



Tasmanian  
Government

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# **2023-24 BUDGET SPEECH**

***Building Tasmania's Future:  
Strong, Safe, Secure.***

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BY

THE TREASURER

THE HON MICHAEL FERGUSON MP

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Delivered in the House of Assembly on 25 May 2023 on the  
Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill (No 1) 2023

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*Presented to both Houses of Parliament by the Governor's Command*



Mr Speaker,

I am pleased to deliver the 2023-24 Tasmanian Budget which delivers on the Rockliff Liberal Government's key priorities of stronger public finances, stronger public services, meeting demand pressures, building healthy business conditions and continued strategic investment in long-term infrastructure.

This is a carefully considered Budget that deals with real economic headwinds and prepares Tasmania for the future.

The Budget provides for a range of important new initiatives that make key investments in the future of our state, while also caring for and protecting our community.

Our response to the pandemic has been significant, with a substantial range of measures that have impacted the Budget over the past four financial years.

We provided massive financial assistance to businesses and households. We waived taxes, fees and charges, and used our financial strength to cushion our community and businesses from the worst impacts of the downturn and the waves of disruption and uncertainty that followed.

There are undoubtedly challenging economic headwinds affecting our nation today, but Tasmania's very strong economy and the decisions reflected within this Budget have placed us in a solid position to weather them.

The Tasmanian Liberal Government recognises that despite a softening national economy, we need to continue to support Tasmanians, unlock opportunities and provide a business environment that generates continued growth and security.

Our sensible, responsible economic and financial management has us well prepared and this Budget charts a safe course through the coming challenges.

## **Economy**

Since we have emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic Tasmania's economy has rebounded strongly.

Last financial year, the Tasmanian economy grew by a significant 4.3 per cent.

This followed growth of 5 per cent in the 2020-21 year and was stronger than the national growth rate.

This reflects a continuation of the trend that has been observed over the past five years, with Tasmania recognised as the strongest performing state economy.

Growth in Tasmania's economy is expected to be more subdued in the 2022-23 financial year due to the slowing global economy, higher inflation, and rising interest rates.

The Budget forecasts a continuation of growth in Gross State Product and State Final Demand in 2023-24, with State Final Demand expected to grow above its long-term average.

Our exports of goods performed strongly throughout the pandemic and remain at historically high levels.

Services exports, which were significantly affected by the pandemic, started to rebound following the reopening of borders. The Budget forecasts that services exports, including tourism and education, will continue to recover strongly over the next two years, driving continued growth in international exports overall.

The benefits of our plan are flowing through into other economic measures.

Our labour market is now booming, with the latest data showing that there are now more than 56 000 extra people employed in Tasmania than when we were first elected, and the unemployment rate sits at a record low of 3.8 per cent.

This is so pleasing, especially considering the growth in our population as well as the current record high participation rate.

Ten years ago there were people looking for jobs; today there are jobs looking for people.

It is no surprise that Tasmania has repeatedly been assessed as Australia's best performing economy in the quarterly CommSec State of the States report.

Tasmania has come forward in leaps and bounds since the Tasmanian Liberal Government was elected, with record high population, record low unemployment and strong economic growth.

With this experience at the helm, we know that Tasmania's future is strong, safe and secure.

### **Financial position**

Mr Speaker,

This Budget continues our track record of providing the services and infrastructure Tasmanians need and deserve, making targeted, careful and considered investments into areas of need.

It delivers significant cost of living relief, along with record investment into health, housing and education, together with a strong pipeline of infrastructure delivery. This supports our community and our businesses in strengthening the Tasmanian economy and ensuring continued job security.

We continue to underpin economic growth through ongoing investment into our future and we do this while charting a safe course through the economic headwinds towards greater budget sustainability without increasing taxes.

In the face of the strongest inflation in decades and with the impact of the Reserve Bank's actions to counter this, national economic growth is expected to be subdued in the short-term and Tasmania will not be immune.

