

**Legislative Council
Hansard
Thursday 19 March 2026**

The president, **Mr Farrell**, took the Chair at 11.00 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

MOTION

Premier's Address - Reply

[3.40 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Thank you, Madam Deputy President. I rise today to respond to the Premier's Address delivered in the other place on Tuesday 3 March. I do so in a state of profound disappointment and frustration. To be honest, many of us here thought last year's effort was a low point, lacking in substance, failing to present a clear agenda, full of boosterism and hollow bravado. Yet here we are again, Madam Deputy President, sadly, we have sunk even further into that same mire this year.

I very much appreciated listening to other members contributions on the Premier's Address. It's always interesting to see the different ways we approach it and things we focus on. I particularly appreciate those members who focus right in a laser way on the fiscal elements of the situation our state finds ourselves in. That was an excellent contribution from the member for Huon just now and I appreciated the detail he went into, as I appreciated yours, Madam Deputy President. We know we can always rely on you to be focused there. I'm not going to be focusing quite as much in that space, although I will mention it in passing.

One of the things that came to mind primarily when I contemplated the Premier's Address was the observation that it was a statement of absences and silences. It's the absences in the Premier's Address which are most telling often when it comes to this government's priorities, looking past the litany of sweeping statements of grandiose and unsubstantiated claims and patting themselves on the back. There's a glaring negative space in this address. The theme of absence or silence, that theme there of negative space, was evident in some key areas, Madam Deputy President. Most centrally, the lack of vision delivered by the Premier in his address was a resounding absence or negative space. Premier's Address provided very little detail or anything substantial for people to really grab hold of, to actually visualise and be able to evaluate how the government's priorities may affect, let alone improve, things that they care about. I think other members have echoed that somewhat, that there wasn't a correlation between what they hear and observe and feel in the community around them and what was said by the Premier in the words of his address. A real disconnect there, Madam Deputy President.

Critically, I think a responsible government would not only articulate its vision and detail its policy imperatives, but it would also provide a praxis which sets out steps and intended time frames to get from here and now to the envisaged outcomes. The policy promise plus the implementation practices are the two sides of the one coin and they're both really important to give the community confidence about the vision and direction of the government that's leading them. Both those elements, the two sides of that coin, are both important for good governance.

It distinguishes good governance from the flimsy thought bubble approach to policy and governance, for example, which unfortunately we're seeing far too much of.

It would be concerning, I think at any stage to witness this lack of vision from the Premier regarding immediate, short- and long-term goals and aspirations from his government. But it's even more alarming at this critical juncture that we find ourselves in in this state, particularly fiscally.

The intent and purpose of the annual Premier's Address, as others have mentioned here too and detailed in Standing Orders of the other place, is for the address to be delivered within the first 6 sitting days of any calendar year, to not only review the past actions of the government of the day, but also to outline the intended future policy and legislative agenda.

Well, on 3 March we listened in vain for any proposed legislative agenda. There was much gazing in a rose-tinted rear-view mirror and lying upon rather withered and crumbling laurels and a few vague statements of future intent. But the word legislation did not appear once, nor was there any broader reference to a legislative agenda. Fancy being at the beginning of our sitting year, marking out your vision and plan for our state, and not being able to spend one word on stating your legislative agenda and work in progress? Clearly we do not need more legislation for legislation's sake, I'm not proposing such a thing, but we do need a forward-looking, clearly articulated vision of how that reform is intended to be implemented and on what timeframe. Which comes back to the worrying lack of vision and praxis that the Rockliff government has put forward for us.

The Premier's address did mention the 'ongoing challenges we face with our budget position', and the need to bring the budget to 'a sustainable footing'. I believe a few eyebrows may have been raised at the notion that the state budget has ever in recent history been on a sustainable footing to return to. However, although the address did mention this challenge briefly, it remained silent on any intention to undertake the urgently needed real and structural fiscal reform required to place the state on a firm, long-term financial footing. Apparently, when it comes our current budget situation, we are just going to rely on shuffling the chairs on the *Titanic*.

On one hand, the government will crow about the apparent strong position the state is in economically, while on the other hand it intends to dissolve an entire state department with a wave of its hand, apparently to help fix the mess we're in. While I agree that the constitution of the Department of State Growth was problematic, which let's remember was a former-premier Hodgman big idea in 2014, the announcement of its dismemberment was delivered in an abrupt and brutal manner, and it smacks of desperately clutching at action for the sake of being seen to act.

