



April 2009

\$10m for Homeless Housing

The Australian and Tasmanian Governments have announced a \$10 million project to help vulnerable Tasmanians break the cycle of homelessness.

Premier David Bartlett and Human Services Minister Lin Thorp joined the Federal Member for Denison Duncan Kerr to launch a 45-unit housing development and support service in Hobart's inner city.

A Place to Call Home Hobart will be Tasmania's first Common Ground housing development, offering not only accommodation but support services to help homeless people return to a stable life.

"I have said in the area of housing, that the coming months will be characterised by the turning of keys in locks.

"Housing is one of the most basic of human needs, and the lack of it is both a cause and a symptom of poverty," Mr Bartlett said.

A Place to Call Home Hobart will provide accommodation for the homeless and a mix of tenants including workers, students, and other low income earners.

It is expected that the project will be fully completed and ready for occupancy by April next year.

Mr Bartlett said the project was a great example of all three tiers of Government working together with private enterprise and the non-government sector for the benefit of the whole community.

The Australian and Tasmanian Government each contributed \$5 million to the project.

"That is not only a vital investment in housing for Tasmanians, but a welcome stimulus to keep the Tasmanian economy moving forwards in the face of the current global financial situation," he said.

The Hobart City Council and Hobart City Mission have made available the site - which they jointly own - at the corner of Liverpool and Barrack Sts.

The City Council will retain ownership and operation of the Liverpool St car park.

The City Mission will sell its part of the site to the State Government and has expressed interest in on-going involvement once the development has been completed.

Mr Bartlett said the initiative for the development had come from Tasmanian construction firm Fairbrothers.

"Fairbrothers developed the proposal and have proactively secured the involvement of each of the partnering organizations.

"They have also agreed to cut their normal construction margin and developers profit, delivering a saving on normal building costs of around \$150,000."

Ms Plibersek said that A Place to Call Home Hobart is an outstanding example of what can be achieved when governments work with non-government organisations, local businesses and community groups.

“Homelessness is everyone's responsibility and we all need to work together and take responsible action now to reduce homelessness in Australia.”

Ms Thorp said A Place to Call Home Hobart will be the first in Tasmania to be developed and run under the Common Ground principles. This means not only stable housing will be offered but on-site support services such as mental health, social and vocational support services will be on-hand to help break the cycle of homelessness.

“The services provided by A Place to Call Home Hobart will make a big difference in helping people who are homeless make the transition to stable housing.”

Tasmanian Exports Up

There is more positive news on Tasmania's export front.

The Treasurer, Michael Aird, said Australian Bureau of Statistics figures released show that overseas exports from Tasmania increased by 7.8 per cent to \$3.74 billion in the year to February 2009.

“In these challenging economic times it is pleasing that Tasmanian exports are doing relatively well,” Mr Aird said.

“The value of exports has been boosted recently by the depreciation of the Australian dollar but this is likely to be partially offset in coming months by a reduction in exports to those countries experiencing slowing economic conditions.

“Tasmania's exports have increased in the past year to Malaysia (up \$163 million), Korea (up \$161 million), China (up \$68 million), Thailand (up \$42 million), the United Kingdom (up \$35 million), the United States (up \$22 million), New Zealand (up \$16 million), Singapore (up \$12 million), Germany (up \$8 million), Japan (up \$2 million) and India (up \$1 million).

“These increases have been partially offset by a fall in the value of exports to Hong Kong (down \$113 million), Taiwan (down \$101 million), Indonesia (down \$28 million) and South Africa (down \$4 million).

“Japan was the single largest importer of Tasmanian goods in the year to February 2009, accounting for 18.4 per cent of the State's total exports followed by Korea which overtook Hong Kong as the second largest export destination.”

Mr Aird said the Department of Economic Development and Tourism had a range of programs and services to assist Tasmanian exporters.

Tasmanian exporters are encouraged to contact Business Point on 1800 440 026 for further information on these programs and services.

Helping Tasmania's Small Business Sector

The Minister for Economic Development, Michael Aird, has announced a range of measures to help Tasmania's small businesses better prepare for the challenges arising from the global financial crisis.

While some sectors of the Tasmanian economy are relatively insulated from the effects, the global situation has already affected Australian financial markets.

The Tasmanian Government is supporting a broad assistance package to help the small and medium-sized business sector better equip itself to manage through these difficult times.

The key elements of this assistance include tailored workshops delivered across the state; online self-help tools; a two day small business expo, and access to finance through the revised Tasmanian Industry Support Scheme.

The Government is supporting workshops to be delivered by the relevant peak bodies, the Tasmanian Small Business Council and the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and by the private sector through the WHK Group Limited.

State-wide coverage will be ensured through regionally based workshops that focus on improving business management and managing the impact of change as a result of the global financial crisis.

The workshops will provide businesses with access to information and contacts that may help them to improve their decision making and how they might best weather the economic crisis.

“Specifically, the assistance aims to provide business with an understanding of the warning signs for their operations and a plan on how to manage the risks appropriately.”