We are already seeing those impacts on revenues with significant write-downs of forecast conveyance duty resulting in a reduction in total state taxation revenue.

Since the *Revised Estimates Report 2022-23* was published, the Commonwealth Grants Commission has reduced Tasmania's assessed GST relativity, with a material impact on the forecast level of GST revenue.

Further, with a softening in national economic growth and consumption, GST revenue growth has moderated in the short-term.

In addition, Tasmania's GST relativity is forecast to decline over the Forward Estimates, highlighting the volatility of this revenue source and the importance of the no-worse-off guarantee.

The Australian Government must permanently extend the Guarantee, which is worth an estimated \$324 million to the state's finances over the 2023-24 Budget and Forward Estimates.

This is proof that the guarantee was, and will always be, necessary.

In the short-term the impact of the revenue volatility means that we must consider every expense, live within our means, and avoid adding to the inflation burden felt by Tasmanian households.

In the 2019-20 Budget, the Government planned an efficiency dividend of 0.75 per cent of expenditure to manage the state's finances responsibly. This was later lifted in the face of the emerging pandemic.

During the pandemic the Government provided significant support to keep Tasmanians safe and employed.

That is what Government's do, step in when challenges arise, but there is no doubt it has had a significant financial impact, just as we have seen in other jurisdictions.

This Budget reintroduces a more modest efficiency dividend to assist with the Government's commitment to delivering targeted and considered investment in services, whilst taking action to restore Tasmania's fiscal buffers.

The efficiency dividend will not commence until 2024-25, giving agencies time to identify efficiencies.

Over four years this measure will deliver \$300 million in savings, representing just 0.6 per cent of total expenditure in 2024-25.

This will equate to a saving in the first year of 60 cents out of every \$100 of Government spending.

This level of efficiency is much more modest than the planned savings from the 2011-12 Budget, which in the first year equated to \$3.73 out of every \$100 and grew to \$4.95 out of every \$100 in the final year.

We will work with agencies to ensure that frontline services are not impacted, as this is a very modest level of saving for agencies to deliver with a strong focus on improving efficiency while continuing key essential services. We can achieve this through backline efficiencies such as new digital enhancements across Government. To be clear, frontline services that Tasmanians rely on will be protected.

While also carefully managing risks, this will ensure the Government is able to meet emerging demands and challenges.

This is a responsible measure that has been applied by the Australian Government, at between one and two per cent per annum, and also other states and territories in making better use of hardworking taxpayers' funds entrusted to us.

The Budget also implements a new Fiscal Strategy. As the impact of the pandemic on the national and global fiscal environment has changed, the Government's response to those impacts has also evolved. As noted in the Revised Estimates Report 2022-23, the existing Fiscal Strategy has been reassessed, and the Strategic Actions in the 2023-24 Budget have been contemporised to improve financial transparency and reflect the Government's response to the changing fiscal environment.

The 2023-24 Fiscal Strategy provides a framework to guide Budget sustainability over the next decade and increases transparency and accountability by developing, implementing and reporting on fiscal objectives at a General Government Sector and Total State Sector level.

We will chart a pathway back to surplus over the Forward Estimates with the Budget forecasting a Net Operating Deficit of \$297.5 million in 2023-24 improving to a Net Operating Surplus of \$61.2 million in 2026-27.

## **Health and mental wellbeing**

We are continuing to see increasing demand for health services which is why this Budget includes a massive \$12.1 billion over four years towards vital health services across Tasmania. This is an increase of almost \$1 billion across the Forward Estimates from the 2022-23 Budget. Since we came to Government, health funding has increased from 28 per cent of the Budget to now 34 per cent.

In addition, the Budget provides \$682.9 million over the same period for upgrades and new facilities at hospitals, ambulance stations and mental health centres, as well as strategic investments in our digital health capacity.

There can be no doubting our commitment to improving healthcare for Tasmanians.

We are now investing almost \$8.3 million into health services each and every day.

We are providing \$374 million to continue opening new beds, enabling 298 beds to be opened by 30 June 2024.