It's worth pausing here to recall that this government has a habit of creating and disbanding departments to look purposeful and busy, I would contend. State growth, created with fanfare in 2014 as a panacea to all manner of apparent ills, is now being scrapped because apparently it's dysfunctional. There is no explanation of how that assessment was arrived at; it's just busyness for busyness' sake. The department of communities, many will remember, was also created by this government back in 2018 to bring together portfolio areas that had previously been in Health and Human Services as well as in the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC). This was undertaken to break down silos and bring things together that naturally should have synergy. It was then abruptly abolished a mere four years later in 2022.

This was a fairly naked attempt to head off at the pass condemnatory findings that were about to come to light through the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings. In an eerie echo of the narrative at its establishment, the rationale for disbanding communities Tasmania was also to - wait for it - break down silos, with its aggregate parts being divvied up, some back to DPAC and others into the newly expanded and named Department of Education, Children and Young People (DECYP).

Shuffling deck chairs - this is busyness for busyness' sake. But wait, there's more. As I said, it's now habitual for this government, which seems to believe it can trick Tasmanians with busywork and thought-bubbles, to create bureaucratic entities and then tear them apart a few years later. Another example, Homes Tasmania, which was created in 2022, as a new independent state entity with the skills-based board, taking out of government departments the management of our state's housing and homelessness systems. We were told this was essential to deliver outcomes in this space, that they'd be able to do it much more effectively and efficiently than from within a state government department. At the time, a number of us in this place objected to its creation, including me, and warned that it was not the right model, and that putting these functions at arms' length from the ministerial responsibility where they belong would result in less accountability and worse outcomes for a Tasmanians. Lo and behold, we are now reabsorbing Homes Tasmania, apparently, back into a government department from where it was taken in the first place.

This is nothing short of an admission of complete failure on the part of government. This government's habit of building and destroying our public bureaucracies as busywork in an effort to look purposeful is seriously detrimental to Tasmania. We can have no confidence that these decisions were the result of careful and strategic analysis and consideration of how to achieve best outcomes. It's pretty straightforward. If you did it as a thought bubble and without careful, strategic, well-researched and conceived policy work to guide the decision of what to do and how to do it, then it's doomed to failure.

I believe we can put a safe prediction on the record right here and now, that this newest thought bubble called Building Tasmania, will be an entity of short duration and will be lucky in my guess to make it to 2030 still intact.

Back to the immediate impact of dismantling state growth, the projected loss of 250 FTE positions as part of this major restructure is a huge ask for the community to absorb and serves up a disconnect with other commentary from the government regarding how strong an economy we're experiencing, how wonderful state growth has been in developing and delivering that economic success.

You can't turn around having praised state growth for purported economic success and driving it in the right direction and at the same time that then abruptly decide you're euthanising it instead because it's failed to deliver the outcomes just two minutes ago you're applauding it for.

Let me put on record here and now, I am very pleased to see housing and homelessness broadly being brought back within a government department, but it's clearly being done so in a knee-jerk fashion again with no clear plan. We don't know what it's going to look like yet. We've announced it. This is *Yes, Minister* territory; this is *Utopia* territory. Make an announcement so that something gets said and looks busy and then figure out how it's going to

work later, even though that's going to be absolutely detrimental to getting good outcomes in this state, utterly detrimental. These are people and people's lives that we're talking about here when we shift these particular deck chairs on this particular Titanic.

For example, I'm highly concerned about what will happen to the functions of Homes Tasmania that not about construction and don't belong in something called Building Tasmania. In particular the housing and homelessness support service system. Those elements are not about construction. They can't go to Building Tasmania. It would be a nonsense to locate them there, but there is no other sensible home for them in the current arrangements that we have. We don't have a Human Services department anymore. That was dismantled in 2018 when it was ripped away from the Health Department where it sat and turned into Communities Tasmania, only then to be disbanded again in 2022 when Communities Tasmania disappeared. No Human Services department to place those two. No Communities Tasmania left to switch them out to. Housing and homelessness services do not fit with the Department of Education, Children and Young Children (DESYP) and they do not fit with the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC). Where will they go? To the Department of Natural Resources and the Environment perhaps? I don't think so; this is highly concerning.