Among other initiatives being offered is a number of online financial tools that will allow businesses to assess their business circumstances at any time, and a commitment by the Tasmanian Government to work with the TCCI to deliver a small business expo in mid-November 2009.

Mr Aird said that workshops to be offered include Surviving the Global Financial Challenge and Downturn Readiness.

Business owners seeking further information on any of these initiatives are encouraged to contact Business Point on 1800 440 026.

Time for Hodgman to Show Some Ticker

State Liberal leader Will Hodgman must back up his support for the Prime Minister’s massive broadband investment by lobbying Malcolm Turnbull to abandon his petty opposition to the rollout.

Premier David Bartlett said it wasn’t good enough for Mr Hodgman to simply say he supports the broadband package without taking clear action to ensure the Liberals don’t block it in the Senate.

“It’s time for Mr Hodgman to prove he has the ticker to stand up for what’s in Tasmania’s interests,” Mr Bartlett said.

“I welcome his verbal support for the broadband package, which will have enormous benefits for Tasmania, as the first state to benefit from its rollout.

“But unless he can convince Malcolm Turnbull, his positioning amounts to nothing but hollow words.

“Mr Hodgman needs to get on the phone to Mr Turnbull straight away and convince him to support the plan. It’s a test of his strength.

“Guy Barnett and Tasmania’s other stoneage Liberal Senators cannot be allowed to block this broadband package in the Senate – it’s too important for Tasmania’s future.

“Mr Hodgman needs to prove that he’s prepared to put Tasmania’s interests ahead of Liberal Party interests.”

Housing Construction Starts Under Rudd Government’s Economic Stimulus Package

The start of social housing construction under the first stage of the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan (NBESP) has begun

Tasmania has secured \$16.1 million in new funding for social housing construction under the Rudd Government’s Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan.

Not only will this initiative deliver great social benefits to Tasmanians through the provision of more affordable housing, but it will also help to stimulate the building and construction industry and support local jobs.

The \$16.1 million will see 65 new social housing units built across Tasmania, the majority of which will be completed and occupied by the end of this year.

These homes will be delivered to areas across Tasmania where the demand for affordable housing is at its greatest. 21 dwellings will be built in the electorate of Franklin and they will be across the State with 23 in Denison, 10 in Bass, 7 in Lyons and 2 in Braddon with another 2 yet to be identified.

The boost to building and construction will also have a flow on effect to other businesses which supply materials to these industries.

This money will be used to bring forward social housing construction projects which would otherwise have taken longer for the State Government to complete.

Tasmania is moving quickly to respond to the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan and take advantage of the many opportunities it presents. .

Under the Nation Building Job Plan, work will soon start on repairs and maintenance and energy efficiency upgrades to around 520 existing public housing homes across Tasmania at a cost of \$9.4 million.

The Rudd Government's Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan has the potential to provide total funding of up to \$147 million for Tasmania over the next three and a half years for social housing.

Tasmania Labour Market Still Holding Up

Tasmania's unemployment rate continues to be below the national rate.

The Treasurer, Michael Aird, said labour force data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that Tasmania's unemployment rate in March in trend terms was 4.6 per cent, up 0.1 per cent from the previous month.

"This is well below the Australian rate, which rose by 0.2 per cent in trend terms to 5.4 per cent. It also shows that Tasmania's economy continues to be robust in the face of the global financial crisis.

"The Australian rate in seasonally adjusted terms in March rose by 0.5 per cent to 5.7 per cent.

"Apart from Queensland, Tasmania was the only state to record employment growth and our unemployment rate is now below NSW, Vic, SA and Queensland."

Mr Aird said while the number of full time jobs declined, overall employment levels increased by 100 people to 239, 300 in trend terms.

"While the Tasmanian economy remains robust we continue to feel the impact of the global financial crisis on our jobs and especially on our state finances.

"We will continue to work with Tasmanian businesses to protect jobs wherever possible but to also ensure that we are strongly placed to take advantage of any turnaround in economic conditions whenever that may happen.

"Announcements such as the new National Broadband Network initiative show there are many reasons to be positive about Tasmania's future.

"Working with Tasmanian public sector unions to achieve wage restraint is an essential part of the Government's response to dealing with the impact of the global financial crisis on the State Budget and to protect public sector jobs.

“Wage restraint together with a range of other important initiatives will ensure that not only are the hard won gains of recent years aren’t lost but the public sector is also strongly positioned to continue to move forward.

“We are committed to discussing a range of options with unions to arrive at the best possible outcome for State Sector employees.”

Adult Education Future Assured

The Premier and Minister for Education and Skills, David Bartlett, has assured the future of Adult Education.

Mr Bartlett said that the Adult Education brand will continue to be part of the Community Knowledge Network, which brings together libraries, Online Access Centres and Adult Education.

“I’m committed to supporting Adult Education – that’s why the Department of Education has a presence at tomorrow’s Adult Education forum organised in Launceston so Tasmanians can be reassured that Adult Education has an exciting, vibrant future,” Mr Bartlett said.

