

*****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*****

State of the State Address, 2009

Mr Speaker,

Today is a day of action for Tasmania.

The program I outline today will deliver on-the-ground action across Tasmania.

Today's State of the State address outlines what is in effect an ongoing stimulus package.

The State Government will use the underlying strengths of our economy and our budget position to invest now for Tasmania's future.

ECONOMY

Mr Speaker

In 2009, there is no greater challenge than the Global Financial Crisis.

These are challenging financial times, and I make no bones about that.

But these are not times to engage in a pessimism that is not supported by the facts.

We must maintain a balanced view.

There are some very real reasons for optimism about Tasmania's financial and economic future.

Respected economists agree that Tasmania is better positioned than other States in Australia to remain resilient in the coming year, and rebound strongly when the recovery begins.

The Tasmanian economy in 2009 is more diverse and more soundly based than it was when it suffered through the 1990s.

We have built up over the last decade the strongest Government finances in Tasmanian history.

We have produced a decade of surplus budgets.

When Labor came to office in 1998, the State was in debt to the tune of \$1.6 billion dollars.

The hung Parliament of 1996-98 left an economic legacy of record debt levels, unemployment levels of 11%, and a dire fiscal situation.

Nurses had been sacked, public hospitals had been sold, and schools had been run into the ground.

The Labor Government came in and turned that around.

It paid off the debt, it re-hired the nurses, it invested in hospitals and schools and it halved the unemployment rate.

Labor's record as an economic manager shows we have the ability to make the sound judgements to keep Tasmania moving forwards.

Mr Speaker, in 2009, this new Government in Government will build on that legacy by taking Tasmania forward again.

As one man from Burnie said to me when I was up there recently, it's time to get the hay out of the barn.

We have the long term plans to build economic capacity by investing in infrastructure, innovation and skills, and we have the short term plans to support economic growth right now.

We are investing in local infrastructure projects right around Tasmania – projects that are fast-moving and can get government funds into the pockets of local businesses and their employees within six months.

In the past month, I have announced projects to a combined value of over \$30 million dollars, including Learning Information Network Centres for Scottsdale and Queenstown, massive irrigation projects, and 18 smaller local projects around the State.

Each of those projects is making a difference in local communities.

Projects like underground powerlines in Oatlands and Stanley, an all abilities playspace in Devonport, \$1 million for the new Makers Workshop in Burnie, and the redevelopment of the Swansea Heritage Museum.

These smaller local projects are all a million dollars or less, but will have enormous flow on impacts in keeping Tasmanians in jobs.

In these economic times, 100 projects of \$1 million dollars will do more for local communities than a single \$100 million project.

In the coming months, we will keep investing in towns and communities across Tasmania to keep Tasmanians in jobs.

Mr Speaker,

We are also making the larger investments that can stimulate the economy now and also create opportunities for the future – in energy, in water, in built infrastructure and in transport links.

Labor governments have delivered for a century in making the energy decisions to power this State forwards.

A Labor government founded the Hydro, Labor governments invested in massive hydro electricity schemes, and Labor governments delivered Basslink and natural gas to Tasmania.

And Mr Speaker, last year it was this Labor Government that moved decisively to purchase the Tamar Valley Power Station for \$100 million so that it could be completed to meet Tasmania's electricity needs.

As the global financial crisis was just beginning to unfold, we acted to provide for Tasmania's future by investing in a vital piece of electricity infrastructure, which will underpin energy security for the people of Tasmania.

We are taking equally bold action to meet the water needs of this State.

The Government is supporting irrigation infrastructure projects around Tasmania with a combined worth of \$400 million.

This Government has a strong record of delivering on water.

We delivered the Meander Dam, a \$37.8 million project that is having a huge impact for farmers and communities.

We are now extending the reach of the Meander Dam to help more Tasmanian farmers.

On 10 February I turned the first sod on the Quamby irrigation pipeline, the first of four projects with a combined value of \$17 million that will deliver water from the Meander Dam to help communities across the region.

A few weeks ago, we announced an interim solution to provide much needed extra water to the Coal River Valley where our innovative agri-businesses are supplying supermarkets around Australia with high quality natural Tasmanian produce.

Tasmanians on the land have endured one of the toughest and longest droughts on record, and by investing strategically in irrigation infrastructure, we can transform Tasmanian agriculture.

These projects are also stimulating the economy by getting money out the door now, supporting the order books of businesses employing Tasmanians to lay the pipes and deliver the projects.

The way that Tasmania can fight the effects of this Global Financial Crisis is to keep investing now – and that is what we are doing.

We are equally investing in the transport infrastructure that underpins growth.

Work will start on the \$240 million combined Brighton Transport Hub and Bypass by May this year with the Kingston Bypass to commence by December.

With commitments to date from the federal government of over \$500m for transport projects and an expanded state government commitment, Tasmania will be well placed to meet future challenges and growth in our economy.

