

**Legislative Council
Hansard
Wednesday 27 May 2026**

[excerpt...]

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

MOTION

Noting - Budget Papers 2026-27 and Appropriation Bills (No. 1 and No. 2) 2026

[12.17 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I rise to speak on the Budget. At the outset I express my appreciation to other members in this place for their contributions. I always appreciate the variety of expertise and insight and analysis that's brought to this place through those contributions. Across all of us, we give it a pretty good going over, as we should, it's our role in this place.

Now onto the budget then. Budget repair was the order of the day, but I have to ask, what budget repair? What I see and feel when I look at this budget is more like budget despair, to be honest. Despair for those reliant on the community services being cut. Despair for those facing the impossible task of reconciling fast depleting coffers with ever increasing need and demand.

Despair for those impacted by the further loss of 1700 full-time equivalent positions in our state service. Recognising that that could involve more than 1700 actual people, actual Tasmanians out of work, should those positions involve job shares and part time workers. Despair for those languishing on healthcare waiting lists trying to fathom what \$700 million in cuts to health services will mean for them. Despair for the squandered opportunities which lay trampled under foot of this government as they charge along their ideologically driven course yet again.

That is the kicker, there were opportunities for alternative restorative action to be taken to put the state onto an economically sound and socially just fiscal footing. But instead, this government indulged in years of pork barrelling, of irresponsible expenditure, gambling away our state while racking up enormous debt through mismanagement of key projects, culminating now in this budget in the community having to pay the price.

We are presented with a very grim budget for the 2026-27 financial year, described though as a precursor to further austerity years. Because the two following years look decidedly harsher and decidedly bleaker according to the forward Estimates presented in these budget papers. People are rightly asking, how did we get here? How has our state reached the point that despite recognised social need across integral sectors such as education, health, housing, climate change mitigation, the need to address increasing cost-of-living pressures, it can no longer afford to do so. We can't afford to do the basics our Tasmanian people need. Basically, these budget papers state the government cannot meet the needs of our community. How did we get here, Mr President?

We are all aware of both the nation's and the state's economic vulnerability to external unpredicted events, such as the current war between the United States and Iran or, looking back, the COVID-19 pandemic. Fair enough. However, as we have been informed by a range

of commentators and experts, the deterioration of the state's financial position in fact began prior to COVID. Yes, it was exacerbated by the necessary financial assistance packages across the business and community that were rolled out during and immediately post the pandemic years. However, as members who were here at the time would recall, I and many others, called for a coherent and expert driven review of our state's financial framework to help drive an appropriate to scale and community centred approach to restructuring and rebuilding our financial framework post the pandemic.

On the one hand, it's arguable the pandemic did show that with political will we could look after the most vulnerable in our community. We could put a roof over people's heads, for example. We could prioritise targeted healthcare delivery. We could invest in innovative and flexible education and other service delivery models. Yes, at a cost and a scale that nobody expected to necessarily continue indefinitely, but what it did demonstrate was the need. Hence my call at the time, for an independent expert review commissioned by the state parliament to evaluate whether our current, at the time, financial framework was fit for purpose, was pulling the right progressive levers when it comes to our revenue and expenditure mix, and whether we were bogged down with dated regressive approaches that needed to be dispensed with.

Instead, the then premier of the day, Mr Gutwein went with his Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council model, which I argued was limited and flawed at the time. I still contend that and won't repeat my extensive arguments about that here, but it was a flawed model, and it did not deliver us a true and right way out of that predicament. Suffice to say though, sadly I've been proven correct when I raised concerns at the time about the PESRAC outcomes. They focused on cutting and reshaping TasTAFE, and the disproportionate reliance on building our way out of the pandemic, which prioritised the construction industry over many other sectors which also contribute to our state's bottom line as well as our community's wellbeing. The failure to seize the moment and the impetus when the state was looking at reshaping itself post pandemic, to stem the deterioration of our financial situation in a consulted, coherent and managed manner was, I firmly believe, a missed opportunity which has cost us dearly.

On another level, the failure to heed and comprehensively implement the 77 recommendations of the Watt's Independent Review of the Tasmanian State Service, which reported in 2021, is another irresponsible missed opportunity which needs to be named up here as a precursor to this budget. The Watt's review was established to evaluate whether the State Service was fit for purpose for now and into the future. To quote from the Department of Premier and Cabinet website, the Watt review resulted in 'a road map to reform'. It outlined this:

Administrative improvements to transform current structures, services, and practices to deliver a more efficient and effective public service.

Yet, despite the government in principle accepting all 77 recommendations towards that end, the last update indicates only 15 of the recommendations were implemented in full and a further 20 underway. Even adding those together, you still get to less than half of the 77 recommendations total. There is something, quite frankly, perverse in this government spouting nonsense about right-sizing our public service when it has so manifestly failed over the past five years to implement the independent expert recommendations to do just that. Potentially, a more timely and focused delivery of that suite of reforms from the Watt review may have already identified and delivered savings and efficiencies in our public service, which we would be seeing the benefit of now and put us ahead of the curve instead of facing this cliff that's in this budget.

Instead of heeding those earlier structural reform calls and independent reform packages, we saw successive iterations of this government indulge in gross election pork-barrelling, corporate welfare and, of course, large-scale capital works such as the divisive AFL stadium on Macquarie Point. Warnings were not heeded, and instead the government chose to keep on piling on the debt, while at the same time refusing to engage in a mature discussion regarding the need to review our revenue capacity and sources.

Let's look at what exactly this 2026-27 Budget does set us up for across a few key areas: sadly, predictions were confirmed that cuts to state service jobs and services would be the almost exclusive lever supposedly pulled to shift us onto a budget repair trajectory. At the outset, I consider such a focus, almost to the exclusion of other potential levers, as an indication of the extent to which this Budget is predicated upon ideology rather than sound, sustainable fiscal-structural reform. While being framed as a return to a smaller, pre-pandemic public service, apparently a right-sized public service, in my opinion, the attempt to balance the books by cutting \$1.47 billion from the state service is an even more extreme demonstration of that ideological lens than people expected.

Further, it is false economy. The effects will be far reaching, should these cuts be even partially delivered. We cannot keep demanding that the state service deliver more with less; what is the right size state service? The budget papers tell us the government has decreed the right size of the state service is no more than 44 percent of the state's revenue; but according to whom? How does this apparently arbitrary nexus reflect the community's needs for services and support, targeted to regional and sector needs?