“I’m also looking forward to celebrating 60 years of Adult Education at a special function later this month, as well as officially launching the Adult Education Winter Course Guide next month.”

Mr Bartlett said that the Government’s commitment to Adult Education in terms of a direct payment of \$1.8m per annum was unmatched by other states.

“Most states do not provide any direct funding to similar programs,” he said.

“Adult Education course fees are not about making profits. Course fees have only risen to meet the cost of living increases such as energy, building maintenance and salaries.

“Pensioners, health care card holders and full-time students receive a flat rate concession on courses, ranging from \$10 to \$25 per course.

“Seniors card holders also receive flat concessions based on the duration of the course, ranging from \$5 to \$13.”

Mr Bartlett said that Adult Education’s current offerings and more would continue into the future as long as people continue to enrol in the courses.

“Our new web-based enrolment system is being developed at a cost of \$350,000,” he said.

Mr Bartlett said that the Government was also spending \$14.883 million over the next four years to establish five new Learning and Information Network Centres (LINC)s).

“This is clear evidence that we are committed to strengthening the provision of adult education and community learning in this State,” he said.

“There is no doubting the high value Tasmanians place on Adult Education programs, and there is no threat whatsoever to their future”.

State of the Art Endoscopy Suite for Mersey Community Hospital

Health Minister Lara Giddings and Federal Member for Braddon Sid Sidebottom have opened a \$500,000 state-of-the-art Endoscopy Suite at the Mersey Community Hospital.

Ms Giddings said the suite would use cutting-edge technology to provide top level care for North West residents needing endoscopic procedures such as colonoscopies or gastroscopies.

“We are seeing a projected increase in demand of 38% for these procedures across the region this financial year, which is in part due to the Australian Government’s National Bowel Screening Program,” Ms Giddings said.

“Mersey Community Hospital will be able to meet this demand by opening the new Endoscopy Suite, together with the appointment of a new Gastroenterologist, and by centralising all endoscopic procedures.

“Relocating endoscopies to Mersey will also free up theatre space at the North West Regional Hospital for additional major surgery, helping to reduce waiting lists in other areas.

The new Gastroenterologist, Dr Jarrad Wilson, will take a leading role in setting up a direct referral system for GPs to streamline the patient pathway through the system.

Federal Member for Braddon Sid Sidebottom MP said the additional services being provided at the Mersey are a direct result of the significant Commonwealth investment in the Mersey Hospital. The Commonwealth is providing \$180 million over three years.

“The new system is excellent news for the community as in most cases patients would no longer need multiple appointments at the hospital before having the procedure and results will be fast tracked back to their doctor, eliminating a potentially anxious wait for people,” Mr Sidebottom said.

North West Area Health Service CEO Jane Holden said the new suite and direct referral system demonstrated a commitment to putting the patient first.

“Opening a state-of-the-art Endoscopy Suite is just one of many services we are committed to improving, and streamlining, so the community can get the best level of care without having to leave the North West.

“At the Mersey alone we have boosted Oncology services by 50%, increased eye surgery by 50% and have opened a new medical Sub-Acute Care Unit.

“We have also committed to involving the community in decision making by establishing a North West Area Health Service Network Advisory Group,” Ms Holden said.

Tarkine Road is Important Regional Investment

The Minister for Infrastructure, Graeme Sturges, said it was no surprise that the Liberal Party would seize on any opportunity to move even closer to the Greens ahead of next year’s State election.

“As if the emerging Liberal-Green Coalition was not apparent enough already, the Liberals are now jumping at any chance to criticise the Tarkine Road development and fly their ever-greener colours up the mast.

“The Liberals would do better to properly analyse media reports before rushing out to condemn the State Government’s efforts to invest in regional projects and grow our economy in challenging times.”

Mr Sturges said unlike the weak, negative and lazy Hodgman Liberal Opposition, the State Government was determined to make proper regional investment decisions.

“Rather than rushing around knocking everything, the State Government is getting on with making decisions focused on keeping the Tasmanian economy as strong as possible amid challenging global circumstances.

“We recognise that not everybody supports this project, but the Tarkine Road project will create many millions of dollars for the region and become another reason for tourists to visit our State.”

Safe At Home Wins International Acclaim

Justice Minister Lara Giddings said China's decision to seek input from Tasmania on domestic violence issues reflected international respect for the State Government's Safe at Home programme.

Ms Giddings said the Principal Consultant of Strategic Policy and Projects in the Department of Justice and a prime mover in the design of the Safe at Home initiative, Elizabeth Little, will represent the Federal and Tasmanian governments at a four-day domestic violence workshop in Changsha, Hunan Province, China in April.

"Ms Little's invitation to address the workshop is a tribute to the success of Safe at Home and confirmation the Chinese Government recognises the merits of an effective domestic violence programme," Ms Giddings said.

"In 1997 China and Australia began high level dialogue, where it was agreed the two countries would undertake a programme aimed at strengthening the administration, promotion and protection of human rights in China.

"The programme, funded by AusAID, focuses on three main theme areas, legal reform, women's and children's rights and ethnic and minority rights.