When we decide where we're going to put these particularly important services for the most vulnerable people in our state who are at the extremity of need, facing homelessness or experiencing current homelessness, for example. We absolutely have thrown them to the wolves by having a thought bubble announcement about a fundamental change to the bureaucratic architecture that they sit within and no clear plan whatsoever about where they're going to be located. It is shameful.

Similarly, I'm concerned about where will climate change go. Where will creative industries go? Sport? Where will visitor economy go? All these things that sat within the mega Department of State Growth when it was cobbled together back in 2014. Where will they all go and sit, because they could go through the same litany of current departments and we could decide in relation to all of those, there's nowhere for them to go. You know what this means: as well as the manly name of Building Tasmania being created, we're going to have to come up with another department to park all of these other what, presumably in terms of the government's priorities, are just miscellaneous concerns in this state.

How can we interpret them as anything else?

According to this government, these must all just be miscellaneous concerns that can be cast about and parked wherever we find there's a convenient spot for them. Let's just call it the Miscellaneous Department and chuck them all into that, shall we? Because as far as this government's priorities go, from what they're demonstrating, that's the only credence they give our housing and homelessness services, our creative industries, et cetera. Climate change - God knows where that's going to end up. We don't have a minister properly responsible for it anymore, so why would we need a department? This is beyond frustration. I'm angry about this and I think many, many Tasmanians will rightly be angry about this, too. It's disgraceful.

One final comment on this particular matter. A key problem with this random creation and destruction of government departments and entities is disruption to accountability. Tracking policies, funding, and responsibility becomes well-nigh impossible when you shake the kaleidoscope every few years and move things about. Specifically, tracking funding in budget papers is completely disrupted by this sort of activity occurring every few years. The

obfuscation resulting from this government's habitual cycle of creation and destruction is not hard to see as an intended design feature of this chaotic, busy work from this government that's run out of ideas and lacks the vision or the drive to pursue one.

Do we have a quorum, Madam Deputy President, just to check? I'll continue.

The government finds itself undertaking such policy and PR contortions with these random announcements because it's hyper-allergic to being fully honest and transparent with the community. The Premier's Address is silent on any genuine intention to place community at the centre. Bizarrely, you could be forgiven for walking away from the Premier's Address feeling as if you're being told, 'All good here; nothing to see; business as usual, but, by the way, a few of you are going to lose your jobs. Quite a few of you, actually, but thank you for taking one for the cause.' And you're told that without that cause being fleshed out in any detail, and there's certainly no encouragement for the community to feed into, engage with, and assist in shaping that cause. When you're not prepared to be honest with the community, you cannot genuinely engage with them and bring them along on the journey to shape the future of our state. That's what this government is failing to do in its failure to be honest with the Tasmanian people.

The attitude is prevalent across a whole range of areas: Genuine consultation practices, absent; areas of integrity and accountability, absent. Also in the area of budget reform. For example, the government proudly announced last year its intention to establish a government business charter in partnership with peak business groups. Great idea. Well done. Where's the equivalent government community sector charter developed in partnership with the peak community and social justice groups? Where is it? Where's the actual engagement with community that isn't just about business and the mates that you probably have drinks with at the footy on the weekend? Where's that? Where's the people out there in the community that don't have the deep pockets to make donations and hobnob with you when you're running for election? Where's that engagement? Silence is the answer to that. No answer. The urgent need for the recognition of a viable community services sector is lost in the negative space of this Premier's Address.

By the way, our economic circumstances are still heading south, well and truly, as others here have very clearly articulated. We're going to have massive layoffs imminently from the public sector. Cuts to government services have been telegraphed for the very near future. We are on a pathway to supercharged demand for our community services sector. Our community services sector are about to be slammed, smashed in fact, at a time they had already sounded the alarm on the unmet need and a workforce and service provision pushed to breaking point. The budget will reveal the full brutal reality of the expected cuts to the community services. I know some in that sector strongly fear that their organisations are facing severe cuts. Some of them are saying they fear cuts up to 40 per cent. If that is what transpires, and we'll see when we come to budget time in a couple of months, but I assure you, if it's anything like that, the results for our state and for the key outcomes of important areas of our state - our health, our education, our employment, our economy - all of those outcomes will suffer because of the pressure we put on our community services because they are our safety net. They are our community builders, they are the ones Tasmanians turn to in times of need and, boy, are we going to be needing more as we face the future under this government on the trajectory they've put us on.