The government is quick to refer, without evidence, to a right-sized state sector, while remaining conveniently silent about whether we have the right mix or scale of revenue on the other side of the equation, a matter which I will discuss further in my contribution at a later stage. Although it has been noted that in these budget papers specific savings measures are indicated against particular agencies and departments, which is a better level of detail than we've had in the past, there is no transparency about how those amounts were arrived at, let alone how they will impact health services, school and education services, protection of our waterways and parks, our justice obligations, our social housing targets or capacity to meet crisis accommodation demand, just to name a few.

Cutting state service roles is a cut in services. It is a false economy when it's done as a blunt instrument, as in this Budget. We must also keep in mind this is at least round three, following successive financial years of being subjected to efficiency dividends. Those efficiency dividends have apparently been targeting backline positions the entire time. They must be largely gone already, I would have thought. Besides that, it is a lazy furphy to suggest that cutting what can be termed backline or back-office positions, does not impact services delivered. We all know that instead of increased efficiencies or productivity, in far too many cases, the work undertaken by those who would be defined as backline or back-office positions doesn't just evaporate when those people are cut from the equation; instead, it shifts onto the desks and the shoulders of those considered frontline or essential, impacting their efficiency, their productivity, and in growing numbers, their morale.

For example, I'm aware that currently our Parks and Wildlife Service is struggling to comply with a range of statutory obligations due to a shortage of staff. Further, it's currently unable to ensure commercial tour operators are complying with their requirements, which actually results in loss of licence and other revenue. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that there is nobody on deck in this particular area except volunteers for up to 120 days per year, apparently. This is just one example where so-called efficiency dividends have actually

delivered perverse outcomes, potentially, and the state may in fact be losing revenue as a result. Clearly that sort of example is false economy in action.

Another example of false economy would be the former efficiency and productivity unit, the EPU, housed in DPAC, which now appears to have been made redundant. Given the EPU online survey commenced in 6 November 2025 and is scheduled to close by 31 May this year - what's that, maybe a couple of days from now - one wonders to what degree any suggestions received have been considered and incorporated into this decree from on high that 1700 jobs are surplus to the community's requirements. The seemingly arbitrary determination about the right-sized State Service and the depth of the projected funding cuts, without any supporting evidence or forward-looking restructure plan, risks eroding our critical core knowledge, our institutional and governance knowledge, and the skills base of our public service, while we know at the same time that need and demand is growing. Of course, greater genuine efficiencies and productivity should always be sought; but there is an important distinction to make between efficiency and simple cost cutting. They cannot be assumed to be the same thing or expected to deliver the same outcomes, but there is no nuance in this Budget.

Speaking of outcomes from cuts, we know people across the Tasmanian community are under real pressure. Equally, the community services which support the most vulnerable people here need are under immense pressure also as demand for their services grows. TasCOSS outlined this very clearly in its state budget wrap-up, and I'm going to quote from that state budget wrap-up TasCOSS:

Many of the positive measures announced in the Budget were short-term and temporary, at a time when the uncertainty facing Tasmanians demanded long-term investment. The Treasurer's commitment to a 'caring community' cannot exist without early prevention support, housing security and sustainable community services which were not made priorities in the Budget. We are deeply concerned around the long-term impacts of reduced funding over the Forward Estimates for community services, with expenditure by output projected to be cut by 13.6% from last year's budget. We will be seeking further detail on what this means, but on the face of it, this would represent a significant reduction in the capacity of our industry to respond to growing demand and future crises.

That could not be clearer. That is TasCOSS, the peak body for our community services sector, saying this Budget is undercutting that sector and puts it at risk, in jeopardy and therefore the services it delivers to the Tasmanian people - our most vulnerable Tasmanian people - at risk and in jeopardy. The TasCOSS budget wrap-up goes on to say this:

Through the Tasmanian Coalition of Community Service Peaks *#PrioritiseallTasmanians* campaign, we called on the Government to protect community services from cuts and commit to long-term funding certainty, because when services can't cope with demand, Tasmanians miss out. TasCOSS and many members remain deeply concerned by projected reductions in the Community Services output group expenditure over the Forward Estimates, with funding forecast to decline by 13.6%, compared to last year's budget. This creates serious uncertainty about the industry's future capacity to respond to growing demand.

They say this as well:

Given increasing workforce and operational costs across the industry, TasCOSS is calling for the indexation review to be brought forward and to deliver a transparent, evidence-based indexation formula that reflects the true cost of delivering community services.

Now, that's significant. They have said they are deeply concerned about the reductions projected in this Budget, that they will not be able to respond to growing demand, and they point to indexation. As a little bit of a matter of history here, because I came from this sector to this place seven years ago: I spent 20 years in that sector, and for the last 10 of those years I was with organisations that were regularly advocating on behalf of the sector, for the funding of their services and for appropriate indexation. Appropriate indexation, modelled and properly in place and committed to over a long term, that can be relied upon by the community services sector, is something that has been missing under this government for the past 12 years.

This government has failed year after year after year to give this certainty. They've held it like a carrot out in front of our community services sector, like a carrot for them to be chasing. It's never been delivered properly and it's still being dangled like a carrot out in front of this sector. The sector is saying, please bring this forward and actually get this done, model this out, give us a transparent, evidence-based indexation formula for our funding arrangements that we can rely on and plan for. It's still not there, and the sector is crying out for it, as it has been the entire time this Liberal government has been in place since 2014 - 13? It's been a long time. Too long, in my opinion. This is a sector that we take for granted and, particularly, that this government takes for granted again and again and again. It's just assumed that they will suck it up and keep supporting people from the goodness of their hearts, that's what they're all about, in the community services sector. Well, that's just, quite frankly, appalling and shameful for that to be taken for granted. I noted this in COTA's state budget response statement. They said this:

Of significant concern to COTA, and our colleagues in the Coalition of Community Service Peaks, is a projected reduction in funding for the community service organisations across the forward estimates.

They go on to say that that cut would have:

... real consequences, with more Tasmanians at risk of missing out on essential support and care.

Community organisations are the backbone of support for many older Tasmanians. A cut of this scale will have real and immediate consequences for people who rely on these services to stay healthy, connected and independent.

That's the thing: when we start to look at particular cohorts who are being supported through our community services sector, they are cohorts that typically have vulnerabilities and need services and support for particular sorts of engagement, whether that's in our community, whether that's in our economy, whether that's with other services like our health system. When we undermine these services and support, we not only cripple that direct service delivery done by the community services sector; it ripples out. It ripples out because it will then have an impact on, say, our health system. It will have an impact on our education system. It will have an impact on our economy, ultimately. It will have an impact on our community cohesion. That's something that I think a lot of people would be concerned about, because I know a lot of people in the Tasmanian community are concerned about issues around community cohesion.