Our \$196.4 million Statewide Elective Surgery Plan is working – we have seen a reduction in the elective surgery waitlist of more than 2 500 people over the past two years. The Budget builds on this with a \$38 million boost to provide an additional 22 000 endoscopies, and \$20 million over the next two years to reduce outpatient wait times.

We are investing in health infrastructure for the future with \$87.1 million for the North West Hospitals Masterplan, including \$40 million for the new mental health precinct in Burnie.

In the North we are progressing with our 10-year, \$580 million major redevelopment of the Launceston General Hospital with construction for the new mental health precinct to begin late next year and \$15 million to construct a new state-of-the-art rooftop helipad on the campus.

For the South, the Budget provides \$170.4 million to progress the 30-year masterplan for the Royal Hobart Hospital redevelopment, including \$6.6 million over two years for a second angiography suite to meet increasing demand and improve care.

We are seeing increasing demand for ambulance services which is why we have permanently funded 97 positions originally established in response to the pandemic to meet current and projected demand.

We are also building six new rural stations at Bridgewater, Beaconsfield, Queenstown, Bicheno, Oatlands and Longford, in addition to the new stations at Burnie and Glenorchy.

The Budget continues our investment in rural and community health facilities with the \$3.5 million upgrade to the Midlands Multipurpose Health Centre at Oatlands to commence this year and funding of \$30 million for the next stage of the Kingston Community Health Centre.

## **Housing**

Mr Speaker,

This Budget delivers on our landmark reforms to social and affordable housing in Tasmania, providing funding to the new authority, Homes Tasmania, to build homes faster and deliver on our ambitious \$1.5 billion plan to provide 10 000 new homes and units by 2032.

Our Plan includes a range of targeted and considered measures to assist Tasmanians in need and we are partnering with industry to build capacity and boost supply across the market.

The Budget includes almost \$373 million in grant funding to Homes Tasmania to continue to provide housing and homelessness services, deliver new initiatives, and provide funding supports for its capital program.

The Budget provides \$3 million to extend our Residential Land Release Rebate initiative, our Headworks Holiday incentive to bring more land to the market sooner.

We are also partnering with Build Up Tassie with \$4 million over six years to provide a free work readiness program for Tasmanians aged between 16 and 24 to enter the construction industry and gain skills for life.

We know that all over the country, rents are a key contributor to cost of living pressures.

We have been responding to this with local innovative solutions such as our very successful Private Rental Incentive Program, which has helped over 500 eligible households into a private residence at a more affordable rent.

We recognise there are Tasmanians struggling to find affordable rentals and the Budget responds to this by extending and enhancing our Private Rental Incentive Program with an additional \$1.5 million.

This will enable the trial of an innovative new Affordable Rentals Initiative where Homes Tasmania will secure private rentals at market rate and provide them to eligible low income Tasmanians at a reduced rent.

We are also continuing to invest in crisis and supported accommodation with \$28 million over four years to continue our Safe Spaces program, \$1.73 million to continue the Hobart Women's Shelter Emergency Response and nearly \$6 million to expand our Youth to Independence program.

### **Education and skills**

The Tasmanian Liberal Government has led landmark education reforms such as extending our high schools to Year 12 and providing education adjustments for students with disability.

Through this Budget we continue to make significant investments into providing our children with world class learning.

This Budget invests a record \$8.9 billion into education and a further \$305.1 million into schools, education, and vocational training infrastructure.

We will invest \$36.6 million over four years to provide an additional 100 in-class support positions by 2025 to assist teachers and we will also introduce a further 25 Education Support Specialist positions.

The Budget also provides \$19 million to attract and retain the best and brightest teachers and we are also investing \$15.4 million in more senior leadership roles in targeted areas of need.

In addition to investing in staff and resources we are also building the school infrastructure needed to support future generations of learners, with new schools at Brighton and Legana and major redevelopments at other schools right across the state.