Mr Speaker,

When the Global Financial Crisis emerged as the dominant issue in world finance last year, I came into the Parliament and made a Ministerial Statement announcing an immediate package of measures to combat the emerging problem.

One of those was the establishment of the Tasmanian Industry Support Scheme, a \$100 million fund to assist any sound Tasmanian businesses who were having trouble accessing credit because of the credit squeeze.

That action was taken as an immediate response to ensure business confidence was maintained.

In light of the rapidly evolving global circumstances and the impacts on business, the Government is revising the guidelines for this scheme.

The focus of the scheme extension will be on supporting businesses to maintain employment during temporary downturns in business activity, in particular businesses suffering immediate, short term cash flow difficulties.

Businesses having difficulty accessing credit will continue to remain eligible under the scheme.

As with the current program, the scheme extension is not about propping up unsound businesses.

Applicants will need to demonstrate that their businesses have ongoing viability and that their business difficulties are the result of changed economic conditions.

I can announce today that the Government will also expand support for our farmers by reactivating the provision of loans under the Farm Water Development Act 1985.

Farmers will be able to apply for loans to support the construction of on-farm storage and the purchase and establishment of irrigation infrastructure.

This is about helping to position Tasmanian farmers to make the most possible use out of the massive irrigation projects the government is implementing.

All loan proposals will continue to be independently assessed by the Tasmanian Development Board and both the TISS extension and the new Farm Water Development loans will be funded from within the \$100 million originally announced for TISS.

Mr Speaker,

I am equally determined that we will come through these challenging financial times without sacrificing the gains we have made in essential services that all Tasmanian families rely on.

That is why I recommit today that we will quarantine spending on schools, hospitals, frontline police, and infrastructure projects from any budget cuts imposed in the 2009/10 State Budget.

We have come too far in literacy and numeracy levels; too far in better elective surgery rates; too far in building a safer and kinder community – to endanger those gains by cutting spending now.

EDUCATION & SKILLS

Mr Speaker,

This new Government's educational priority is to lift Tasmania's educational outcomes from below the Australian average to the top of the nation within ten years.

And we have already made progress.

The 2008 national literacy and numeracy test results show that our investment in the early years is beginning to show results.

More than 97 per cent of Year 3 students achieved at or above the national minimum standard in writing, ranking Tasmania as second in Australia.

Overall, across all age groups, Tasmania was ranked fourth in reading and numeracy and fifth in writing, grammar and punctuation.

These results show that our goal of taking Tasmania to the top of the nation over the coming decade is achievable.

The reform of our post year 10 educational institutions is also already bearing fruit.

Our enrolments have grown considerably and have exceeded expectations, and I will be releasing the final enrolment figures as soon as they become available.

Students are voting with their feet to take advantage of what the Academy, the Polytechnic and the Skills Institute can do for their future.

Mr Speaker,

My 10 year vision for skills is that we will have the best trained workforce with the highest levels of vocational qualification in the nation, and the Tasmanian Skills Strategy that I released last year maps out just how we can get there.

To date, the Tasmanian Skills Institute has 7480 apprentices and trainees enrolled in qualifications under contracts of training in partnership with their employers.

This year we will commence the relaxation of the quarantines that currently hold back competition in the training sector.

Historically, TAFE Tasmania has essentially had a monopoly as the only publicly funded provider of training for many trades, including automotive, metal trades, agriculture, and building and construction.

I can announce today that beginning in early 2010, we will sequentially lift those quarantines, to allow other Registered Training Organisations to compete for apprentices.

This will grow our skills sector, both in the number of people being trained and in the quality of Registered Training Organisations.

I have every confidence that the Tasmanian Skills Institute will continue to compete very effectively in the training market and that competition will stimulate the sector.

HEALTH

Mr Speaker,

Just as we are making progress in Education and Skills, so too are we making progress in Health.

Tasmania's Health Plan is driving the investment of almost \$1 billion every year in better health care for Tasmanians.

We now provide more than 1 million treatments and services to Tasmanians needing care each year.

Under Tasmania's Health Plan an extra 2,000 elective operations were performed last year, a 15% increase in elective surgery throughput.

There is much still to do, and we will continue working every day to bring better health services to the people of Tasmania.

Mr Speaker,

In Hobart the outstanding infrastructure challenge in health revolves around the Royal Hobart Hospital.

The Government will not be rushed into making a decision on a project with such important implications for our children's future.

We are considering all the options and will thoroughly assess expert advice before making a final determination.

The decision we will make in coming months will be financially responsible and accurately costed.

It will have at its heart the best interests of patients and staff.

It will reflect a commitment to listening to doctors when they tell us what facilities they need, and a commitment to listening to the community about what services they want.

And we have a responsibility in governing for all Tasmanians to ensure that we don't devote the entire Hospital Capital Fund to the new Royal, because we also need to keep investing in hospital services in the north and the north-west.