When we're not delivering the basics for our community, when we're not supporting them in the most fundamental ways, what happens is cracks grow deeper between people, and our community begins to feel the effects of those cracks when it comes to cohesion. A caring community, according to the Treasurer, is what this budget is delivering. A caring community, says the Treasurer. However, in its budget wrap-up, TasCOSS reflected on the urgent cost-of-living pressures that are continuing to be ignored by the Liberal government despite what may be claimed. TasCOSS says this about those pressures, 'but cost-of-living relief for households is an oversight'.

An oversight, just to make that really clear: an oversight. Actually, how can we even say that? It's such a mild word for something that's quite appalling: an oversight. I will go on with the quote:

... cost of living relief for households is an oversight, and will impact the ability for families to afford the rising costs of rent, bills and other amenities, which are compounded by conflicts offshore.

At a time when the Government continues to invest heavily in projects like the Macquarie Point Stadium and a half a billion-dollar bailout to TT-Line, Tasmanians are entitled to ask why the same level of urgency is not being applied.

Believe me, thousands upon thousands of Tasmanians are asking why and how this government can have so grotesquely butchered its priorities in this way. We know that there are substantial investments and reforms that have been in train in our child and family and our youth justice spaces as a result of the commission of inquiry. We know that these all require continued commitment, not just to implement them on paper but to implement them fully in practice, because the ultimate aim that we are all trying to achieve is to make Tasmanian children safer in this state.

We've already seen, through our joint standing committee scrutinising the implementation of these recommendations, some warning lights flashing at the fact that continued, appropriately targeted, but also an appropriate quantum of funding to implement these recommendations is absolutely essential. A lot of them require significant workforce development and expansion. A lot of them require more investment into training and skilling up our workforces across all these related sectors. A lot of them require new skills into spaces at a level not required before. All of this will cost money, and all of it needs to be done now in the face of significant cuts to be expected across these sectors. That's something that I think all of us may have some significant concerns about, in terms of where to from here, implementing our commission of inquiry recommendations and achieving that ultimate outcome of safer institutions for our Tasmanian children.

I do note that some of the community sector folk acknowledged the investments that had been made in some of these areas, the fact that the budget papers do point to funding specifically towards some of the recommendations made from the commission of inquiry that are in the process of being implemented. That's fine, but we also have to see what the cuts will mean and where that will potentially undermine the good efforts that have been in train in these spaces. TasCOSS said, when their budget wrap-up reflected on this area:

While funding has been directed towards statutory and crisis responses, there appears to be less focus on the community-based supports that prevent

children and young people and families reaching those systems in the first place.

This raises important questions about the Government's long-term commitment to prevention, early intervention and community led reform.

I agree with that statement. We will have to wait and see, to some extent, and I hope what we're not going to see is things fall in a hole as these reforms continue to play out. It's hard not to always include in these sorts of reflections on state budgets some comments on housing, and affordable housing in particular, because it's such a fundamental challenge in our state, particularly for Tasmanians who are most vulnerable. Again, I'm going to quote from some of our community sector colleagues because they are at the frontline of this, and they know when they read the budget papers exactly what it's going to mean for the people that they work with and support. Again, TasCOSS said this in its budget wrap-up:

Tasmania's housing crisis continues to worsen, with housing affordability at record lows, rental stress is increasing and the social housing wait list continues to grow, reaching another record 5,533 applicants — representing more than 9,000 Tasmanians.

TasCOSS was looking to this budget for a significant commitment to increasing the supply of social housing, but disappointingly, we saw more of the same.

While we welcome announcements of new money for Jireh House and McCombe House, other measures are unlikely to meaningfully improve housing affordability, including the extension of the First Home Owner Grant at a reduced rate, a measure that many economists argue actually increases house prices.

Shelter Tasmania, the peak body for housing and homelessness in the community services sector, said this in their post-budget comments:

Tasmania is in the midst of a housing crisis, and we know that rising rents are a major contributor to cost of living issues for Tasmanians. Housing prices and rental costs are growing much faster than peoples' incomes and the worst impact felt is by those who can least afford it.

They went on to say:

More than 40,000 households are under rental stress in an increasingly competitive private market. Support must be prioritised for the lowest incomes, which is why Shelter Tasmania's key ask for this budget is to increase the supply of social and affordable rental homes.

But they then observe that:

One in three Tasmanian households are now struggling with rental affordability, exacerbated by growing demand for short-stay accommodation.

They have the damning comment, of course, and say this:

Increases in short-term rentals like Airbnb are adding to the housing crisis. There are now 9669 total short-stay properties in Tasmania. Over 4700 of these are entire homes that have been removed from the long-term rental market.

We know that this is a significant factor here that we cannot ignore, and yet this government continues to ignore it. A short-stay levy does not fix it, especially if you're not going to direct that money into social and affordable housing, hypothecating it for a purpose to offset the harm that's being done by the short-stay market to our private rental market. We know there's been a 45 per cent increase in homelessness between the 2016 and the 2021 census. It would only be growing since then also. There are persistently high rents in our private rental market because we do nothing to ensure they aren't in a race to the top under our current laws. It's causing more Tasmanians to face homelessness and it's causing more Tasmanians to apply for social housing. That's why we have those record numbers, the 5533, which is actually the applicant number. When you're talking about how many people are on the waiting list, it's 9000 Tasmanians. That's an increase of 9.2 percent in the last 12 months. Waiting times have blown out to 104 weeks. An independent analysis for Shelter Tasmania shows that more than 500 additional social housing homes need to be built very year until 2041 to meet demand. That's not what's being delivered by this government in this Budget, and there is no intention for this government to actually solve this issue for our state, if we go by what's presented in these budget papers. Budgets are about priorities. This is clearly not one.

I also have concerns about the machinery of government changes, the scrapping of Department of State Growth and what that's going to mean in this space. It's certainly going to have an impact. It's on the record that just a few short years ago when we passed legislation here to form Homes Tasmania. I opposed it at the time because it was inappropriate to take all that functionality out of a government department, put it at arms-length from accountability for the minister in charge and put it under a skills-based board. Apparently, however, that board was going to leverage lots of wonderful debt, have lots of innovative ideas and deliver well and truly on solving our housing crisis here. Of course, as we know, that did not happen. None of that happened.

Now we have the demolition of the Department of State Growth, we have the creation of Building Tasmania as a new department entity. Quite rightly, I think it is good to be bringing Homes Tasmania back within a government department environment. I think that's where things should be focused in this space; that's where accountability should lie in this space. So that's not necessarily a bad outcome. The thing that concerns me, though, is that in the space of our housing and homelessness supports, there are a lot of different levels of services and support delivered. It's not all just about building homes and construction. Yet, our housing and homelessness services are going to be put into an entity called Building Tasmania. Parts of what we do in those services and supports might fit under an entity called that, but I'm really concerned that we're putting a whole range of housing and homelessness support services into something called Building Tasmania because I don't think that's where they belong. I'm going to be watching how that plays out really carefully as the demolition of State Growth progresses during this year. I think it's going to be very interesting to see how that provides for more accountability back to the minister of the day and the government of the day.