We are also supporting our students through our \$10 million Contemporary Classrooms program which is providing modern learning spaces around Tasmania.

The Government is continuing its \$28 million program to construct Six New Child and Family Learning Centres, with the new centre at East Tamar already open and construction well advanced on the Waratah-Wynyard and West Ulverstone centres.

The remaining centres at Sorell, Kingborough and Glenorchy are expected to be complete by the end of next year.

We are also investing in a range of facility upgrades including \$8 million for electrical switchboards, \$6.3 million for student bathrooms, \$5 million for solar panels in more than 100 schools, and our \$10 million Outdoor Learning program.

The Budget provides \$6.5 million for the Literacy Community-wide Framework to achieve the aspirational target of 100 per cent functional literacy in Tasmania.

Mr Speaker,

We recognise that in a time of record high employment we need to continue significant investments into skills and workforce growth.

We know that our ambitious infrastructure agenda needs more people in the building and construction sector, so we are helping Tasmanians gain the training needed to pursue an exciting new career.

We are investing more than \$660 million into skills and workforce growth over four years, including new funding for TasTAFE infrastructure and additional supports for our bold Jobs Tasmania agenda.

We are committing an additional \$1.5 million to the Freer Farm Agricultural Centre of Excellence, a \$6.5 million investment that is ensuring that students learn on the latest equipment when launching into a career on the farm.

The Budget also provides \$3 million for important upgrades at our TasTAFE facilities in Hobart, Clarence and Alanvale.

These investments take our total commitment to TasTAFE to nearly \$120 million in new funding in just three years, ensuring the success of the essential reforms we fought for, and modernising our leading skills provider.

We are also connecting more Tasmanians with jobs by investing a further \$5.5 million into our successful \$10.6 million Jobs Hub initiative, together with a further \$1.8 million to secure the popular and refreshed Employer of Choice program.

### **Cost of living**

Mr Speaker,

We know the past year has been challenging for many in our community with strong inflation driven by national and global factors.

Coupled with a tight labour market we have seen the cost of groceries and fuel grow dramatically and now mortgage costs are growing significantly as the Reserve Bank works to bring inflation under control.

Last year we provided significant cost of living relief, including the very successful Winter Bill Buster payment, and this Budget continues to provide much needed assistance for Tasmanians on low or fixed incomes.

Over the next four years there is more than \$347 million in supports, including \$216.1 million for electricity concessions, \$88.9 million to assist with council rates bills, \$40.6 million to assist with water and sewerage bills, and \$1.4 million in pensioner subsidies for travel on the Spirit of Tasmania.

The funding provided for just these four concessions is 13.7 per cent higher than last year, and the Budget funds many other concessions and discounts across government services.

The Budget also includes the state's half share of the Energy Bill Relief Fund. Our \$45 million in state funding is matched dollar for dollar by the Australian Government, providing \$90 million to fund rebates of \$250 per year for two years for up to 140 000 households and \$650 to small business customers this coming financial year.

We have included \$18.1 million in taxi fare concessions and subsidies for eligible persons with permanent disabilities or medical conditions that significantly restrict their personal mobility, further assisting these Tasmanians who need it most.

We are continuing both our School Lunch Program and Ticket to Play initiatives easing the pressures on working families.

### **Communities and culture**

The Government works closely with the community sector to improve the wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities.



The Budget provides \$2.4 million to Neighbourhood Houses across Tasmania, including \$222 000 in extended core funding for Phoenix Community House on King Island, and \$435 000 in extended core funding over three years for Kentish House.

The Budget also provides a \$2.1 million uplift in funding in 2023-24 for community sector organisations to help ease their own inflation pressures, and the Government is committed to a comprehensive review of CSO funding models to ensure long-term certainty, clear outcomes, and adaptable service provision.

The Government has a long-term aim of eliminating family and sexual violence, with this Budget allocating \$50 million over four years to deliver our third Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan, providing five years of funding certainty to our specialist family and sexual violence services.