We will work closely with the experts in the medical community to look at options that are both affordable and effective in light of the global financial crisis.

INNOVATION

Mr Speaker

Innovation is more than a word or a catch-phrase – it is the embrace of a way of doing things.

For most of the 20th century, Tasmania's economic development was underpinned and driven by a far-sighted investment in hydro electricity.

That supply of constant and low-cost electricity allowed us to develop the Tasmanian manufacturing and industrial base that has helped to sustain our economy for the last hundred years.

In 2009, we stand ready to adopt a series of new big ideas – new strategies that can underpin the continued growth of the Tasmanian economy for decades to come.

We have commissioned the Australian Innovation Research Centre to help us identify those ideas through the creation of the Tasmanian Innovation Strategy.

This work, being led by Professor Jonathon West, has identified some potential areas in which Tasmania can make use of its natural advantages to lead the world.

One of those ideas revolves around the creation of a Statewide water economy to make Tasmania a foodbowl for Australia.

Tasmania has the potential to significantly contribute to Australia's food security for decades to come.

This is about re-thinking the whole concept of land use in this State.

This is a vision of what we can become within the next decade.

With the vigorous pursuit of this policy, we will see dry plains of slowly degrading soils turn into acre after acre of Australia's most innovative and productive farm lands.

That is real and it's achievable and this Government will make it happen right across Tasmania.

As the immense challenges now facing the Murray Darling Basin begin to affect what is currently Australia's strongest food production area, Tasmania has the capacity and the opportunity to step in.

This State has one of the highest rainfalls in the country, per square metre of territory, and we need to harness that for our future – and that is what we are doing right across the State.

The Government is soon to announce the preferred design for the Midland Water Scheme and construction of the South Esk Pipeline section of the scheme will commence this year.

Solutions for the Ouse/Shannon/Clyde water catchment will be available in late March, with the commitment that construction on a new irrigation scheme will commence in early 2010.

In the North West, the Sassafras/Wesley Vale pipeline will commence construction in October this year.

Construction for the Whitemore irrigation scheme will commence in September 2009.

Preparatory work is also underway on a new scheme that will service the needs of the lower Jordan River Valley and link that scheme to the Coal River Valley and beyond to the fertile plains around Sorell that were so productive in the early years of Tasmanian settlement.

In coming years, over 200,000 extra hectares will be under irrigation when these projects are complete.

The transformation of Tasmania's agri-business will have begun.

This is an investment, not just in water and crops – but in the communities that they support.

This is about inspiring the next generation of young farmers who will take this water and create wealth – through innovation, new ideas and new products.

That is why we will partner with the University of Tasmania to create a top flight farm management course.

With our innovative agriculture sector, and our world-wide reputation for fine food, Tasmania is the natural place to establish a university course that can harness these natural advantages.

This is about keeping the heart in places like Campbell Town, Ross, Tunbridge, Oatlands, Parattah and Mount Seymour, by supporting a new generation of farmers.

This is about preserving the fabric of our regional way of life in Sassafras, Wesley Vale, Bracknell, Westbury, Bothwell, Scottsdale, Winneleah, Cranbrook, Ringarooma, Hamilton, Ouse, Kempton and more.

When you build a local economy, you underpin local communities – the schools, businesses and town halls that will nurture our next generation on the land.

With an investment of \$400 million in irrigation, delivering up to 250,000 mega litres of water per year, to water over 200,000 extra hectares under irrigation, to deliver an extra \$200 million in produce at the farm gate – this will transform Tasmania.

Mr Speaker,

To achieve innovation, we will invest not only in infrastructure, but in people, in giving Tasmanians the skills to match our vision.

We need our vision to stretch from the crop in the field, past the farm gate and through to quality food on restaurant tables.

That is why we will create Australia's leading institute for training high end chefs.

Dr. James Cretan will chair a working party to establish the institute this year, with special advice coming from Tetsuya Wakuda.

The Tasmanian Culinary School of Excellence will take Tasmanian cuisine to the world.

Mr Speaker, from extra water supply, to quality crops in the ground, to innovative farm management practices, to the trucks that leave the farm gate, to the frying pans of the likes of Tetsuya Wakuda, Tasmanian agri-business will lead an economic recovery in this State and entrench it for the future.

We can create in Tasmania a continuum of food excellence that runs from the seedling in the paddock right through to the restaurant menu.

To demonstrate the possibilities, Brand Tasmania will run a culinary event in May of this year called 'Savour Tasmania'.

It will bring three world class chefs to Tasmania who will use Tasmanian produce to create meals in Tasmanian restaurants over four evenings.

Savour Tasmania will also include a wine show and public master-classes.

Mr Speaker,

The Government's partnership with the University of Tasmania is wide-reaching.

We've already worked together to establish the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research (TIAR) and the Tasmanian Aquaculture and Fisheries Institute (TAFI).