I note other members - I think it was a member for Murchison and maybe another member as well - commented on the very interesting situation where we're claiming savings out the process of dismantling Homes Tasmania, but we don't appear to be acknowledging the liabilities that come with that, because Homes Tasmania carries a lot of debt as well. So, that's going to be an interesting shifting and moving of numbers on pages to see where we end up in

that equation.

Another area I want to speak about is digital inclusion, which is foundational in a modern community. Digital inclusion relates to both access and capacity; that is, people being fluent and being able to access digital services and supports, and actual just functionality in their daily lives. Digital inclusion, through that access and capacity, are essential building blocks for a successful modern community and economy. Just as we need a workforce of people in high-vis vests and steel-toe boots to do construction work, we also need the infrastructure, education and skills to ensure digital competence and innovation. In effect, in a modern environment, the people in the high-vis vests need that, too. I think it is absolutely crystal clear the government is dropping the ball on this one. This government is ignoring the huge digital inclusion challenge our community is facing and, in doing so, it's undermining the ability of our state to thrive and for Tasmanians to live a good life. Our digital disadvantage affects all Tasmanians, but there are also particular impacts on various cohorts within our state. I note that not only did TasCOSS raise concerns about our poor investment - or complete lack of - in some cases an undermining of previous investment - in digital inclusion. We had groups like COTA in their budget response statement pointing to particular impacts on the cohort they represent, older Tasmanians, and the fact that the dropping of this ball by the government will actually play into a diminishment of services and supports for older Tasmanians in these places. As they say, without targeted investment, many older Tasmanians are at risk of being left behind.

TasCOSS pointed out that, despite they and others in the community services sector calling for greater investment in digital skills and literacy, the Digital Ready for Daily Life program was scrapped. They'd called for it to be doubled and, let's be clear, is a very modest request. Doubling that program would have only brought it up to \$400,000 a year. Pretty modest investment. Instead of going with their recommendation and seeing the benefit of that play out in the Tasmanian community, we've seen it scrapped. They've even pointed out that Libraries Tasmania, a critical enabler of digital access and skills, has also received a funding reduction in this Budget. Things are coming from left and right, on all sides, saying that, rather than digital inclusion being regarded as essential infrastructure and supported, it's being undermined in this state and in this Budget. TasCOSS continues to call for a reinstatement of investment and an improvement in investment in that space. I don't know when this government thinks it's going to be the right season for digital inclusion investment in this state, but my goodness me, at the moment, I think we're in the winter of that area.

It's one of those things that seems intangible, in many ways, because it's not about putting a brick on top of another brick, or putting great big steel beams up and all that sort of thing. You don't have to wear high-vis for it. But, in a modern environment, we know we are already behind here and if we continue to allow ourselves to fall further and further behind, we will never catch up. A small place like Tasmania has so many opportunities for innovation, for new thinking, for leaping ahead when it comes to the digital space, because we don't have to be one of the large jurisdictions, one of the other states, to become a leader in some of these fields. But instead of that, we're falling behind.

The expected savings, or let's be clear and call them cuts, that the health sector is assigned in this Budget is \$131.4 million in this 2026-27 year alone. Our health sector is already described as struggling and broken by the professionals who work in it, yet, to assist in the savings that form the Budget's bottom line, there's not plan or any details for the delivery of savings that also shows us how necessary services and healthcare will be maintained. This is a significant omission and a failure by the government.

Over the decade to 2025-26, we know health costs have increased by an average of

8.5 per cent each year yet, apparently, this can just be turned around in a sustainable manner without impacting on service delivery to the value of over \$700 million over the forward Estimates cut. Are we also meant to presume that the decades of increases in demand in both the acute and the emergency wards are suddenly going to decrease? I don't think anyone's deluded enough to think that. We're not going to meet what we would normally expect to be the inflation rates in health each year. We're not going to meet what would be expected in terms of increased demand each year. Instead, we're going to cut what's there to ribbons. Struggling and broken is our starting point; God help us where we end up at the end of the forward Estimates.

In this space, something that's often overlooked, or is presented as an afterthought or a trivial little bauble on the side, is preventative health, because ultimately, if we want to take the pressure off our acute and emergency healthcare services, we need to have a significant uplift in what we do in the preventative health area. We need to stop people ending up in hospitals. We need to stop people ending up in emergency wards, and we do that through preventative health measures.

It is absolutely rock solid, research proven, that to make a tangible improvement in preventative health, which would then flow through into taking pressure off your acute health systems, we need to invest at least 5 per cent of a health budget in the preventative health area. That's the research proven quantum.

What we're looking at - and I'm quoting here from TasCOSS' work analysing the budget. a preventative health investment, if it was to be 5 per cent of our health budget, it would then be about \$183 million a year based on this budget. That's what we should be looking at putting into preventative health. Instead, the Budget delivers a modest first step of \$5 million per year over the forward Estimates on preventative health. It should be \$183 million a year, it's \$5 million a year.

Now that makes things very plain. We cannot achieve what we should be achieving in preventative health with such a paltry investment in it. The government may well point to its twenty-year preventative health strategy that it's put together. That is all well and good, but if it amounts to nothing but a hill of beans in terms of an actual outcome at the other end, then that's just busy work. That might be nice and glossy and sits on a shelf, but if all we're investing in it is \$5 million a year, it's nothing. It's not enough. It won't actually assist us with our healthcare challenges in this state.

Many in the health area, in the community services area, consistently call for a reshuffle of investment to direct more into the preventative health area. It's an investment in the future. Sure, it's a tough ask in the short term, but if we want tangible difference down the line, that's what we need to do. We don't change a trajectory unless we invest up the top end of the stream when it comes to needs and demand.

I've already pointed to the work of the peak body for older Tasmanians, COTA a couple of times in terms of a response to the Budget. I have a particular interest that has extended from the very first job I had in the community services sector where I worked in community aged care. I maintain a very strong policy interest in the area of support, services and policy settings around older Tasmanians, so I did take a bit of a look at what was others were commenting on within this area in the Budget.