We are also making targeted and considered investments into our cultural and creative industries including \$2.4 million over four years for arts and cultural production and services.

In addition, \$1 million is provided to Screen Tasmania over two years, with a significant benefit to our regional economy, and \$2 million is allocated to our beloved Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery for building restoration works.

The Budget also continues to deliver on our firm commitment to better outcomes for Tasmanian Aboriginal people with a further \$2 million toward Closing the Gap.

This is part of our \$5.3 million commitment to building the capacity of Aboriginal organisations and helping to address targets in key areas such as health, education, and housing.

In addition, the Budget provides \$200 000 for legislative reforms to enable the return of more land to Aboriginal people and develop stronger protections for Aboriginal cultural heritage, and \$500 000 for Aboriginal heritage projects, including wukalina Walk.

### **Community safety**

Mr Speaker,

The Tasmanian Liberal Government knows the importance of keeping our communities safe which is why we have such a strong track record of investment into our ever-vigilant police, fire and emergency services.

We are continuing to support Tasmania Police officers with \$38.6 million over four years to ensure that our increasing police numbers across the state are provided with the latest resources and contemporary supports, including \$4.3 million to provide more body-worn cameras and cloud reporting technology.

We are providing \$2.9 million over three years to bolster the management of the Sex Offender Register and a further \$300 000 to establish a Sex Offender Disclosure Program.

This provides additional police to specifically monitor registered sex offenders to ensure the safety of our community and our children.

The Budget provides \$3 million to continue our highly regarded Health and Wellbeing Program, together with \$19.5 million to support injured police, fire fighters and emergency services officers.

We are also investing in police infrastructure with a \$1.2 million expansion of our Upgrading Police Housing initiative and \$4.1 million in capacity upgrades at the Rokeby Police Academy.

We are building a new integrated Tasmania Fire and Emergency Service and to support our brave volunteer firefighters and State Emergency Service personnel we are investing \$10 million over the next two years to boost our capital investment in volunteer stations.

We are also embarking on financial reform to ensure that our fire and emergency services are properly funded through a fair, simple, and sustainable model.

We are also investing in community preparedness with an additional \$2.2 million provided for flood mitigation works in Kentish and Latrobe to support the ongoing response to floods.

The Government remains committed to keeping the community safe and rehabilitating inmates of contemporary correctional facilities with \$50 million allocated to deliver a new 52 bed facility at the Risdon Prison Complex.

The Budget also provides \$1.5 million for increased drug and alcohol intervention and therapeutic support for inmates and a further \$1 million to expand and boost the delivery of the Family Violence Offender Intervention program and violence prevention programs across the Tasmania Prison Service.

We are also ensuring all Tasmanians have access to an efficient, fair, and effective justice system with additional funding of \$46.5 million to deliver on our commitment for a new Burnie Court Complex in the city centre, bringing the total investment to \$86.5 million.

The Budget also provides \$350 000 to establish the new State Litigation Office enabling careful and considered management of civil cases arising from child sexual abuse.

We are also taking action to reduce backlogs in the criminal justice system, with \$1.2 million to fund Acting Judges, and we are investing ongoing funding of \$4.9 million per annum to support the delivery of Safe at Home, Tasmania's nationally recognised criminal justice response to family violence.

### **Commission of Inquiry**

Protecting the safety and wellbeing of Tasmania's children is among the highest priorities of the Tasmanian Government.

The Government is already taking action before it receives the recommendations from the Commission of Inquiry, with the final report due later this year.

It is expected to make wide-ranging recommendations on actions the Government should take in response to past abuses and to better protect our children, who are so very precious, into the future.

The Government is committed to implementing the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry and the Budget includes a \$30 million down payment to fund any urgent actions in 2023-24.

This funding will be administered by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, working closely with relevant agencies. Further allocations will be made when the final recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry have been made.

The Government is also committing a further \$70 million over the Forward Estimates for compensation and administration costs of the National Redress Scheme and civil claims for child sexual abuse.