They are natural areas for collaboration, and today I can announce that we will extend that partnership further through the establishment of the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies.

Tasmania is a natural window for Antarctic Science, and this new institute will build on those opportunities.

PLANNING REFORMS

Mr Speaker,

I believe that a planning system should be an enabler of good, sustainable developments – not a series of roadblocks and hurdles and hoops that do nothing but create frustration and confusion.

The Government has now completed its review of Tasmania's Planning System and we will be bringing legislation to the Parliament as a matter of urgency to make a more responsive planning system a reality.

The most important structural change is that the Resource Planning and Development Commission and the staff of the Land Use Planning Branch from the Department of Justice will be amalgamated to form a new Tasmanian Planning Commission.

The current powers of the RPDC will be in no way diminished, and will simply transfer across to the new body.

The new Tasmanian Planning Commission will exercise the current statutory responsibilities of the RPDC with the same high degree of legislative independence that the RPDC currently enjoys.

Mr Speaker,

To support region-wide vision and investment in Tasmania, we will introduce a new category of development to be known as a Project of Regional Significance.

A Project of Regional Significance will be required to meet specific legislative criteria but will essentially reflect those more substantial proposals that have significant regional impacts and require 'expert assessment' which may be beyond the capacity of an individual Council.

A Project of Regional Significance will be able to be 'called-in' by the Planning Minister and be assessed by an independent panel.

But I want to make sure that whatever changes are made to planning laws in this State, that members of the public are not excluded from the process.

That is why public consultation will be a key part of the assessment process for Projects of Regional Significance.

This is the most significant planning reform agenda since the planning legislation was introduced in the early 1990's and I expect to be consulting with stakeholders on a draft Bill within weeks.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr Speaker,

Tasmania's future will be closely tied to our ability as a State to stay connected to a fast-paced world.

Telecommunications infrastructure will be to the 21st Century what the dams, poles and wires of the Hydro were to the 20th.

It will provide the essential connection for our knowledge industries that rely on modern telecommunications to take their products and their ideas to the world.

In November last year we announced the agreement to light up the fibre optic cable across Bass Strait.

Tasmanian history will come to judge the lighting up of the cable as a defining point for this State's future.

Aurora and Basslink are now working through the final details to activate the cable within the next few months, when Tasmanian consumers and ISPs will begin to see the significant price competition we have all been waiting for.

Already Aurora has signed up major customers including local ISPs, carriers and Government entities to use the on-island optic fibre and in the next few months a major national ISP will enable 12 exchanges across Tasmania for high speed broadband services.

Mr Speaker,

I am determined that within the next ten years, Tasmania will be the most connected community in Australia.

Through our investment in telecommunications infrastructure we will attract new information based industries to Tasmania and become a test bed for cutting edge technologies.

In 2009, we will begin the process of linking schools and hospitals to high speed telecommunication services.

We will begin to wi fi all major CBDs and tourist towns to take competitive telecommunications to every corner of this State.

The Government will shortly commence a trial of this technology in Sullivans Cove with the Wireless Waterfront project, and there is much more still to come.

This is about more than people being able to access information wherever they are – this is about connecting people as a community, and driving the growth of the Tasmanian economy.

A Statewide, world-class telecommunications system will be the greatest driver of social and economic change in this State since the era of hydro-industrialisation.

LOW EMISSIONS INTELLIGENT TRANSPORT

Mr Speaker,

It is clear that over the course of the next two decades, the combination of the increasing impacts of climate change and rising fuel costs will increase the need for low emission, intelligent transport options.

Our ten year vision for commuter/passenger transport is to provide a mixture of road, rail, cycleways and walkways - options that keep Tasmanians moving while lowering our emissions.

Last year, we held a fuel summit in Launceston, and it produced many key ideas that we are now investing in for the future.

A key focus was on an improvement to cycleway infrastructure to give people a greater option to use their bike for transport rather than only for recreation.

We committed \$4 million in the 2008/09 budget to match dollar for dollar investments that local councils make at a regional level in cycleways.

Those projects are now well underway.

Five projects, with a combined value of over \$800,000, are underway as part of the Hobart Arterial Bike Network – with the State Government matching council funding.

These projects include on road cycleways in Argyle and Campbell Streets, the Cadbury link cycleway in Claremont, the Clarence Foreshore Trail at Bellerive Bluff, the Foreshore Trail at Jetty Road in the Brighton municipality, and planning for a Bonnet Hill Cycleway.

Earlier this year, I announced over \$500,000 for work to make the Tasman Bridge more cycle friendly for people cycling to work in Hobart.

I know that work is underway on regional cycle initiatives in Launceston and on the north-west coast, and the State Government will provide dollar for dollar funding for those initiatives when they are ready to go.

I am also determined to invest in public transport in a modern way.

It is time to move into a new era of public transport – a smarter era that sees all Tasmanians as potential customers.

Since June 2008 more than 170 new and modern school buses have been purchased across the State.