The other key but missing government commitment to the community, in this speech, is the glaring absence of anything related to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. I was shocked and disappointed at the Premier's silence on the pressing matters of reconciliation, truth-telling or treaty, but maybe that silence is, at the very least, an honest representation of the lack of prioritisation. The lack of commitment or care the government has on this matter. If they bothered to say anything about it, we could perhaps refute such an idea. I hope I'm wrong, but the silence is deafening. We know that in May last year, the government paused progress on a formal treaty, instead stating that it would first prioritise truth-telling. Well, here we are, almost a year later and the Premier does not see fit to provide an update on the truth-telling process in his supposed agenda-setting formal address to this parliament. This is more than disappointing; far beyond it, in fact. I believe it's inexcusable and it's shameful, and I reiterate, as I regularly have in this Chamber, that it is inexcusable that the Premier does not hold the portfolio responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs. Given that the Premier has jettisoned all other portfolio responsibilities to devote his time to holding together his minority government - potentially with bailing twine and string or whatever the expression is - it would be an important and salutary gesture to bring responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs back to himself as Premier, where it should rightly belong. I'm not going to hold my breath on that one, though.

There were other glaring silences, further large areas of policy negative space, some to mention - we're not going to be able to go through all of them though, of course, but I particularly want to mention climate crisis, the increasing risk our state faces from extreme weather events; and the 'just transition' challenge that we face in our community, where inequality is already described as creating two Tasmanias. Another significant area of policy given no further mention - the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings' recommendations and reforms, nor the urgent need within that context to focus on youth justice reforms.

While we hear a lot, a lot in fact, about construction and things that require high-vis - we hear a lot about that aspect of housing supply, but the silence is deafening on defining and prioritising sufficient, accessible, affordable social housing and, particularly addressing the catastrophic failure of our private rental market, the urgent need for reform of our Residential Tenancy Act to better protect tenants who have never before - I say never before - been so vulnerable, powerless and massively at risk of free falling into homelessness in the current state of our private rental market. Vacancy rates have been below 0.5 per cent here in Hobart for an extended period of time now and, just to remind members of the stats and the research of it, we know anything less than a 3 per cent vacancy rate is market failure in a private rental market. We have been under 1 per cent for years now I believe, nowhere near 3 per cent in any of the time that I've been in this place. That's how badly this government, which has been responsible for this area since 2014, has failed Tasmanians when it comes to housing, especially the growing proportion of Tasmanians who are in the private rental market.

There was further silence from the Premier on 3 March on when the parliament and the community could expect the government's formal responses to either of two key reviews that had been done: either the independent Snell and McCormack RTI review or the pivotal independent Woolcott Review Report volumes one and two into the actions that were taken in response to information and concerns raised by the commission of inquiry. Really important review reports.

Since then, as we know, we did suddenly receive on Tuesday morning this week the government's response to the independent Snell and McCormack RTI review. Maybe, I need

to flag my intent to debate my motion number 8 currently on the notice paper, noting the Woolcott reviews findings and recommendations, and that may prompt another 6:00 AM media release on the day of debate with the government's response to those reports attached. Maybe that's the only way we get this government to respond to key important reviews with important recommendations that should be seriously considered for structural reforms. But it shouldn't require such pulling of teeth and such political games.

The Premier's Address could have provided the expected time frame for the provision of the government's formal response to both of these significant policy driving, governance shaping, independent reviews. That would have been a respectful and reasonable thing to include. These silences, speak volumes. They are silences that actually shout out across the public policy void which sits at the heart of this government. They tell us who matters to this government, and, with crystal clarity, who does not matter.

Mr President, welcome back.

I will now move on to sharing some thoughts on how we could fill some of that negative space. It won't be exhaustive, just some things I would like to touch on in my response today. The focus of this needs to be about how we value community priorities and how we seek to bring people along with transformative change.

We hear a lot lately of communities and public discourse becoming more divided and fragmented. The spectre of community division is frequently pointed to nationally and locally by those who wish to dog whistle and exploit underlying fears and those who are concerned about where we're going as a society. History also tells us that people can be at their most vulnerable either to being susceptible to rhetoric of hate and division, or being at risk of victimisation by such rhetoric, when times get tough.

We know we're facing a budget crisis. We know we're in a terrible fiscal mess. We know that Tasmanians from all walks of life may experience increased costs and financial challenges and other related constraints over the next few years. In this regard, I fear the state has not really learned the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr President, that if we do not proactively and transparently seek to ensure that people are not left out or left behind. The disparity between the haves and the have nots will only grow and fester.