I do note that less than 12 months ago the state government appointed a Minister for Ageing, which was an interesting and positive development at the time. It should have been a gesture towards showing priority and support for this cohort of Tasmanians. We should have

been able to see that demonstrated in the Budget when we looked here, given that we've gone down that path. But when I look at the COTA state budget response statement, this is what they had to say about that. I'm going to quote from it. I'm quite happy to put the words of our community services peak bodies here on the parliamentary record because they're the experts in this space. This is what COTA had to say;

Budgets are about more than numbers, they are a tangible annual statement of what a government values, what it prioritises and who it sees. In an ageing Tasmania, that must include 40 per cent of Tasmanians now aged 50 and over, a proportion that continues to grow. These are the people who have contributed to and shaped the Tasmania we are proud to call home. As we move into later years, people need confidence that governments have planned for, adjusted to, and can support their changing needs. The budget handed down last week did not reflect the realities of demographic change or the growing pressures facing older people across the state. Tasmania has the oldest population in the country and yet this budget does not match the scale of that shift. Older Tasmanians are a significant and growing part of our community, and they deserve to be seen.

Sitting suspended from 1 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Resumed from above (page xxx).

[2.40 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I had just been speaking about older Tasmanians and the impacts this Budget will have on that cohort of our community and I was quoting from COTA's state budget response, which expressed their disappointment in the absence of appropriate targeted supports for this significant part of our community. The final sentence I was quoting from that statement was, 'Older Tasmanians are a significant and growing part of our community, and they deserve to be seen in the Government's priorities. That's the end of the quote. COTA goes on to acknowledge some modest commitments in the Budget, but then they say,

However, these measures fall short of what is required, with the overall level of investment not going far enough to address the real and immediate challenges older Tasmanians are facing. The Budget lacks targeted measures to address cost-of-living pressures, which are being acutely felt by pensioners, and includes no meaningful investment in programs addressing social isolation or supporting mature-age job seekers.

There are many vulnerable cohorts in the Tasmanian community who are going to be affected by what is not in this Budget, by the absence of support that's being offered here because of either cuts that are going to be imposed through our service systems or drop-offs of funding being provided to our community service support organisations. That's something that we will see the impact of in a cascading way in coming years.

Earlier in my contribution I used the phrase false economy in relation to the cuts proposed in our public service and the lack of continued investment and appropriate investment in our community services is also a false economy. The more we underfund those services, the greater the deterioration in the wellbeing of our community, the social cohesion in our community and the resilience of our community manage the challenges that Tasmanian families face every day. I fear the trajectory that that sets us on.

I mentioned the matter of risk that was presented in chapter four of budget paper 1. Potentially, a future reform of Tasmania's fiscal framework would be a formal recognition of climate cost as a risk, along with the economic opportunities of a green transition inclusive but not limited to renewables. If we can claim revenue from increased insurance duties due to more frequent and extreme weather events as a positive benefit in our budget papers, then the reality of climate change impacts - the disruption upon people's health and wellbeing, the sustainability of our state's biodiversity, the productivity of sectors such as primary industries and water - should all be recognised as risks and addressed throughout the budget papers, I believe.

This is additional to any ongoing climate-related policy and program development and implementation across portfolios, which should also be represented in the budget. In fact, the formal inclusion of climate risk within our fiscal framework would assist in driving policy coherence across clean energy investments as well as other climate-disruption mitigation policy priorities, many of which we are sadly neglecting.

I haven't had the opportunity to delve into this in detail yet, but I believe that in these budget papers we're actually seeing cuts in areas of climate-change action. That is an incredible false economy for us to go down that path. Perhaps the member for Hobart, who's yet to speak, will have more to say on that area. It's one I'll take a look at in more detail in time.

There's a really important area that I want to speak about now in relation to this Budget. It's the fact that I heard no mention in the Treasurer's budget speech of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. Nor can I find any mention of the significant commitment this Liberal government previously made to progress treaty and truth-telling with the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. Nor could I find any specific mention or allocation throughout the budget papers to progress that previous commitment and work towards it. I think that's an incredibly unfortunate omission. In fact, that's an understatement. I think the silence on any mention of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, by the Treasurer in his speech or in a priority way in the budget papers, shouts contempt and failure of this government and its commitment to reconciliation, to restoration and to treaty and truth-telling. The government's moral compass has lost direction on a fundamental human rights matter, one that goes to the heart of the Tasmanian community.

Yesterday was National Sorry Day, the day on which we acknowledged the Stolen Generations. It marked the 29th anniversary of the Bringing them Home report in 1997. That report shared the history of the Stolen Generations and made 86 recommendations to address the ongoing intergenerational harm inflicted on Stolen Generations survivors and their families. However, here we are a generation on and only five of the report's crucial recommendations have been fully implemented. I note that this year's theme for Sorry Day was 'From Sorry to Action,' calling on further action from leaders to commit to making meaningful change because sorry without action is simply not enough and not good enough. How shamefully short we are falling in this state on that front.

This week, in fact, is National Reconciliation Week, which kicked off here in Hobart this morning with an annual breakfast hosted by Reconciliation Tasmania. It was a moving event. This year Tasmania forged its own path, led by the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, with a theme for the week that eschewed the terminology of 'reconciliation' for the theme Truth, Reckoning, Change. A powerful panel of speakers reflected on that theme and the actions required in our state to honestly listen to and understand the stories of the historic and ongoing harm suffered by the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as a result of invasion and dispossession.

This truth-telling must accompany a genuine intention to progress treaty in order to heal the relationship between our first Tasmanians and the non-Aboriginal community here in our state.

We are supremely fortunate to live in this place, where we are graciously invited by the Tasmanian Aboriginal people to engage with them in truth, reckoning and change. What an opportunity we have to celebrate and share in the pride and knowledge that comes from a connection to place held by the oldest continuous culture on the planet, stretching back more than 2000 generations and for over 40,000 years. The Tasmanian people and our communities have so much to benefit from in embracing this generous offer from the Tasmanian Aboriginal people. It should be, I believe, a priority for the state government. Not only that, it should be a priority for the Premier, who, as I have regularly asserted in this place, should rightly hold the portfolio responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs. This would correctly and respectfully situate leadership of this priority area within the government.

Chapter 4 of budget paper 1, Risks and Sensitivities and Presentation, includes a range of redress and compensation matters arising from the historical institutional abuse involving current redress schemes and civil claims against the state. Such schemes identified as risks include claims against the state by survivors of institutional child sexual abuse and the recently announced historical forced adoption redress scheme. These significant mechanisms by which the state takes responsibility and attempts to make some form of recompense for the harm inflicted are considered as risks on the budget books. It is the responsible course of action that we should be investing in strengthening oversight, integrity and good governance entities. That investment in good governance and strengthened oversight is clearly a sound investment not only in our human rights protection of our Tasmanian people, but also in our budget bottom line, given these things are identified as risks in a budgetary sense. Before I move on to talk about those entities of oversight and integrity, which members here will no doubt understand is an area of particular interest for me in an ongoing sense, I do wish to make two calls first on the government, which are a matter of justice when we're talking about matters of redress.