We thank victim-survivors for sharing their experiences and their bravery in making a difference for others.

### **Business and industry support**

The Tasmanian Liberal Government recognises the massive contribution the business sector makes to our economy, delivering investment and jobs and providing a secure future for Tasmanian families.

Without businesses, we wouldn't be able to be here today, funding stronger public services.

The Budget provides \$750 000 over three years to deliver client-focused services to support our existing major industrial businesses, as well as those seeking to bring their business to Tasmania.

The Budget also allocates \$3.5 million over three years to support our Business Energy Efficiency Scheme for large electricity customers, making a meaningful difference to the way businesses run their operations and putting downward pressure on commercial electricity bills.

The Government is also a strong supporter of small business, and the Budget includes targeted funding for the sector with \$685 000 over the next two years for grants associated with the Small Business Growth Strategy 2026.

The Government firmly believes that Tasmania's new AFL team and the Macquarie Point Urban Renewal Precinct will provide a major boost to economic growth in Tasmania.

The Budget includes \$230 million of the Government's \$375 million commitment to deliver the Macquarie Point Urban Renewal Precinct. This landmark project will deliver a new \$715 million stadium to support our AFL licence, as part of a broader arts, entertainment, and sporting precinct.

The Budget also includes \$34.5 million for the establishment and initial operations of the new club, together with \$60 million towards a new AFL High Performance Training and Administration Centre to accommodate and support the new Tasmanian AFL and AFLW teams as they get ready to enter the national competition.

These projects will support thousands of jobs during construction and once complete will generate economic activity and stimulate private investment, building a more vibrant waterfront and an even stronger economic position for Tasmania.

This investment will complement our \$65 million investment in the \$130 million upgrade of Launceston's magnificent York Park, as part of our integrated package to finally realise our decades-long dream of our own AFL and AFLW teams, in our own colours, singing our own song.

## **Tourism and trade**

Mr Speaker,

Tasmania's visitor economy is one of our greatest success stories and despite the immense challenges of the pandemic, it is rebounding.

However as international travel also experiences a resurgence, we must continue to aggressively promote Tasmania as a must-see destination.

That's why we are extending Tourism Tasmania's funding for destination marketing, with a further \$6 million to continue promotion of our state in interstate and international markets.

The Budget also commits \$1.25 million to underpin the operation of our iconic and treasured West Coast Wilderness Railway, building on our \$1 million support package to support local operators while the railway undergoes a major work program over winter.

We know that the railway is a tourism magnet for the West Coast, which is why we are helping local operators to invest in their businesses over the winter, and encouraging visitors to go to the rugged, beautiful, and welcoming West.

We must continue to have the products and experiences to encourage visitors to travel to our regions and that's why this Budget also invests in the Boags Visitor Centre experience in Launceston and our world class wukalina Walk.

Tasmania has what the world wants, and in Tasmania we have world class skills and expertise.

Our export sector is booming and this Budget will invest \$5 million, in partnership with North West employer Elphinstone, to deliver a new \$25 million, world-class facility that will diversify export operations and provide more opportunities for global defence contracts, supporting jobs and economic activity.

The recently released Defence Strategic Review will provide opportunities for our local advanced manufacturing and defence sector and to support this the Budget commits \$2.75 million to help Tasmanian businesses compete and succeed in the national and international defence supply chains.

There's also \$780 000 over two years to support the Accelerating Trade Program to help more Tasmanian businesses secure trade opportunities, linking them to national and international trade events and missions.

## **Parks and environment**

Mr Speaker,

Our parks and reserves are part of Tasmania's identity. Our natural heritage is unmatched in the world.

We are continuing our investment into these icons with a massive \$163.7 million capital investment over four years to protect them and to let our people enjoy them even more.

This includes \$58.1 million for the Cradle Mountain Experience Master Plan and \$28.3 million towards our \$40 million investment in Tasmania's Next Iconic Walk at the majestic Tyndall Ranges.