The Premier warns in his address:

The increase in government investment that saved us from economic devastation during COVID cannot become baked into our budget.

I would counter that by stating we cannot risk hard baking inequality and intergenerational disadvantage into our social fabric either. People warned at the time via submissions to what was then the Premier Gutwein's Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council. People might remember that in the deep dark past. In submissions to PESRAC, and elsewhere, against boosting only one sector or a select area of our economy, the main one being construction, for example, against putting all our eggs in the one basket. But those warnings were not heeded. That's exactly the path we've gone down under this government.

The opportunity to restructure our financial base during the post pandemic rebuild, as it was framed, was missed. Instead, we saw election after election where it wasn't the COVID

spending that was bankrupting our state. Certainly, wasn't that we know that from Saul Eslake's review and reporting. It was government election spending promises. It was them being prepared to put hands in the pockets of Tasmanians, to use public money, to basically buy votes. Shocking, how dare the Premier suggest that the COVID spending that was required to keep people safe and keep our economy moving in that very urgent time, how dare he suggest that's the thing that might be then bankrupting our state, when in fact it was his absolute desire to hold onto power through elections.

But we did see glimmers, Mr President, during that COVID pandemic time of what a caring community at the centre approach could deliver. During the pandemic we saw that when there was a policy imperative, for example, we could provide housing to Tasmanians, we could push back on homelessness, for example. We saw people encouraged to be innovative in a collaborative manner to keep local businesses going or even to drive the establishment of new styles of businesses. Nobody wants to revisit the pandemic and that is not what I'm suggesting. Instead, what I'm pointing to is that there were important lessons experienced during those difficult times which we should be ensuring are not lost while we face the current crossroads before us.

Therefore, I believe it would be a significant move to reinstate a role in this state that's focused into this space, a Tasmanian Equity and Inclusion Commissioner, for example.

Some members here may recall that in 2008 Prof David Adams was appointed the state's inaugural social inclusion commissioner, who during his tenure in that role developed Australia's first ever state cost-of-living strategy and also a social inclusion strategy for Tasmania, which was released in 2009. That groundbreaking social inclusion strategy presented 10 action strategies for Tasmania. It highlighted the importance of shifting from a deficit to an assets model of people and places. It was community centric in the best sense of the word. It included things like this, promoting enterprise solutions to build capacity and sustainability for groups and places, devolving responsibility locally as much as possible through a focus on place management, supporting families in communities to have greater choice and responsibility over their futures, and changing the way government works. Mr President, that sounds to me like a sound priority framework which would actually be absolutely apt and appropriate for consideration, highly relevant for the here and now.

The government does not need to look too far for initiatives for progressive and reforming legislation. We can give them plenty of suggestions if they've run out of ideas themselves. I again highlight the necessity of our state instituting a Tasmanian human rights act.

This Chamber has passed at least two motions supporting the implementation of the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute's recommended Tasmanian human rights act. The TLRI has done the bulk of the research and work. It would be an investment in strengthening our equity and inclusion framework with leadership demonstrated from the top down, it would become a really good touchstone for measuring how we're protecting our community and their rights while we attend to the challenges we face across a range of areas.

When discussing the risks of intergenerational inequities when we're facing an urgent budget crisis, I do find myself coming back to the need for a rigorous independent mechanism to identify and advise on a coherent package of immediate and long-term structural fiscal reforms to address the dire state of our state's finances. I feel like a stuck record in this regard, as do other members in this place because there's a lot of good intent, certainly in this Chamber

of ideas and thoughts on how we could move forward in a more collaborative way, evidence based expert informed agreement on how we can address the challenges we face fiscally.

Clearly the Rockliff government is congenitally incapable of being honest about the financial mess it has created and stuck in that fog of persistent denial, it cannot map out an effective way forward. That's been demonstrated now yet again with this address, and I believe when we get to the budget in May, this is something we'll be talking about also.

Treasury, in its Fiscal Sustainability Report, and others, have talked about this in much more detail. I will mention it briefly. That report, released last month, could not be more categorical. Without corrective action, debt will balloon massively, debt servicing costs will take a huge slice of our budget, and all government services will suffer egregiously. We have a short window, that report tells us, of a few years to put corrective actions in place and avert the otherwise inevitable financial disasters that lie ahead. The Treasury report plainly lays out that all available policy levers must be pulled, and we cannot rely on growing the economy only to get us out of this mess.