Firstly, I call on the government to expand the current historical forced adoption redress scheme to include the children who were removed from their mothers, as well as the fathers who were also denied access to their children under those abhorrent policies of the past. Secondly, I reiterate my calls for a redress scheme for those family members affected by the wrong practices at the RA Rodda Museum, which saw body parts stolen from coronial autopsies and kept without consent. Those are both matters of justice for Tasmanians harmed by actions of the state, and I call on the government to act on those with alacrity.

Most here will be aware that a lack of adequate funding has plagued our Integrity Commission for many, many years: one of the many blockages to it functioning as intended and as desperately needed in our state. Other blockages, of course, have been long-delayed legislative reforms identified a decade ago under the Cox review and allowed to languish in neglect, and now finally, perhaps being progressed - fingers crossed - in legislation this year. As much as the legislative reform was so readily neglected by this government, so has adequate funding of the Integrity Commission been neglected. It's a matter of embarrassment and disgrace that our Integrity Commission is so woefully funded for so long that the previous chief commissioner, in desperation, perhaps, in recent years, had to begin publicly criticising the neglect of this Liberal government and making stark calls for improved funding.

That wasn't the only one of our statutory entities having to speak out. In fact, it had become a veritable chorus, but to no avail, it would seem, when we look at this Budget. The Integrity Commission receives in this Budget a modest increase linked to resourcing required for the implementation of the Integrity Commission Amendment (Mandatory Notifications)

Bill, which was passed in recent times in this place and will lead to further work for the Integrity Commission. That is being funded, but after that, there's a gradual decline over the forward Estimates, and no recognition that we were starting from a point of underfunding. We're not addressing the problem that we have all known has been there for a very long time and continues to be there in this Budget. This is an important integrity entity for our state, and this government continues to neglect it.

Another egregious and inexplicable cut has been made to the operational funding of the Tasmanian Audit Office of apparently \$300,000. The impact of this will be, I believe, approximately halving the audit office's capacity to undertake their suite of planned performance audits. Ironically, these orders contribute to the government's ongoing efficiency and productivity on behalf of the Tasmanian community. The most recent performance audit is a case in point: the planning and early implementation of the Human Resources Information System report, which just came out this week and revealed that in fact, \$47 million had been spent over four years within the Department of Health on this project initially, without any intended modules being delivered. Now that the project has moved to DPAC and is being rolled out more broadly, it is estimated to cost a total of \$119 million, up from the initial \$22 million that had been estimated at the start. Absolutely despicable, but that's why the audit office is important.

The audit office is an independent integrity entity that looks into these matters for us as a parliament and as a Tasmanian community, and provides the government with valuable independent recommendations to make improvements to the way it functions, to the way it undergoes project management, for example, like this one, and hopefully saves us money in the long run to produce more efficient and effective services through our public service. It's important and valuable work delivering on the audit functions of the statutory office. It provides assurance both to the parliament and the Tasmanian public on the performance and accountability of the Tasmanian public sector.

As has been noted by other speakers in contributions, this state Budget raises serious questions surrounding trust and community confidence in this government, and when people see the government cutting the operational funding of independent oversight entities such as the audit office, public trust and confidence will be nothing other than driven down. This funding cut must be considered an aberration, and not a trend.

Members may recall this chamber recently passed a motion I moved, calling for the Tasmanian preventive mechanism (TNPM) to be funded for the long-stalled recommendations made across two recent implementation reports for that office. It's therefore disappointing that instead, the government has chosen to provide an insufficient allocation of a total of \$555,000 across the 2026-27 and 2027-28 financial years, with \$400,000 of that deferred until 2027-28.

This is to give effect to the commission of inquiry recommendations, as well as relevant recommendations from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. It's clearly welcome to have some funding into the space, but woefully insufficient. Nor does it address the key functions the OPCAT Treaty requires our NPM to fulfil, in order for Tasmania to be OPCAT compliant. Shamefully, we fail yet again in delivering on our human rights obligations.

Similarly, the custodial inspector receives a small amount in the 2026-27 year to maintain monitoring of Ashley Youth Detention Centre and give effect to two recommendations from the commission of inquiry. Let's not forget, Ashley Youth Detention Centre should have been shut by now. It should not be requiring ongoing monitoring and extra investment in that space because we should have actually given effect to the commission of inquiry recommendation of

some urgency that the centre close. Turning our attention to the Office of the Ombudsman: as another of our integrity entities, it defies belief that following a brief bump upwards in 2026-27, there's a downward trajectory over the forward Estimates, below the amount which this significant oversight body received this financial year. What an extraordinary situation, and one that I consider to be utterly untenable.

These entities that I've just been speaking about are the integrity architecture for our state. They are what we rely on as a parliament, and as a Tasmanian community to ensure that good governance is occurring when it isn't, to ensure that matters can be addressed. For the government of the day to now be habitual neglecters of this integrity architecture is utterly untenable, it's shameful, it's self interested. It's self interested for sure, because certainly these entities do nothing but shine a light on the failures of this government. So no wonder they'd like to keep them underfunded and below par in terms of what they can deliver; but that speaks volumes in itself. This is not an acceptable situation. It does not deliver good outcomes for the community. It doesn't deliver, it doesn't work towards our aims of more effective and efficient public service and will be to our detriment in the long run.

As some members here will be aware, in nearly every state budget response which I've delivered in this place, I've raised the matter of the gender impact budget statements. I'm happy to give credit where credit is due, and I do acknowledge the ongoing improvement evident in the 2026-27 gender impact budget statement. It has come a long way from the initial glossy brochure, collating of spending initiatives that was presented to this parliament back in 2022-23, after my motion passed this place. I thank those that have worked on this important element in our suite of annual budget documentation.

However, I'm sure no one will be surprised that I'm also, on top of that congratulations and that acknowledgement of progress, going to be urging the government to make continued future improvements in the range of data that's collected, in the analysis that's undertaken and in the presentation of the gender impact budget statement. Importantly, the work encourages us to apply a gender lens to the budget priorities, and any policy and parameter changes. We can certainly extend it out beyond particular just policy decisions in the budget, we can look at cuts, we can look at the policy and parameters things, we can look at the risks and think about how a gender lens might be beneficial to us to put over those.

It's a start, however, because we know as a real centrepiece of this budget that we're facing these cuts to services, I think it would have been particularly important to see a gender lens put over those. There's still an opportunity to do so going forward as they play out. Where's the government's work on any expected gender distribution of the 1700 FTE positions to be slashed from the state service, for example? We would like to know how many of those will see part-time or full-time working women out of a job. Where's the government's work analysing any potential gender impacts of their demanded operational efficiencies across the public service?