"Introduced in 2005, Safe at Home involves a range of services to protect and support victims of family violence, including young people and children, while ensuring offenders are held responsible for their behaviour."

"The programme was last year named a national winner in the Crime and Violence Protection Awards."

Ms Giddings said the Changsha workshop will involve around 70 Chinese delegates, including officials from the All China Women's Federation, the Supreme People's Court and China's Legal Research Institute.

\$440,000 Program to Break Down Education Barriers

Tasmanians experiencing barriers to post compulsory education and employment will benefit from a \$440,000 statewide program run by Skills Tasmania.

Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier, Heather Butler, announced that community groups and registered training organisations which provide services targeted at individuals from various groups such as Aboriginal people, people with a disability, women, older people, migrants and refugees were encouraged to apply for small grants of up to \$20,000 under the Equity Support Program.

"This great program is designed to help people overcome barriers to participation in further education and employment," Ms Butler said.

"In any society, there are groups and individuals who experience difficulties in gaining equal access to opportunities and services for a variety of reasons.

"Not only may those people be excluded from fully taking part in training and work, but it can also mean there are fewer people engaged in the workforce and contributing to Tasmania's economic and social wellbeing.

"The State Government recognises that certain groups may need assistance to overcome the barriers to identifying, accessing and completing training, as well as successfully making the transition into work.

"Projects may involve people from a wide range of equity groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a disability, women, Tasmanians aged 45 and over, and migrants and refugees."

Ms Butler said that small grants ranging from \$5000 to \$20,000 would be available to fund accredited training as well as activities to promote vocational education and training pathways.

"This is a great opportunity for community groups and registered training organisations to really make a difference in people's lives," she said.

Expressions of interest will be advertised Statewide in the three regional newspapers tomorrow (Saturday 18 April).

Applications close on Thursday 21 May 2009.

Application forms, selection criteria and categories are listed in detail at www.skills.tas.gov.au/providers/services

For more information contact Marion Wilcox on 6233 7115 or email marion.wilcox@skills.tas.gov.au

Largest Ever Transport Infrastructure Projects in Tasmania Get Underway

The first sod has been turned on Tasmania's largest ever transport infrastructure projects – the \$243 million Brighton Bypass and Transport Hub.

Tasmanian Premier, David Bartlett, and the Parliamentary Secretary for Government Service Delivery, Senator Mark Arbib, today inspected the site and turned the first sod on the project - six months ahead of schedule.

Premier David Bartlett, said that the projects were vital components of joint State – Federal Government plans to upgrade the northern approaches to Hobart.

"The investment in these projects will provide a significant stimulus to the Tasmanian construction industry and the Tasmanian economy – especially in the current economic climate.

"The bypass will have significant improvements to local communities by cutting travelling time on the Midland Highway and improving safety in the built-up areas at its southern end.

"These projects will significantly improve connections to the developing Brighton Industrial Estate and future Brighton Transport Hub."

"This is of fundamental and long-term importance for the future of transport in Southern Tasmania," he said.

Representing the Federal Government, the Parliamentary Secretary for Government Service Delivery, Senator Mark Arbib, said the Rudd Labor Government's decision to bring forward funding for the Brighton Bypass demonstrates a commitment to delivering key road infrastructure projects and create jobs during the current economic downturn.

"This project is part of our nation building plan to support local economies during the current global economic recession and with the Hub, is expected to provide up to 380 direct jobs with additional flow on effects to local businesses," said Mr Arbib.

"In fact, work on the project is starting six months earlier than previously expected as a direct result of the Rudd Government's decision to bring forward the necessary funding."

Mr Bartlett said that the Brighton Transport Hub would provide a modern road-rail interchange and freight distribution hub to improve the efficiency of freight movement into and out of southern Tasmania.

"They are also of critical importance for the Brighton community and we have been working closely with the Brighton Council, transport operators, local business, land owners and the general community.

"The Government has been working on developing the most effective construction program. This has resulted in the integration of the Hub and Bypass construction programs which will achieve significant efficiencies," Mr Bartlett said.

Two joint ventures have been selected to carry out the work – VEC/Thiess has won the contract for the northern section of the bypass and John Holland/Hazell Bros the southern section, which includes the Brighton Transport Hub.

The \$79 million Hub is expected to be operational by September 2011 and the \$164 million Bypass is scheduled for completion by June 2012.

Exciting New Future for Burnie Schools

Premier and Minister for Education and Skills, David Bartlett, has paid tribute to the work of school communities in the Burnie and Somerset areas for securing the optimum in learning facilities for North-West students.

Officially accepting signed agreements from Burnie and Somerset school communities indicating their formal support of amalgamation, Mr Bartlett said that it was a very important time for the future of education on the North-West Coast.

“The amalgamation of Acton, Upper Burnie and Brooklyn primary schools to enable the construction of one brand new primary school on the grounds of Parklands High School is a fantastic initiative for this community and is a great response to the demographic challenges facing the Burnie community,” Mr Bartlett said.