I also feel even more strongly that I have a responsibility as do others in this place to keep reminding this government that if they cannot bring themselves to make responsible decisions and hard choices, there are other ways to ensure we do undertake the necessary fiscal structural reforms. Moreover, we should do that in a way which ensures any funding cuts or taxation reform are discussed and delivered in ways that are transparent, equitable and fair. I reiterate again today one idea only in previous calls I've made in this place, an option that could genuinely tackle this challenge. We could have an independent expert panel or mechanism be established by the parliament which reports to parliament, and that panel would be tasked to undertake comprehensive analysis of state finances and fiscal framework. It will be charged to test whether our current taxation base and mix is most suited to supporting a modern and intergenerationally equitable fiscal framework and then make immediate and long-term recommendations regarding structural reforms to address this. This would take into account our social, ecological as well as economic demands and futures. Importantly, such a panel - similar potentially in nature to the expert independent energy panel that had previously been established under the Labor-Green minority government of 2010 - would publicly consult which provide the opportunity for the community to participate in and shape the eventual outcomes.

Let's face it, it is the Tasmanian community, the public sector workers, the students, the small-business owners, the educators, just to mention some who will have to live with the budgetary challenges and choices that we have before us. Importantly, such an expert independent panel undertaking this work would help reassure people that any budget reform decisions made, no matter how unpopular, are evidence based and are not ideologically driven or driven through political self-interest - something which many Tasmanians do not feel confident about currently when it comes to decisions being exhibited by this government.

Apparently, we are set on a course to address current and looming debt via an in-house strategy of not rocking the boat of corporate mates and big business while telling other Tasmanians to accept random public service cuts. Based on what assessment? We are not informed. Community service cuts and God only knows what else is coming down the track at us because of this government's congenital inability to be honest about the state that they have driven us to.

The government's cut to manage debt without addressing revenue shortfalls approach is just populism. It's because they can't make hard decisions. They refuse to do anything that might jeopardise the death grip they now have on power in this state. It cuts corners and avoids the real hard work necessary. It's utterly irresponsible. It's based on political self-interest and serving vested interests while failing to faithfully serve the public interest for Tasmanians. What we are guaranteed is that the inevitable harm felt by Tasmanians as a result of this approach will not be shared equitably or with the necessary buffers in place to protect those who need it most.

As the Premier's Address did mention the government's budget approach, I do want to take this opportunity to highlight the government's responsibility and imperative to provide a genuine and comprehensive gender budget assessment as part of this year's state budget. I take this opportunity to place on the record here that the gender equality and impacts on women, girls and gender diverse Tasmanians must be firmly in the centre of budget decision-making processes. By that I mean a comprehensive state budget gender impact statement must detail how any cuts to services, funding or jobs have been assessed for potential impacts on women, girls and the gender diverse.

On International Women's Day, I asked how many of the announced, for example, 250 jobs to go at state growth will impact female employees? How will any changes to services provided by state growth impact upon women and girls and the gender diverse? Where is the plan to manage those impacts? I haven't received any indication of an answer to that.

Assumptions that budgetary policy decisions are gender neutral are wrong and dangerous. We know policy assumptions can result in people being impacted differently or disproportionately due to their gender, which can be further compounded by other characteristics such as race, religion, or disability. That's why rigorous gender budget impact statements are necessary to help expose any assumptions, highlight potential risks of perpetuating current inequalities and identify unintended consequences and impacts. Government is on notice. There's no justifiable reason for this not to be delivered.

While still taking a holistic and intergenerational approach here, another glaring omission from the Premier's address is any mention of tackling the climate crisis, as I mentioned briefly earlier. This deafening silence demonstrates an extraordinary disconnection between government priorities or big-build obsessions with the world around us. This summer has seen temperatures escalate, particularly interstate, where for seven or eight days straight, interstate temperatures were around 45 degrees or higher. There were instances in other jurisdictions where people were collapsing waiting at bus stops and in some cases dying of heat stress. Public notices ran on radio, TV, and across social media, detailing public libraries and other community facilities which were remaining open after hours to provide some temporary refuge from the baking heat for those suffering homelessness. But the wildlife had no escape from the baking temperatures. Animals were dying of heat stress and birds were falling out of trees.