Such a gender lens-based assessment is needed to inform those decisions prior to implementation, rather than summarised as impact captured after the fact in indicators such as worsening, neutral or improving. That's fine, it's good to measure and monitor after the fact, but a gender lens before we make or implement decisions is best practice and where we should be heading.

We can't reflect on this budget without mentioning the contentious white elephant plan to desecrate the heritage waterfront of our state's capital city. The budget books will never be balanced and weighed in the community's interest while the stadium is on them. These budget papers spell it out in black and white. The AFL demanded stadium is a gamble both with our

financial future and Tasmanians present.

It's in black and white that Tasmanians are to lose jobs and will be inevitably losing vital services and opportunities in this budget. Tasmanians are to lose jobs and services because we need to rein in spending apparently but not spending on the Macquarie Point Stadium. We will continue gambling with the state's finances in that regard, because we need to account for current debt and future interest payments for that abomination.

We will keep the ever cash hungry Macquarie Point Stadium on the books despite current and predicted cost blowouts, gambling on the hope that sometime in the future we will get an unquantified return on those costs. The government is gambling that the current estimate of \$1.13 billion will not blow out further. What are the odds on that? Not good, I can tell you. Taking such a gamble is not a responsible budget repair measure and goes against every single other budget repair measure that could be claimed in this budget and rubs salt in the wound of them.

On that same theme of looking ahead, many may ask where to from here with this budget. I opened my contribution referencing the despair felt by many since the delivery of this budget last Thursday. Much of that despair and anger in some quarters is driven by the fact earlier warnings and structural reform opportunities had gone unheeded. The community services sector, the unions, academics, stakeholders, political commentators and members of the public have been aware of the need for significant structural reform of the state's finances and have been for years.

However, the mode of any reform as critical as its goals. Changes which hard bake in economic inequities, social disadvantage and ecological disruption is not reform. Clearly, the principle of intergenerational equity, of not passing on ecological devastation or unmanageable debt to future generations is significant. Equally as important is intragenerational equity. Which, as emphasised by the UN Sustainable Development Unit, is about driving fairness in the here and now.

Sadly, these budget papers reveal the myopic focus of this government to perceive intergenerational equity in a purely economic sense, while abandoning other equally significant pillars of equitable social and environmental justice. There have already been calls from the community for the parliament to either seek to amend or vote against the 2026-27 Budget. However, people making those calls may not be aware of how drastic a step it is to either amend, even by \$1 or vote against state budgets under our parliamentary system.

It's hardly likely we will see any parliamentary appetite to do so, I suspect, following last year when we saw the Labor opposition huff and puff and blow their own house down. Is this devastating budget a fait accompli? We have to ask ourselves what could real, inclusive, inter and intergenerationally sustainable budget repair look like, and is it too late? Are we too far down this path?

To put it bluntly, it is not comprehensive or even sustainable to have budget repair claims that are reliant on cuts in isolation of any proper examination of our own source state revenue streams. We've heard from a range of commentators and indeed, Mr Saul Eslake reiterated his views during yesterday's briefing for members, that although the 2026-27 financial year will be hard, particularly in light of the cuts expected to be found across our health services, the subsequent years up to 2029-30 will be even worse.

Therefore, there is an imperative and, I would argue, still a window, for an independent

expert review of our entire financial framework inclusive of the current state revenue and taxation mix to be undertaken. Members may recall I've spoken of it here before and will put it on the record again. Members may recall that the state parliament once before did attempt to hold an inquiry into our taxation mix. This was the multi-party committee established in 2010, prompted by the public debate coming out of the global financial crisis, that we needed a more robust financial framework and an honest debate about our taxation and income base.

It's, of course, the political third rail, but at that time, in 2010, the committee was formed. A committee that consisted of the then Labor Premier and Treasurer Lara Giddings, the Liberal opposition Treasurer, spokesperson Peter Gutwein, the Greens Treasury spokesperson Tim Morris, and the honourable member for Murchison from this Chamber. The committee sought to assess the sustainability, fairness and efficiency of our state tax system, responding to historical reliance on volatile GST distributions and a narrow tax base. Fundamental fiscal considerations, all very relevant and under scrutiny today. However, unfortunately this significant attempt was abandoned suddenly in late 2011, after the two larger parties decided it was not in their respective political interests to engage in taxation reform. There's that third rail. An unfortunate failure to seize the moment and drive a modern fit for purpose taxation base delivered in a community sensitive manner by which to shift the state's financial framework onto a more robust and sustainable footing. Who knows, if that committee had completed its work, maybe we would have been in a better place to weather the COVID pandemic storm when it arrived on us in 2020. Maybe we would have a previously agreed restructuring model we could now be updating and building upon.

The external pressures and contributing factors, the uncertain economic conditions, the income constraints, all of which motivated some recognition 16 years ago that we cannot afford to keep drifting along in this matter, remain today. As Mr Eslake states, one of the uncertain conditions which holds great sway over our economic fortunes is 'good luck', rather than good management. Specifically, good luck is required to ensure that our current revenue sources from the Commonwealth materialises at the level on which this 2026-27 Budget is predicated upon. This budget projected revenue increase from \$10.191 billion in 2026-27 to \$11.603 billion in 2029-30 - down to increased payments from the Commonwealth for health and GST share and some higher revenue from current payments. Without those projected revenue streams delivering as projected, the state's forecast surplus is on very shaky grounds. A precarious situation which does not inspire confidence in the now or into the future.

It's utterly irresponsible to continue to refuse to assess our current revenue levers over which we do have some control. That is why I'm calling once again for an independent parliamentary-commissioned mechanism by which we can review and reset our state's revenue and savings space. Let me be clear, before we see perhaps any gaslighting assertions that I'm calling for new or higher taxes; that is not what I'm saying in simplicity.

It's nonsense to say we're balancing the books when certain chapters of those books remained exempt from consideration or review. We need to know whether we're pulling the right levers to deliver a modern, fit for purpose financial framework with the capacity to support a compassionate and sustainable community now and into the future. Is the current taxation and revenue mix the right mix? For example, are the current approximate \$300 million in payroll tax exemptions delivering on its intended policy outcomes? How is the contribution of income and dividends from the state's Government Business Enterprises and companies best utilised and targeted? Such a review of these matters should involve stakeholder, public consultation and input. It should have the capacity to provide options which drive meaningful structural reform of those elements of our fiscal framework over which the state can control or influence. Importantly, it should also provide the scope for the community to have their say on

their priorities, values and on what they want to see as the Tasmania of our future.

Such a proposal may or may not arrive at radical suggestions for change and that revenue reform will have a minimal contribution to overall structural reform. But at least we would know. We don't know what it would come out with, but certainly, if it's done right, it should come out with some options for us to consider and a better understanding of what we can expect those options to deliver.