We are also providing visitors with a safe and reliable experience in getting to some of our most beautiful natural assets with \$4 million over the next two years for critical road maintenance.

There is also an additional \$1.6 million to improve car parking and vehicle access at the Bruny Island lighthouse and a further \$900 000 to upgrade the jetty at Maria Island, building on our \$6.8 million commitment to revitalise the island's visitor experience.

The Budget also provides the beloved Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens with \$325 000 to undertake critical repair works to the heritage-listed Eardley-Wilmot wall and to replace ageing irrigation infrastructure.

The Government has committed further funding of \$2.1 million to the Circular Economy which will contribute to the delivery of organics waste processing, get our community ready for the statewide landfill levy and provide for regional and remote grants.

These initiatives will support our goal to reduce the volume of organic waste sent to land fill by 25 per cent by 2025 and 50 per cent by 2030.

The Budget also provides a \$3 million investment over two years to partner with industry to construct a new crumbed rubber plant, delivering a real and sustainable solution for the recycling and recovery of end-of-life tyres in Tasmania.

We are also committed to protecting our threatened species and the Budget commits \$1.3 million over the next two years to build on existing trials for a tracking program of the Orange-bellied Parrot to support new risk mitigation measures.

## **Agriculture and resources**

Mr Speaker,

The Government is continuing to invest in the competitiveness and innovation of our primary industries as we work towards our target of growing the value of Tasmanian agriculture to \$10 billion by 2050.

We are committing a further \$2 million over two years to the Agriculture Innovation Fund which builds on the success of our \$6 million already invested in Tasmania's agricultural research and development capability.

We will provide \$2.59 million for the Emergency Animal Disease Risk Fund to ensure we are prepared for, and can respond to, risks at our borders.

The Budget also provides an additional \$1.4 million over two years to extend the Weed Action Fund, which tackles serious weeds that impact on valuable agricultural land and the natural environment.

We will also invest \$600 000 over two years to fund a business case and detailed concept plan to modernise the state's Water Information Management System.

Our salmon industry and fisheries are a key part of our export economy and support thousands of jobs in regional communities around Tasmania.

Our new Tasmanian Salmon Industry Plan provides an enduring framework that articulates long-term priorities and supports businesses and the community.

We are investing \$850 000 over three years to implement key initiatives, working towards our vision for a sustainable industry, healthy ecosystems, prosperous communities, and contemporary governance.

The Budget also provides funding to continue initiatives to support sustainability and productivity of abalone stocks and to support the recovery of East Coast fisheries and habitats with \$2 million over two years to continue the Abalone Industry Reinvestment Fund.

As an island state, recreational fishing is a Tasmanian way of life so we are working to ensure the continued viability and sustainability of our marine fisheries, in particular Tasmania's most popular recreational fish, the sand flathead.

The Budget provides \$1 million over two years to support a flathead recovery program to rebuild stocks, undertake research and provide targeted fisher education programs in partnership with Tasmanian Association for Recreational Fishing.

Also, through the Digital Transformation Priority Expenditure Program, we are investing \$1 million for the Fisheries Digital Transition Project which will continue to reduce red tape for Tasmania's commercial wild-capture fisheries by transitioning to digital platforms.

### **Climate change and renewables**

Mr Speaker,

The Tasmanian Government is continuing to invest in our nation-leading renewable energy program to help prepare Tasmania for the future.

To help unlock the next wave of renewable energy development in Tasmania, the Budget invests \$3.75 million over two years into our Renewable Energy Plan, progressing the development of new renewable energy projects, the implementation of Renewable Energy Zones in the state, and the continued development of Project Marinus and our Battery of the Nation projects.

We will also continue to deliver on our Tasmanian Renewable Hydrogen Action Plan, working to establish Tasmania as a global leader in large scale green hydrogen production by 2030.

With \$900 000 over three years to progress the development of the Tasmanian Green Hydrogen Hub at Bell Bay, we will continue to work with hydrogen proponents and our government businesses to fully realise the potential in our comparative advantages in renewable energy and plentiful water supply.