While Tasmania may not have experienced that degree of summer heat, currently we have areas of the state on water restrictions. Long-term weather forecasts predict a dry winter. These changes pose immediate, daily and long-term challenges for our biodiversity, the health of our waterways, and our marine and terrestrial environments.

There are also very real consequences for people's livelihoods, and for everyone just going about their daily lives. Climate justice must be interwoven with the state's key policy

priorities, and when we seek to address systemic, socioeconomic and intergenerational inequalities, we must have climate justice at the heart of how we do that. Not everyone can afford an air-conditioned private car to get to work during a heatwave, hence why people were collapsing at bus stops on the mainland. That's an example of the inequitable impact of climate change which climate justice seeks to recognise and address.

Health, emergency services and community sector organisations are reporting how heatwaves, fires and floods result in a spike in domestic and intimate partner violence, another example of environmental stress having a direct correlation with increased human stress. Climate justice means not only putting equity and human rights at the core of decision-making and action on climate change, but in other policy areas as well. Yet the concept of climate justice appears alien to this government. Time prevents me from going into further detail here, so I'll reiterate that we urgently require a climate justice lens on both our budget repair measures, as well as holistically across our general policy framework.

Another deafening silence in the Premier's address was the need to strengthen our integrity framework. A meaningful legislative agenda from the government could easily include a legislated lobbyist register, introducing truth in advertising measures as part of our electoral funding framework, as well as addressing the current administrative funding inequity within that framework between the two chambers of this place. The government continues to thumb its nose at long-outstanding calls for reforms from a range of the state's independent statutory oversight entities. The Tasmanian National Preventative Mechanism (TNPM), which is required under international obligations, has released two implementation reports, one in 2023, the other in 2024, providing 12 key recommendations detailing the necessary structural measures required to establish an independent and accountable office that is most suitable for Tasmania, that would be best placed to prevent torture and ill-treatment, designed to complement and work with existing oversight bodies, engage actively with civil society and ensure appropriate parliamentary scrutiny of its activities.

It's all mapped out in those two implementation reports. Despite this chamber passing a motion for these 12 implementation recommendations to be adopted by government, all we have heard back is silence.

In the interim, Tasmania is at risk of non-compliance with our actual state act, the *OPCAT Implementation Act 2021*, and with our international obligations that it relates to. Thumbing the nose and giving the cold shoulder to our independent statutory oversight officers is at risk of becoming the norm under this government. We have seen recommendations, whether for structural reform or funding reform, repeatedly ignored, whether they come from the Ombudsman, the Integrity Commission, the custodial inspector, the TNPM, the coroner, the list goes on. While it's easy to simplistically dismiss these calls along the line that 'not everyone can receive everything they ask for, particularly in light of the current financial constraints,' the fact is that by strengthening our integrity framework, we are actually investing in better quality decision-making, and better outcomes from that decision-making. Investing in a stronger integrity framework is also an investment in a robust democracy, a safer community, and in building public confidence and trust.

In relation to the Office of the Ombudsman, I again reiterate the need for the government to commit to boosting that office's annual funding by the \$1.5 million over the next three years as a minimum, in accordance with recommendation 41 of the independent RTI review we have previously discussed in this place. I also take this opportunity to restate my call for an

immediate moratorium to be placed on the staff and resource funding for all our independent statutory officers in light of the government's expected budget cuts. They should not be the target of budget cuts, Mr President. In fact, to go one step further, an important integrity and legislative reform the government could and should have made and announced in the Premier's Address was to commit to instituting an independent mechanism to determine appropriate funding levels for our key independent statutory oversight officers and bodies.

The purpose of this, an independent mechanism to determine funding, is to depoliticise budget decisions on the funding of our statutory entities. It is to buffer them from ideologically-driven death by many cuts of any particular government of the day. Other states are moving in that direction and it's one that we should emulate here. I also note current review of the ministerial diary disclosure process- finally, action by the government late last year, after only three of my motions in this place calling for it being passed.

While unnecessarily delayed, due to that disrespect shown to an affirmative vote passed by this Chamber, it's heartening to see the public submissions that were made late last year and here, just by chance from the Leader in an earlier debate this week, that it is apparently the intention to reduce the public release time frame from the current quarterly basis to monthly. That would be a significant improvement, but it shouldn't be the only one.