Through Metro Tasmania, the Government has introduced 12 clean, energy efficient Euro 5 buses, with another 6 on order, with 5 new state of the art hybrid, diesel electric buses to be introduced in the future.

I also announce today that we will convert the remainder of Metro Tasmania's existing bus fleet to bio-diesel during the next 12 months.

A smart ticketing system will be expanded to give passengers easy options for ticket purchase on-line and instant access to accurate information via active electronic sign boards at major bus interchanges and by mobile phone.

This year, bus priority measures will be developed along the Brooker Highway, and the Southern Outlet bus lane will be further extended along Macquarie Street – and we'll examine options for other priority routes.

Park and Ride facilities will be developed in Glenorchy and Kingston in 2009, with other areas to follow.

Modern, efficient, innovative transport solutions are the way of the future for Tasmania.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

Mr Speaker,

In my Social Policy Blueprint speech delivered to the TASCOS Breakfast last October, I said that addressing transport was key to Tasmania becoming more socially inclusive.

We need, wherever possible, to empower communities to meet their own transport needs.

During the recent consultations for the Social Inclusion Strategy, many communities throughout Tasmania have nominated a lack of local transport options as a major barrier to accessing opportunities to employment, training and social and community networks.

People told us that they want community driven, local transport services to meet local needs.

We have listened to that feedback, and today I can announce that in 2009 we will establish the Tasmanian Community Transport Trust.

Through this trust, every Tasmanian community will be able to apply for vehicles – buses, vans, cars and others - by establishing their ongoing capacity to support their management and use in the community.

Reliable and available community transport will support mums and dads who can't get to the shops, elderly people stuck in their homes, and remote students who need transport to reach the educational opportunities available in our larger centres.

The work of the Trust will complement the work of the Health Department's Patient Transport Review, and DHHS and the Social Inclusion Unit in my Department will work together to make sure there is no duplication of services.

We will work with communities in coming months to quantify what the need for this scheme will be, so that we can allocate significant funding in the 2009/10 State Budget.

This is what I mean when I talk about connected communities.

Mr Speaker,

The Community Transport Trust is only one component of our vision to ensure that all Tasmanians can connect to Government services, where they need them, in their communities.

We need to imbed Government services as a part of community life.

That is why we have committed to building five new Learning Information Network Centres (or LINC) around Tasmania, and up to 30 Child and Family Centres.

LINC) are one stop shops for government services.

For example, in the Huonville LINC you will find the Library with Online Access Centre, Centrelink, Service Tasmania, Business Enterprise Centre and the Magistrates Court under the one roof.

Training providers can use LINC) as their base to deliver education and training programs. LINC) will also provide training and meeting rooms at an affordable cost for community organisations and training providers.

I have already announced that the first three of our five new LINC centres will be built in Scottsdale, Bridgewater and Queenstown.

I am pleased to announce today that the locations for the remaining two LINC centres will be in Sorell and George Town.

The educational opportunities provided by the LINC centres will be complemented by the services to be provided at our Child and Family Centres.

Child and Family Centres will be a one-stop shop for families, bringing together all of those services that make the most difference in the early years of a child's life.

These centres will provide parenting programmes, early learning support, child and family health services, early identification of children with special needs, and access to adult education and training.

They epitomise what connected-up government service is all about.

We have committed to building up to 30 of these over four years – and 8 of those will be under construction this year.

I am pleased to announce today that the first seven centres will be located at Clarendon Vale, Ravenswood, Chigwell, George Town, East Devonport, Beaconsfield, and Queenstown.

The Tasmanian Aboriginal Community has asked repeatedly for a dedicated centre at Risdon Cove to support the needs of Aboriginal children, and I can announce today that the 8th Child and Family Centre will be built at Risdon Cove to provide that support.

I anticipate being able to make a further announcement with the Deputy Prime Minister in the very near future about two further locations for Federally funded Child and Family Centres.

Mr Speaker,

We are applying these same principles of connected government service to our health sector.

It is clear that Government - to meet the needs of our ageing population into the future - will have to adopt new ways of delivering health services.

Tasmania's Health Plan is ushering in a new future, with the patient at the centre of everything we do.

This includes the introduction of Integrated Care Centres, breaking down the old lines of demarcation between hospitals and primary care.

We are well on the way to delivering ICCs at Launceston and Clarence which will link hospitals with other parts of the health system, providing true integration of services and a better experience for patients.

Mr Speaker,

Public Housing is a vital service that Government provides to our community.

Over the past two years, the Government has undertaken important planning and has set aside significant funds to provide more housing for Tasmanians most in need.

In 2009, our focus in public housing, aided by the Commonwealth, will be on getting keys into locks and on delivering houses for families.

This year will see a total of 167 new houses for Tasmanians in need.

In October last year we announced that we were investing in 50 Quickbuild homes, and I'm pleased to report today that we will have every one of those homes ready to go in mid 2009, with 10 more to come on line in the second half of this calendar year.