### **Infrastructure**

Mr Speaker,

As we speak, the Government is building intergenerational infrastructure.

Not only are we catching up on the decades of underinvestment into our roads, bridges and rail but we are upgrading key access routes right around the state and improving road safety.

In all cases, we are building assets for our long-term future, from the long-awaited Bridgewater Bridge and the expansive upgrades of the Midland Highway, through to the staged and continuing improvements of the Bass Highway.

This Budget continues the Government's strong track record of investment in infrastructure, providing the building and civil construction sectors with a reliable pipeline of work that gives them the confidence to invest in their businesses, to employ and train Tasmanians.

We will invest almost \$5 billion in job-creating infrastructure across the next four years, including \$2.2 billion in new and upgraded roads and bridges across Tasmania.

The \$786 million Bridgewater Bridge is Tasmania's largest ever land transport project and we have achieved what previous governments couldn't or wouldn't; and the new Bridgewater Bridge is now well and truly under construction and will be open to traffic at the end of next year.

Over the next four years we will also complete our 10-year \$565 million Midland Highway Action Plan which will have delivered upgrades, new passing opportunities and safety treatments along the full stretch of highway between Launceston and Hobart.

We will also complete our \$350 million South East Traffic Solution, which will provide a continuous four lane highway between the Hobart Airport and Sorell.

We have already removed the traffic snarls at the airport and Midway Point, and completed a new bypass of Sorell for travellers to the Southern Beaches and the beautiful Tasman Peninsula.

Next up, we will duplicate the highway between the airport and the causeway and double both causeways.

We are continuing to invest in roads in the North and North West with \$280 million of ongoing improvements to the Bass Highway, together with \$213 million in state funding for upgrades to the East and West Tamar highways, the Launceston and Tamar Traffic Vision and our Northern Region upgrades program.

The Government is also delivering major upgrades to support a contemporary, efficient and attractive public transport system with \$20.8 million in new funding for the Targeting Congestion Package to alleviate urban congestion and encouraging more Tasmanians onto public transport.

We will activate the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor, introducing Rapid Transit Buses as part of a wider network to move people around the city quickly and comfortably. Our \$13.5 million in state funding matches the Australian Government's commitment to the Hobart Congestion Package as part of the \$99.7 million co-funded Urban Congestion Fund roads program.

We will continue our planning and design work, and the early works to ready the corridor for construction.

## **Conclusion**

Mr Speaker,

This is a very carefully considered and constructed Budget which makes targeted investments in the key services and infrastructure that Tasmanians need and deserve.

It is a Budget that builds on our strong track record of carefully managing taxpayers' money, prudent financial management, providing the funding necessary for initiatives in identified areas of need while taking sensible decisions to rebuild the state's fiscal buffers.

We are providing significant cost of living relief to Tasmanians in need at levels never before seen, while making record investments into contemporary health, education and other essential services.

And we're proud to be doing so.

I want to say a particular thank you to those people who make this state the incredible place that it is.

Thank you to the more than 570 000 people who now proudly call Tasmania home; who give their best to make this place so welcoming, so vibrant and so optimistic for the future; who are committed to their families and the precious children of our state.

Thank you to the business community, for creating opportunities for your employees, for paying the taxes that are used by Government for stronger public services and creating employment for our people.

We are taking action to keep our communities safe, deliberately investing in our police and emergency services, providing fair access to justice and preparing ourselves to be able to respond to the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry.

We are continuing our track record of providing a competitive and investment friendly business environment, supporting our industries to grow, invest and employ more Tasmanians.

Through this Budget, we are committed to making Tasmania strong, safe and secure and we are charting a safe path through the economic uncertainties we face.

This is a time when the state needs experience at the helm.

Without a doubt, the Rockliff Liberal Government is building Tasmania's future.

The Plan is working for our economy and our people.

This Budget strives to keep that momentum.

Mr Speaker,

I commend the Bill to the House.