“The new school, Burnie, Montello, Havenview and Cooee primary schools will make up the group of five strong viable government primary schools in the Burnie city area.

“I commend all the school communities for seizing the opportunity to achieve what will be an outstanding educational outcome for the Burnie area.”

Mr Bartlett also acknowledged the hard work of the Somerset and West Somerset school communities, which began 18 months ago.

“In many ways the Somerset and West Somerset school communities are trail blazers. Community and school leaders realized the impact of the changing demographics in their community, and both school associations had the foresight to work collaboratively with their school communities,” he said.

“The result of that hard work will result in a \$6 million investment to refurbish and modernize the West Somerset site using both our \$5.7 million School Futures Fund and the Australian Government’s \$370 million Building the Education Revolution package for Tasmanian schools.”

Mr Bartlett was impressed with the way these school communities have really engaged with the process.

“They have a real depth of understanding of the complexity of the issues and a determination to provide the best possible education for their children,” Mr Bartlett said.

“These two education projects are about every child in the Burnie area having a better start and access to better schools that offer better curriculum choices.

Mr Bartlett said that the steering committee members had a wide range of backgrounds and experiences.

“I have full confidence that they will provide the leadership and commitment to deliver the best possible outcomes for the students, staff and wider school communities in the Burnie and Somerset areas,” he said.

“Like many other school communities across the state, the Burnie and Somerset school communities have handled this important decision magnificently,”

Fuel Price Monitoring Program

The State Government and the Royal Automobile Club of Tasmania will jointly fund a new daily petrol price monitoring scheme in Tasmania.

The Treasurer, Michael Aird, said he was pleased the initiative would allow the RACT to expand its weekly fuel price monitoring program.

“When the Premier organised his Fuel Summit he emphasised it was about coming up with new ideas and solutions to help alleviate the impact of rising fuel prices,” Mr Aird said.

“The RACT wanted to extend its fuel monitoring and the State Government is pleased to support the expanded scheme.

“It is important the Government does all it can to ease the impact of high fuel prices on Tasmanian families and businesses.

“The RACT will now be able to provide consumers with more information on fuel prices from the extended scheme.

“The club’s weekly service is popular with RACT members and non-members alike taking advantage of the information it provides.

“The Government obviously has no control over world oil prices but I am sure motorists will welcome daily monitoring of fuel prices including petrol, diesel and LPG.”

It is expected the new monitoring program will begin on 1 July

It Pays to Check the Docket

The Minister for Corrections and Consumer Protection, Lisa Singh, has urged consumers to scrutinise shopping docket.

Ms Singh says Tasmanian Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading investigators recently took part in an annual national scanning audit, checking a range of shops that use electronic scanning equipment at checkouts.

She says convenience stores, service stations, pharmacies, hardware stores and discount variety stores were the focus of this year’s checks.

“While the results show an improvement on last year, there’s considerable room for improvement,” Ms Singh said.

“It was encouraging to see Tasmania’s price scanning accuracy increased from 88 percent last year to 92 percent this year.

“Interestingly, five percent of inaccurate scans were undercharges and three per cent overcharges, meaning it’s probably a case of retailers needing to pay more attention to their data entry.”

Tasmanian Survey Results

- Of the 625 items audited, 92% scanned at the correct price.
- Of the 50 items scanned at an incorrect price, 31 were undercharges and 19 were overcharges.
- The highest overcharge was for sunscreen purchased from a service station, which scanned \$5.45 more than the correct price.
- Hardware stores and convenience stores had the highest rate of error with every hardware store and convenience store tested returning errors.
- Variety stores performed poorly last year but showed significant improvement this year.

Ms Singh says shoppers should always check their dockets carefully and if they detect a scanning error should immediately raise the matter with the trader and ask that it be rectified.

"If people encounter stores with consistent errors, they should notify Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading," Ms Singh said.

Biggest Ever Federal Investment in Road and Rail Infrastructure

The Minister for Infrastructure, Graeme Sturges, confirmed that agreement has been reached on the biggest-ever federal investment in the nation's road and rail infrastructure.

"Tasmania has received a very welcome \$800 million," Mr Sturges said.

"That funding will be spent on projects such as the Brighton and Kingston bypasses, north-east freight roads, rail upgrade projects, and increased maintenance funding for the national road network.

"There is money for planning the Bagdad bypass and Bridgewater Bridge, level crossing funding, and \$13.5 million in black-spot funding.

"Funding is also going directly to local councils, including money for the Roads to Recovery program.

"This is central to efforts to support jobs and businesses during the current global recession.

"The Rudd Labor Government Nation Building Program will fund routine maintenance as well as upgrades to sections of the transport network.

"This will lower transport costs, cut travel times, reduce carbon emissions and save lives."

Commitment to National VET Broadband Project Welcomed

Premier and Minister for Education and Skills, David Bartlett, has welcomed the Australian Government's \$81.9 million, three-year commitment to the national Vocational Education Broadband Network.

"I'm delighted that Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard has given this commitment, seeing that it will provide the infrastructure to support a high speed broadband network for the training sector," Mr Bartlett said.