The Social Housing National Partnership will deliver 21 homes, and Tasmania's share of the National Rental Affordability scheme a further 66.

Twenty new houses will also be built under the HomeShare program.

And by June 2010, the State Government will build a further 188 housing units, targeted specifically at people and families who are currently homeless.

Mr Speaker, 2009-10 will see keys turn in locks to provide public housing to those Tasmanians most in need.

Mr Speaker,

Providing housing for people is not the only social need we intend to meet.

During the course of the last year, we have made important gains in our child protection system, which has seen our unallocated lists be reduced significantly.

The development of regional, one-point-of-access services and strengthened Family Support Services will improve that still further by supporting families so that fewer children need the child protection system.

We are committed to continuing our children and family services reforms so that an extra 3,400 children and families across Tasmania can receive the support and assistance they need more quickly than previously.

The reform of our disability services system will also continue, providing an additional 1,000 people with disabilities with the support and care that they need.

Mr Speaker,

We need to support the most disadvantaged in our community – the socially excluded – at every opportunity.

As the Tasmanian economy is challenged by the impact of a global financial downturn, so too will be the most disadvantaged in our community.

The Emergency Relief Fund is a pool of money made available each year by the Federal Government to support the agencies and non government organisations that reach out a helping hand to others.

Approximately 750 community organisations, operating 1300 outlets receive funding, including Anglicare, the Salvation Army, the Hobart City Mission, St Vincent de Paul, and Colony 47.

I want to make sure that the Tasmanian Government is doing everything it can to support existing networks in helping Tasmanians.

I announce today that Tasmania will commit \$1 mill to the Emergency Relief Fund in 2009/10, to make sure that service organisations have the resources they need to support all Tasmanians, through the challenging times ahead.

TOURISM

Mr Speaker,

Over the past decade, Tasmania has become one of Australia's premier tourism destinations.

To continue our growth as a tourism destination, we need to keep adding to the breadth of our attractions, and in an authentically Tasmanian way.

It is estimated that over 30% of the nation's pre 1850's buildings exist in Tasmania, and there is great potential for our unique built-heritage to play an even bigger role in developing regional tourism.

That opens up enormous tourism opportunities.

For example, the town of Oatlands has the largest collection of colonial sandstone buildings in a village environment in Australia.

It has a convict-built gaol and the oldest Supreme courthouse in the country.

Callington Mill is the third oldest windmill in Australia and the State Government has committed \$1.2 million towards its restoration into a working flour mill.

I can announce today that will invest further in 2009 to build Oatlands into a new heritage destination equal in excellence to Richmond and Port Arthur, beginning with \$500,000 for the restoration of the Oatlands Penitentiary Building.

That will bring the total Government investment in Oatlands in the last two years alone to nearly \$2 million, with more to come.

Mr Speaker,

Another of Tasmania's tourism attractions that I believe we can make more of is our network of heritage railways.

Tasmanian Visitor Survey results show that just over 53,000 interstate and international visitors have a heritage rail experience in Tasmania during their visit.

I recently announced more than \$180,000 to support the Don River Railway to upgrade and refurbish their rolling stock and steam locomotives.

Many of our small railways are run by preservation societies, supported by a dedicated and passionate team of volunteers and enthusiasts.

We have the opportunity here to harness that passion and create a world-class network of rail experiences across Tasmania.

To do that we will need to help existing operators face issues including access to mainlines, public liability insurance and better marketing opportunities.

I announce today that the Government will commission the preparation of a four year strategic plan for rail tourism in this State, to resolve those issues for the long term.

Heritage railways are not a part of the problem for rail in this State - rather they can be a part of the solution.

Mr Speaker,

I am equally determined that we will continue to build our cultural tourism attractions.

The recent success of the inaugural MONA FOMA festival illustrates the enormous potential we have here for creative art of the highest quality.

We have an enormous reservoir of creative talent in Tasmania, and that is why I have committed to the creation of a Tasmanian Festival of Ideas to be held here in mid-2010.

The Festival of Ideas will be a sister-festival for Ten Days on the Island, with both to be held biennially in alternate years.

I want to send a categorical message to the rest of the world that Tasmania is a society open to the best minds on earth and dedicated to the emergence of the new ideas that will characterise the future.

I want to attract speakers of not just national but international standing.

People of ideas - of the standing of Al Gore, Richard Florida, Malcolm Gladwell or Thomas Freedman.

I want the adventurous minds of the 21st Century world to come to Tasmania to embrace the Tasmanian Festival of Ideas.

But I also want to engage the great minds we have right here in this State.

There will be workshops, debates, forums, and other more innovative ways of getting local Tasmanians immersed in a world of ideas, passionate debate and informed crystal-ball gazing.

The Festival of Ideas is a new idea for presenting big ideas.