As the Fiscal Sustainability Report 2026 released earlier this year informed us:

Budget repair can be achieved through actions such as increasing revenue, and reducing capital and operating expenditure, as well as efficiencies in service delivery and productivity improvements.

No single action will be sufficient on its own, and all measures are needed to return the State to a sustainable pathway.

Holding an independent state taxation review of some sort would be consistent with the fiscal sustainability report 2026 findings. I reiterate, all measures are needed to return the state to a sustainable pathway. At some point, we have to grapple with the third rail here. We actually have to pull all the levers we have available and do so in a dispassionate and informed manner, certainly not a politically self-interested manner.

Before I leave this matter, it's worth noting how the 2026 budget papers reflect policy and parameter assessment of the state's current revenue sources. Budget paper 1, chapter 6 page 147, describes the following as a positive outlook across the 2026-27 Budget,

Payroll tax forecast to reflect historical growth rates, supported by growth in the labour market. Land tax forecasts reflect historical growth rates. Insurance duty forecasts reflect national trends, attributable to historical inflation rates, with growth across the Forward Estimates resulting from increased natural disaster costs due to extreme weather events such as flooding and fires.

There's those extreme weather events, and, my goodness, apparently they're a positive income-raising measure for the state as they increase insurance duties. Basically, the state profits from the community being affected by floods and fires. The budget papers may merely be reflecting the fiscal reality; however, maybe this is an area that an independent taxation and revenue review could assess to check whether that is a lever being pulled in the right direction or not or how else we might mitigate that reality.

The budget papers also see increases in revenue elsewhere, which are conveniently referred to as 'increased fees and charges' rather than taxes. For example, the government is now expecting to raise \$3 million per year via Service Tasmania fees. Who will be mainly affected by these fees? On what basis will they be ascribed? As others here have also stated, this smacks of Tasmanians being taxed on the sly when they're seeking assistance from their government or participating in regulatory services and proceedings. Where is the equity lens to assess the fairness of this particular revenue-raising effort? How will it be demonstrated that this will be well targeted? Why have we chosen this particular measure above others available to us? I'm not saying it's wrong and we shouldn't do it; I'm saying we don't know enough about it. We haven't seen it presented to us in an evidence-based, clearly modelled way and we don't know that it's the best and right way forward here.

Again, something that could be subject to a holistic comprehensive review of all state revenue levers would be to test social equity considerations and whether they're progressive or regressive, or risk perverse policy outcomes, for example. In fact, according to budget paper 1, chapter 3, the government intends to undertake a whole-of-government fees and charges review. Why only review that one component of the revenue base which the state can influence? It would make more sense to have the comprehensive and independent taxation review broadly, which would include state fees and charges as I've outlined.

To reiterate, although the 2026-27 Budget appears grim under these budget papers, the following two years after that will be bleaker and harsher. We need to use the time between now and then wisely. The responsible course of action is to act now. It's not too late for the parliament potentially to commission an independent expert review which could and should inform real sustainable budget repair, where it could have a full set of numbers which are believable, where we can see the projected outcomes and have confidence in whether will be delivered and, equally importantly, test whether those outcomes are desirable in the form that they've been presented. Findings of such a review should also feed into and inform the 2027-28 Budget and forward Estimates revenue, savings and expenditure priorities. It may even be able to tell us where the mythical target of state revenue contributing 37 per cent of the overall state budget came from and what it was based upon and whether it could, in fact, be more aspirational. Further, it may help define in a transparent manner exactly what the rightsize State Service is when it comes to meeting the needs of the community and also fulfilling the state's statutory obligations.

As the fiscal strategy detailed in budget paper 1 states on page 59, the first new measure that differentiates this fiscal strategy from the previous one, is linking the State Service employee costs to revenue. Apparently, this new measure will provide a 'more meaningful and sustainable assessment of the number of employees the state can employ over time.' This new measure specifically linking our State Service size to revenue presents in itself the argument for a comprehensive review of our revenue and income base. It is nonsense to talk about a rightsize State Service solely within the context of cuts and in isolation of any integrated comprehensive analysis of community need, statutory obligations and revenue. As mentioned earlier, much of the deterioration of the state's finances, as identified by Mr Saul Eslake, is reliant upon federal grant money's current and projected - a hefty dose of good luck rather than good management. What happens should that good luck begin to run out? Should the federal GST pool shrink, for example, or the No Worse Off Guarantee expire in 2030, what then? I predict we will inevitably see new taxes or privatisation process entered into, but in a highly politicised, pressure-cooker desperation context, rather than a considered, transparent holistic approach.

Some cynics may actually think that the cuts that we're seeing in this Budget, without details or delivery plans and implemented at such a breakneck downwards trajectory, are part of a deliberate and cunning plan to position for future ideologically driven state taxes or to pressure the Commonwealth to keep our good luck tap running. Maybe, Mr President.

Just like old Mother Hubbard, the Treasurer, Mr Abetz, has gone to the cupboard to discover its bare. The cupboard has been in the care of Mr Abetz's colleagues for the last 12 years and 13 state budgets. The fact that the cupboard is bare is an indictment on this Liberal government and only this Liberal government. An indictment on its blind refusal to heed lessons that should have been learned. Lessons delivered time and time again from credible, independent experts, from experienced people in this place, from its own Treasury. It's an indictment on this government's intransigence to heed warnings against ill-advised,

ideologically driven expenditure such as the gratuitous Macquarie Point Stadium, the costs of which have ballooned from the original estimate out to \$1.13 billion, and inevitably climbing much, much higher. If those earlier opportunities had been seized and warnings heeded, a more inclusive and gentler road for our state to fiscal sustainability and reform could have been well progressed by now. You cannot care for the community with a bare cupboard and Tasmanians deserve more. Far more.

Which begs the question, why should Tasmanians trust those who depleted the cupboard to actually deliver on replenishing it? There is nothing in this government's record to support such trust, quite the opposite, in fact. When we look at this Budget we must be clear-eyed in assessing its merits. We need to not be bullied by rhetoric of the so-called 'rightsize' State Service decreed in isolation to fit a convenient narrative. We also need to demand an equal focus on determining the right revenue and savings mix, the right workforce mix to deliver the right community services to our Tasmanian community, and that these debates are informed by the right consultation processes and be evidence based rather than ideologically driven.

In closing, in this Budget, all Tasmanians are paying for the Liberal government's politically self-interested indulgences and now habitual mismanagement. Tasmanians deserve so much more and now face a frankly horrifying impact on services and support that we know will hit the most vulnerable the hardest. So it is with immense reservations that I note the 2026-27 State Budget.