I look forward to hearing more detail about further improvements that will be made to the ministerial diary disclosure scheme as a result of the review from late last year. Again, a missed opportunity, the Premier certainly did not make any reference to that in his speech.

Mr President, on the face of it, the belated focus on arts and creativity in the Premier's Address is welcome- on the face of it. However, I cannot help but concur with the member for Mersey's comments on this matter in his contribution, which I thought was an excellent contribution. I'm pleased he highlighted this area of the arts. It is all very well to trumpet intentions to champion the arts in a new strategic plan for example, but we have to look at previous performance to best predict future outcomes. This government, under this premier, has seen a steady decline in supporting investment in the arts. For example, as the member for Mersey pointed out in his address, we are seeing the oldest professional theatre company in this state, the Tasmania Theatre Company and Mudlark Theatre Inc, having to close.

They say explicitly due to a lack of government support. Now, that's just disgraceful and it is only one of many examples we could point to. It is a case of far too little, far too late when it comes to apparent support for the arts. Indeed, the sentiments expressed by the premier in his address look like little more than a belated scramble to deflect criticism of the latest blow to our state's arts communities. The government has been stripping arts and screen courses, of course, from our TasTAFE just since late last year, abruptly, out of the blue, stopping those courses that were a key pipeline for people's employment and engagement in those areas.

Ms O'Connor - Yes, but we got the Foo Fighters instead. Subsidised. Sorry. I mean, I know-

Ms WEBB - Don't get me started, member for Hobart. We know I've been here for a while already. Those were disgraceful cuts to our TasTAFE programs. Just because you don't wear high vis when you make art doesn't mean it doesn't matter.

Ms Forrest - Well, you might.

Ms WEBB - Well, you might. Well, actually maybe if everyone made a point of doing that in this state, then it might get attention.

Ms Forrest - And a hard hat as well.

Ms WEBB - Maybe that will be in the strategic plan the Premier talked about when it comes to the arts, a requirement to pop on the high vis and the hard hat and the steel-toed boots and they will be right. You can still play instruments, you can still lift up a paintbrush when you are wearing high vis, Mr President.

Ms Thomas - It will fit into Building Tasmania then, too.

Ms WEBB - It's late in the day, I'm nearly there, so on we go.

Mr PRESIDENT - No, I'm having a great time.

Ms WEBB - Having given such a prominent promotion to his intention in the art space, many will be looking keenly for there to be genuine and meaningful delivery by this premier on his apparent support in the upcoming and future state budgets for the arts sector. We will be keeping a keen eye on that. It better be more than token, I tell you that, because there's a lot of a lot of ground to make up for when you think of what hasn't been there in the time that this government has been in power in terms of support of the arts.

Mr President, in summary, listening to the Premier's Address felt like being taken through a hall of mirrors. It was a hall of opaque shadows disguising potentially sharp corners and deep cracks in the floor. Quite frankly, a hall with the brief reflection of the government congratulating itself for itself rather than seeking to reflect back to the community the broader range of values and priorities which concern them. It is a meandering hall, though. Worryingly aimless, directionless when it comes to investing in and building social inclusion, cohesion and equity. The lack of vision was stark, and the lack of progressive and reforming legislative agenda articulated was absolutely telling.

Instead of ensuring, this annual priority report provided a clear map of where the government intends to go, how it intends to get there from here and most importantly how it intends to ensure no Tasmania is left behind during that transformative journey, we were presented with predominantly rehashed self congratulatory rhetoric.

In fact, there was a very troubling and disconcerting sense of being told on the one hand we have been too spoilt really in the past and we need to wind back some of our spending, but on the other hand, nothing to see here, everything's fine, we're strong and good. Apparently, it's an exciting time to be Tasmanian, but best not to look too closely at exactly what might be happening to the Tasmanian services that we all rely upon so fundamentally.

In my mind, this appears to warn that we need to brace ourselves for more of the same thinking that has led us to this current situation. A situation largely defined by the large budget and fiscal storm clouds which are no longer on the horizon. They are here, they are hanging over us as we speak and some Tasmanians may have access to the necessary infrastructure and supports, they can shelter under and whether that storm, but there will be many, many Tasmanians who do not have access to that same support and shelter.

It is unclear to me that the government has a plan to ensure that all Tasmanians have the capacity to weather this storm. They certainly have not articulated as such and so it is with a high degree of alarm that I note the Premier's Address.