The Festival will operate on the same very successful model that Ten Days on the Island runs on, with an independent board, to be chaired by Professor Jonathon West from the Australian Innovation Research Centre.

Mr Speaker,

Ten Days on the Island and the Tasmanian Festival of ideas will be complemented by our four seasons of smaller festivals right around the State.

Tasmania is home to the Sydney Hobart Yacht Race, the Wooden Boat Festival, the Falls Festival, the Cygnet Folk Festival, Festivale, the bikes and spikes Christmas carnivals, Burnie Shines, the mid-winter festival, the Taste of Tasmania, Targa Tasmania, AFL Football, international cricket – I could go on.

We have a critical mass of quality, locally based, community inclusive sport, arts and culture that will draw locals and tourists alike more fully into the life of Tasmania in the years ahead.

We will work with Tourism Tasmania in 2009 to develop a fresh marketing strategy for the four seasons of festivals that Tasmania has on offer.

Mr Speaker,

One of the central points of cultural attraction in its own right is the iconic Hobart Waterfront.

I am committed to making sure that Sullivans Cove remains an area with a human face – a connection point for Tasmanians.

Whatever happens on the Hobart waterfront, it must include public space, take account of public amenity, be focussed on public utility and showcase public art.

Over the next 12 months there will be substantial action in relation to the waterfront.

The Parliament Square project is well progressed and final design options will be available for public viewing in April this year.

The community consultation process for PW1 was announced just prior to Christmas and the design options will be finalised in the next few months.

We will see construction commence on both of these projects in early 2010.

I have recently announced the commencement of the consultation process for Franklin Wharf and we will be resuming the EOI process for Macquarie No 1 in the next couple of months, starting with a public consultation phase.

Mr Speaker, a carefully developed Sullivans Cove will continue to be Tasmania's meeting place and window to the world for generations to come.

CELEBRATING TASMANIA

Mr Speaker,

I have visited every corner of Tasmania as Premier over the last few months, and the abiding sentiment that I hear everywhere is that people are proud to be Tasmanian.

We saw it with our celebration last year of the arrival of the 500,000th Tasmanian.

It's a sentiment that I want to see continued through an annual celebration of our State, and especially the people – the volunteers – who give so much of their time to make Tasmania what it is.

I announce today that this year we will institute Celebrate Tasmania Day, and dedicate it to volunteerism in our State.

This is not about the creation of a public holiday, but rather a chance to celebrate what Tasmania means to all of us each day of the year.

That is why Celebrate Tasmania Day will be held on a Sunday in November each year.

It will be an annual event to celebrate at a community level who we are and where we come from.

We will provide APEX, Rotary and Lions clubs in Tasmania with a small grant to create events in local streets and parks across our State.

Community organisations like APEX, Rotary and Lions clubs give so much to our State all year round.

They contribute their time and energy in an effort to improve the lives of their neighbours and their communities, and they are the natural choice to lead a day on which to celebrate all that we enjoy in Tasmania.

Whether it's having a neighbourhood BBQ, or a sports day or a spud throwing competition – I want every town and community, every street and every family to have the opportunity to engage in a relaxing day of community connection.

Mr Speaker,

In addition to Celebrate Tasmania Day, we will keep supporting volunteerism in Tasmania all year round.

I want to make sure that our volunteers are getting the same support they are giving us.

I want to make sure that we can encourage the next generation of volunteers to get involved in their local communities and give a little of their time for the greater good.

That is why I can announce today that we will provide recurrent funding of \$260,000 in the 2009/10 Budget to Volunteering Tasmania to coordinate and reinvigorate volunteering across the State.

We will also support those volunteers who are caring for our environment.

I am pleased today to announce that in 2009 the Tasmanian Government will partner with Conservation Volunteers Australia on a 'Tasmanian Islands' project, to undertake restorative and maintenance work on a range of small Tasmanian islands.

The islands to be considered for work include Tasman Island, Maatsayker Island, Breaksea Island, Bonnet Island, Hunter Island, Three Hummock Island and Waterhouse Island.

Mr Speaker,

In addition to supporting volunteers, I am equally determined to take away the barriers that can hinder the work of volunteer organisations.

I am aware that the issue of public liability insurance has deterred community groups from using Education Department owned facilities.

Some communities are missing out on making the most possible use out of our vital public infrastructure and all the health and social benefits that go with such use.

There is no doubt that if school facilities were made more accessible after school and on weekends, thousands of Tasmanians who currently don't participate in sport and recreational activities would have a new venue with which to engage.

I am pleased to announce today that from 1 July this year the State Government will fund, on a trial basis for two years, a blanket-cover third party insurance policy that will insure all community bodies and groups using Education Department facilities.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr Speaker,

The Tasmanian Government is committed to addressing the challenge of climate change – and last year we legislated to reduce Tasmania’s emissions by 60% by 2050.

In 2008, I released the Tasmanian Framework for Action on climate change and significant progress had been made on implementing initiatives from the framework.