"Skills Tasmania had a large part to play in getting the network to this point.

"We managed the national VET broadband project which involved establishing the conceptual framework, piloting technical options and garnering high-level support for the initiative.

Skills Tasmania's involvement continues through its management of the high bandwidth network proof of concept project currently underway between the Commonwealth and various states and territories.

"The new network will allow more courses to be delivered to learners and enable quicker access to resources and training no matter where people live.

"Importantly, it will help support basic skills training in such areas as language, literacy and numeracy by providing low-cost infrastructure delivery.

Review of Youth Justice Act

The Minister for Human Services, Lin Thorp, has urged Tasmanians to have their say on the review of the Youth Justice Act.

Releasing a 78-page public consultation paper, Ms Thorp said that while the Act had worked well since it commenced nine years ago, the review would consider a range of improvements.

“The review aims to ensure we have the most appropriate arrangements, including sentencing options, to help reduce the rate of offending by young people and to break the trajectory of young offenders into the criminal justice system,” Ms Thorp said.

“As a first stage, the Department has consulted with people in the criminal justice system who work with the legislation and are familiar with its operation.

“The feedback from those consultations has been incorporated with a snapshot of provisions applying in other Australian jurisdictions as well as New Zealand into the Discussion Paper, which is available at www.dhhs.tas.gov.au

Ms Thorp said the initial consultation round had raised a number of issues on which people were invited to offer suggestions.

“A number of those issues are based on improving clarity around the operation of existing provisions and their effect on young people.

“Others, such as whether Tasmania should introduce a system of parole for young people or whether we should retain an amended system of supervised release , may involve additions to existing provisions.

“At present there is no parole provision in the Youth Justice Act. As an alternative a detainee is automatically released on a supervised release order after completion of 50% of the sentence.

“The review will consider whether this acts as a disincentive to rehabilitation because the young person knows he or she will be released automatically regardless of behaviour.”

Ms Thorp said other issues to be considered in the review included:

- The need for specific bail conditions for young people;
- The need for alternatives to support young people on bail in the community instead of being remanded in custody;
- Additional sentencing options such as deferral of a sentence to allow rehabilitation to be undertaken and assessed;
- Consideration of the system of diversion for young people.

Anyone with a contribution to make to the review is invited to make a submission on the form available on the Department website, or by email to yjareview@dhhs.tas.gov.au

The closing date for submissions is Friday June 19.

Tarkine Tourist Drive Community Information

The Tasmanian Government has launched a new website and developed displays for nine locations throughout the State to provide information on the Tarkine Drive.

The sealed two-lane 134-kilometre tourist route is expected to bring up to 215,000 new visitors a year to the region, generating \$70 million annually in increased economic activity and resulting in 1600 new jobs.

Braddon MP, Bryan Green, today also announced that public information briefings would be held in Wynyard and Smithton in May.

Mr Green said it was important that more information be provided about the \$23 million project and the attractions along the way.

“Before the government agreed to fund the project, there had been consultation with stakeholders and a number of reports commissioned into the economic and social benefits of the project,” Mr Green said.

“The community will be provided with more information and given the opportunity to ask questions,” Mr Green said.

“A form will be available at the display sites for people to lodge questions and for those interested in pursuing business opportunities associated with the development to register their interest.

“Community groups and organisations will also be able to request briefings.”

Mr Green said to better inform people displays and brochures would be provided at key locations during May. They include:

- Waratah Wynyard and Circular Head Council Chambers
- the foyer of the Burnie City Council Chambers
- Service Tasmania in Smithton
- Stanley’s Tourist Information Centre
- Tarkine Forest Adventures at Dismal Swamp
- Tall Timbers
- the foyer of the Tasmanian Government offices, 10 Murray St Hobart
- Forestry Tasmania head office, 79 Melville St Hobart

“Feedback boxes will be positioned at each of the displays where visitors can place questions they would like answered.”

“The questions and the relevant answers will then be added to the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Tarkine Drive website.

“Informal information sessions will also be held on nominated days in conjunction with the displays.”

Mayors Kevin Hyland and Daryl Quillam will chair the Wynyard and Smithton forums which will feature a presentation by Forestry Tasmania project manager Mike Peterson, an overview of tourism and economic outcomes by Moore Consulting, and an explanation of governance arrangements by a Department of Infrastructure Energy and Resources representative.

The Wynyard forum will be held on Thursday May 21 and the Smithton forum will be held on Friday May 22.

The Tarkine Drive website can be accessed at www.tarkinedrive.com.au

Tough Car Confiscation Legislation Introduced

The Minister for Infrastructure, Graeme Sturges, announced the State Government was continuing its crackdown on law breakers on Tasmania’s roads, empowering Tasmania Police to confiscate cars for an even greater range of offences.

Mr Sturges has introduced legislation that would give police the authority to confiscate vehicles off people who showed scant regard for road safety and the law by speeding at extremely high levels or where a person is detected for their second or subsequent offence of driving while disqualified.