Late last year I signed an historic partnership with Local Government on climate change, making Tasmania the first state in Australia to work with all of its councils to audit their carbon emissions.

In the coming weeks I will be announcing recipients of the first funding round of the Government’s climate change community grants program, ClimateConnect.

Mr Speaker,

Members would be aware that the Australian Government has been working towards the introduction of a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and an expanded Mandatory Renewable Energy Target scheme.

While there will undoubtedly be some challenges as these schemes are implemented, so too are there opportunities, and no jurisdiction is better placed than Tasmania to take advantage of these opportunities.

We have an established expertise in renewable energies and advantages in natural resources such as water, wind and geothermal energy.

We need to keep building on this Government's proud record of investment in energy by examining new options, including bio-energy, bio-fuels and further strategic roll outs of the gas network.

We need to harness the immense opportunities that the MRETs scheme will provide for this State.

To undertake that task, I am pleased today to announce that we will establish the Alternative and Renewable Energies Industry Council to advise Government how it can make the most of these opportunities.

ENVIRONMENT

Mr Speaker,

The Tasmanian environment is one of this State's greatest assets.

Our commitment in 2009 is to continue to strike a balance between development and protection, between supporting the excellence of our forest industries, and preserving our unique wilderness.

I spoke earlier about Tasmania's international reputation as a tourism destination of choice.

Such is our fame that the Lonely Planet Guide has chosen the Bay of Fires on the East Coast as their must see destination of 2009.

The Bay of Fires has been a drawcard for locals and tourists for years, and has provided inspiration for everything from artists workshops to family holidays.

I am pleased to announce today the intention of this Government to establish the Bay of Fires National Park.

This is a stunning part of Tasmania that deserves to be protected for future generations.

Every National Park in Tasmanian history bar one has been established under a Labor Government – and it is a tradition I am proud to continue.

We will begin consultations immediately with the community, with stakeholders and with the Aboriginal community so that we can progress the establishment of the Bay of Fires National Park.

Mr Speaker,

Tasmania is a haven for an enormously diverse range of fauna and flora.

Some of those species are endangered, and it is vital that we continue to do what we can to support their ongoing survival.

The Swift Parrot is an endangered species whose habitat is concentrated within 10km of the coastline in certain parts of south eastern Tasmania.

The current lack of breeding-season foraging habitat is likely to be a limiting factor in Swift Parrot population recovery.

Research indicates that plantings of blue-gums along cleared parts of the coastline could create significant new areas of foraging habitat within 10 years.

I am pleased to announce today that the Government will undertake a five year program of re-planting along coastal areas at the rate of 500 hectares per year over five years.

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM AND TRUST IN DEMOCRACY

Mr Speaker,

In August last year, I announced a package of reforms aimed at improving accountability and trust in Government.

I am one hundred percent committed to making sure Tasmanians can have trust in the workings of government in this State.

The package of measures was outlined in a ten point plan, and I am pleased to report – as part of today's State of the State – that progress is being made right across the ten points.

The review of the Freedom of Information Act has commenced. Two of Australia's leading experts on Freedom of Information, Dr David Solomon and Mr Rick Snell have assisted in identifying the strengths and areas for change in Tasmania's Freedom of Information Act through the consultation phase. Public submissions closed on 13 February.

I committed to providing extra protection for whistleblowers - and a review of the Public Interest Disclosures Act has commenced to assist in identifying any necessary amendments. Public submissions have recently closed and are currently under consideration.

I committed to approved protocols and rules for judicial appointments and a draft of the Protocol for Judicial Appointments, including selection criteria, has been released.

Comments were sought in mid January on the draft and the protocol is now being prepared.

I committed to improvements in governance and accountability in GBEs and I am pleased to report that a Tasmanian Government Business Governance Framework Guide has been completed, and it is now publicly available on the Department of Treasury and Finance's website.

I committed to creating a register of Lobbyists.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet has developed an internal working paper for my consideration which I expect to receive in the next two weeks.

I committed to new codes of conduct for members of parliament, ministers, and ministerial and parliamentary staff and I envisage that the Ethics Commission, once established, will be asked to create these codes as one of their first orders of business.

That will include creating the documents that will support the training, advice and induction activities for all members, ministers and their staff.

I committed to a review of the resourcing provided to key government officers.

The first stage of that review has been completed, and comments are currently being sought from the Ombudsman, DPP and Auditor-General.

CONCLUSION

Mr Speaker,

In conclusion today, I have no doubt that Tasmania's best days still lie ahead of us.

We are ten years into a two decade transformation of this State.

We must not let temporary financial and economic conditions dissuade or deter us from finishing what we have begun.

The Government stands ready to take whatever action is necessary to help Tasmania through short term financial shocks caused by the global situation.

We are investing and will keep investing to drive our economy forwards, and take this State into the next decade with confidence for today and with vision for tomorrow.