“Anyone who is caught travelling at 45kmh above the speed limit, or anyone who is caught driving as second time while their licence is disqualified is being targeted by the State Government’s latest move to make our roads safer for all road users.

“There is no place for people on our roads who thumb their nose at the safety of themselves or others, and it is the State Government’s responsibility to show that this behaviour will not be tolerated, and their cars will be confiscated.”

Mr Sturges said the confiscation period would be the same increasing scale as currently used for hooning offences, with confiscations increasing from one week for a first offence, to three months for a second, with a Magistrate to decide the case in the event of a third offence where permanent confiscation is an option.

“When it comes to safety on our roads, everybody has a responsibility to play their part, and the State Government is committed to providing a legislative framework that underlines road safety by sending a strong deterrent to wilful speeders and disqualified drivers backed by the penalty of car confiscation.

“It is common knowledge that people who speed are at a greater risk of killing and injuring themselves or other road users, and speed is still a major contributor to the State’s road toll year after year.

“Travelling at 45kmh or more above the speed limit is completely inexcusable, and I believe the people of Tasmania find such crimes on our roads nothing more than tragedies waiting to happen.

“Disqualified drivers are denied access to a licence because they have contravened our road laws, and this means they must fulfil the disqualification period before again having access to driving.

“This new legislation reinforces the fact that a driver’s licence is a privilege, not a right, and disqualified drivers must serve their penalty.

“These offenders have absolutely no place on Tasmania’s roads, and if they attempt to compromise our road safety, they will lose their cars,” Mr Sturges said.

Community Coalition of Interest for Climate Change

Minister assisting the Premier on Climate Change Lisa Singh has called on Tasmanians to come forward with their ideas on combating climate change.

The Coalition of Interest being set up will provide a vehicle for members of the community to have a say.

“I am particularly anxious to tap into the thoughts and ideas of those people who put forward their names to be part of the Tasmanian Climate Action Council.

“We were overwhelmed by the number of people who wanted to take part and I don’t want to see the enthusiasm and expertise lost of those who were not appointed to the council.

“The Coalition will be independent and I believe can be a powerhouse of community ideas on ways we can deal with climate change in Tasmania.

“As part of this commitment to community involvement, the Government last year sought community nominations to fill two key roles on the Tasmanian Climate Action Council,” said Ms Singh.

“We received over eighty nominations from committed and talented Tasmanians, many of whom are also engaged in other local climate change groups.

“It is important that we not let this experience go to waste and is why the Coalition will fill a vital role.”

Ms Singh said that the Council's two community representatives, Ben Kearney and Nel Smit, are developing the Coalition of Interest along similar lines to that used under the Tasmania Together program.

Mental Health Services for Young Tasmanians

Health Minister Lara Giddings has said Mental Health Services is working to improve clinical support to young people under 18 years of age who need acute mental health care.

Ms Giddings said a new dedicated psychiatric unit for children and teenagers is included in planning for the new Royal Hobart Hospital.

"While a decision is yet to be made on the New Royal project, MHS is working to strengthen support for young people requiring specialist mental health inpatient care," Ms Giddings said.

"In Hobart, the Department of Psychological Medicine has remodelled the High Dependency Unit to accommodate young people separately from adult patients.

"The remodelling has altered the layout of the HDU to make it more personal and provided additional outdoor space and activity areas to enable more flexible treatment options.

"Mental Health Services and RHH are implementing a new Child and Adolescent Mental Health team to strengthen care of young people needing specialist inpatient treatment.

"The new specialist team will include a child psychiatrist, clinical psychologist and clinical nurse consultant.

"Children are admitted to adult mental health facilities only in exceptional circumstances, including:

- When there is a high risk of harm to themselves or others; and
- There is immediate need for specialist care which cannot be delivered in other inpatient services.

"A high level of care and supervision is provided to all young people under the age of 18 admitted to acute mental health facilities.

"This includes 1:1 nursing care for all young people admitted to Spencer Clinic and Northside Clinic.

"Young people admitted to Wilfred Lopes Centre are required by a standing order from the Chief Forensic Psychiatrist to be accommodated in a separate area and to have their developmental needs addressed in their care within the unit," Ms Giddings said.

Weak Hodgman Caught Flip-Flopping

The State Liberal leader, Will Hodgman, has been caught out flip-flopping in his support for the Prime Minister's \$42 billion economic stimulus package.

This has been a particularly weak effort from Mr Hodgman, who lacks the backbone to make a final decision one way or the other.

Initially, Mr Hodgman said he supported the Federal Opposition leader, Mr Turnbull, in opposing the package and its benefits flowing to Tasmania.

But in State Parliament, he tried to claim the State Liberals had always supported the Rudd package. These positions are clearly inconsistent.

Does Mr Hodgman support around \$1 billion in new federal funds flowing to this state for things like school upgrades, social housing and \$900 bonuses to working Tasmanians?

Or does he support Mr Turnbull, who as recently as yesterday was continuing his opposition to the Rudd package? Mr Hodgman can't have it both ways. He either supports Tasmania's interests or he supports Liberal interests. Which is it?

In response to a question on the State Liberals' position on the Rudd package from presenter Tim Cox on ABC Radio on February 6, Mr Hodgman said:

"Look, the response from Malcolm Turnbull is totally appropriate, responsible, prudent."

But in State Parliament, he said:

"I want to dispel the notion that was put by the Deputy Premier, parroting what was said by the Premier during question time this morning, that the State Opposition opposed the Rudd Government's Federal stimulus package. The record in this Parliament and the public record show that we in fact supported it."

It appeared Mr Hodgman was attempting to hide behind a vote last month on planning legislation the State Government introduced to help the stimulus package funds flow.

Not opposing planning legislation is a different proposition to outright support for the Rudd package. This has been a very meek, uninspiring performance from Mr Hodgman.

He needs to make a clear statement about where the State Liberals now stand on the stimulus package.

It says much about Mr Hodgman's weak economic management – particularly in a climate like this when strong leadership is so important – that almost three months after the package was announced, he is still dithering about trying to have two bob each way.

Asbestos Steering Committee

The Minister for Workplace Standards, Lisa Singh, announced that a high level Asbestos Safety Steering Committee, and an officer level Reference Group will be formed to further help tackle asbestos in Tasmania. .

The first step to review current asbestos management practices and to inform the Tasmanian Government on future policy options regarding asbestos was a forum organised by Workplace Standards Tasmania.

The forum identified a number of key issues and highlighted the fact that asbestos must be treated as a 'whole-of-community' concern.

The most appropriate way to progress the issues raised at the forum is through the formation of a high level Asbestos Safety Steering Committee, and an officer level Reference Group.

The Asbestos Safety Steering Committee and Reference Group will be tasked with preparing recommendations for:

- policy and legislative change;
- increasing public awareness; and
- improving education.

This is as an important step in the process to further review current asbestos management practices and to inform the Government on future policy options regarding asbestos.

It is intended that a report detailing recommendations will be finalised at the end of 2009

Employment and Energy Initiatives Welcomed

The Council of Australian Governments held its 26th meeting in Hobart recently.

Federal and State leaders reaffirmed their commitment to tackling the challenges of the global financial crisis including rising unemployment.

Tasmanian Premier David Bartlett said he particularly welcomed measures aimed at increasing young people's engagement with education, training and employment.

"The Prime Minister has shown strong leadership during tough economic times and he demonstrated that again today.

"What we have seen is recognition of the importance of youth engagement in education, retention and attainment. These are areas we have already made a top priority in Tasmania by implementing Tasmania Tomorrow. Commitments made today confirm our focus on post year 10 reform," he said.

Jobs Training and Youth Transitions

\$100 million was put on the table for a Youth Compact which will ensure young people 15-19 years have access to education and training places.

"Tasmania has the greatest need to improve in terms of retention compared to the other states. The \$100 million announced today will support and build on the aims of the Tasmania Tomorrow reforms," Mr Bartlett said.

"While Tasmania also welcomes a commitment to have 90 percent of Australian young people complete Year 12 or equivalent, by 2015 we have more work to do than any other state."

A National Youth Participation Requirement will make participation in education, training or employment compulsory for young people until they turn 17 which is in line with current policy in Tasmania.

"There can be no better investment in the future of Australia than in Education – it is the key driver of the economy.

"For example, every year we add to the average level of school attainment for Tasmanian youth, we will add 8% to productivity and up to 2% to Gross State Product," Mr Bartlett said.

Energy

As Australia's largest producer of renewable energy Tasmania is expected to be a major beneficiary of an expanded National Renewable Energy Target Scheme.

"In Tasmania it will release hundreds of millions of dollars in pent up investment in renewable energy over the coming months and years.

"Tasmania has been the leader in renewable energy. An agreement today for 20 per cent of Australia's energy to be from renewable sources by 2020 is recognition that renewable energy is the way of the future.

"Commonwealth modelling shows the implementation of RET and the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme will increase Tasmania's GDP by \$580 million between 2010 and 2030. It is estimated the expanded RET would also result in the creation of around 500 new jobs in Tasmania.

"I am pleased that the expanded RET will include assistance to electricity intensive trade exposed industries. This is something the Tasmanian Government has been pushing hard for.

"We are looking forward to working closely with the Commonwealth to ensure that industries affected by the introduction of RET will be supported through the transition to the new scheme," Mr Bartlett said.

COAG also reaffirmed a commitment to introduce a comprehensive National Strategy for Energy Efficiency.

Natural Disaster Arrangements

In the wake of the Victorian bushfires and significant flooding in Queensland COAG agreed to take immediate steps to enhance Australia's natural disaster arrangements through the development of a telephone based emergency warning system.

"Such a system would ensure Tasmanians are given the earliest possible warning should we ever face another disaster like the 1967 bushfires."

National Broadband Network

Premier Bartlett said he was pleased to have further discussions with the Prime Minister on the National Broadband Network rollout in Tasmania.

"The NBN represents a new era for Tasmania and will have significant benefits for our economy and society.

"I look forward to being able to make further announcements around the roll out in the coming weeks and months."