



March 2009

Independent Study Supports Tarkine Tourist Road

Bryan Green has released an independent consultant's report that concludes the full Tarkine Tourist Road could deliver 1600 jobs and pour an extra \$70m a year into the North West Coast's economy.

The report described the Tarkine road as the single most significant development available to Tasmania after the introduction of the Spirits of Tasmania.

The report has also found the Tarkine could be comparable to Cradle Mountain and Freycinet as a destination for nature enthusiasts.

Completion of the 127 km tourist link of which only 5.4 km will be new road would lay the foundation for the potential of the Tarkine to be realised.

"This project is about establishing the Tarkine as an iconic tourist destination and the full loop road will be the enabler for that to happen."

The consultants commissioned by the Department of Economic Development, Moore Consulting, SCA Marketing and EMDA, are highly respected in the tourism industry. A key finding of their report is that visitors do not want to backtrack therefore a full loop is the only option.

It was now even more difficult to comprehend the opposition to the tourist road by the State Liberals and the Greens.

"While they want to play politics the State Government's sole objective is to achieve the best outcome possible for the Circular Head region and the State's tourist industry."

"The Greens will never support it no matter what benefits are but Liberal Leader Will Hodgman and his Braddon colleagues Brett Whiteley and Jeremy Rockliff must now reconsider their opposition to the project."

"It is time for Will Hodgman to show leadership, admit he is making a big mistake by siding with the Greens to try to stop this development and come out and support it."

"The Liberals have been tricked into believing the Greens who claim they want to unlock the Tarkine's potential when their aim has always been to lock it up."

"The Greens recently stated publicly their political agenda is to make the Tarkine a national park or world heritage area."

"The tourist road will give people the opportunity to experience the beauty of the Tarkine they otherwise would not have if the Greens get their way."

The Government is committed to working with all tiers of government, businesses and tourist operators to get maximum benefits from the Tarkine Tourist Road. Proposals put forward by the Cradle Coast Authority would help provide opportunities in the future to build on the Tarkine experience for visitors and further enhance and promote the tourism potential of the North-West and West Coast regions.

Moore Consulting, SCA Marketing and EMDA were initially engaged by the Cradle Coast Authority to determine the potential of the Tarkine as a tourism destination. The question that the CCA did not ask the consultants was how that potential could be realised.

This study gives the answer with the consultants finding that the entire loop road was the best and only option.

The consultants acknowledge that over ten years, there will need to be further investment in this iconic region, mostly from the private sector delivering attractions and accommodation.

The report shows the new jobs and increased economic activity could only be delivered by the full loop drive from Myalla near Wynyard to Arthur River.

“The enormous benefits to the Circular Head community and the wider Tasmanian economy are simply too great to be sacrificed for the political self interest of the Liberals and the Greens.

“Mr Hodgman has set his sights on a Liberal-Green hung parliament and that will cripple Tasmania’s economy.”

“Where is his business case and cost analysis for the Tarkine?”

The report shows proposals to only upgrade the South Arthur Forest Drive and the link to Phantom Valley would not deliver significant economic benefits.

Cancer Treatment Boost for the Mersey Community Hospital

The Mersey Community Hospital has expanded its Oncology services from three to five days a week, allowing more cancer patients in the North West to be treated locally.

Health Minister Lara Giddings has said the number of patients receiving chemotherapy at the hospital would increase by around 50% to more than 30 each week.

This is happening as a result of the recruitment of more staff and increase in Outpatient Clinic sessions.

“It’s a fantastic improvement which will avoid the need for regular round trips to Launceston and Burnie for many sick patients from the local area undergoing chemotherapy,” Ms Giddings said.

The boost to Oncology is one of a number of service improvements at Mersey since the Tasmanian and Commonwealth Governments entered into a partnership agreement last year to secure the hospital’s future.

The agreement secured \$180 million in funding over three years from the Commonwealth and handed control of the hospital back to the State.

Additional services at the Mersey include:

- A 50% increase in eye surgery through the addition of a new ophthalmic microscope and an additional Ophthalmologist. This has allowed 48 patients per month to receive eye surgery, which is helping to significantly reduce the waiting list.
- A new wound clinic was opened at the hospital in December to give wound patients specialised care and reduce the pressure on the Emergency Department. The clinic also reduces the waiting time for these patients who no longer have to wait in the Emergency Department while other patients with more serious injuries or illnesses are treated first. The clinic will eventually be relocated to the Devonport Community Health Centre and is expected to treat approximately 5,000 patients per year.
- A specialised sub-acute unit was opened last week to assist with the rehabilitation of patients in a controlled and fun environment. The unit is helping to maximise a person’s function and independence in the hospital by engaging a multidisciplinary team, including nurses and allied health staff, to work with patients. With the rehabilitation program lasting four to six weeks per patient, it’s expected more than 50 people per year will benefit from the new unit.
- A new state-of-the-art virtual rounds system is allowing high dependency patients at the Mersey to receive specialist bedside consultation without having to be transferred to the North West Regional Hospital in Burnie. The VirtualRounds telemedicine system uses high speed broadband and real time video to put specialists from the NWRH in the Mersey’s

High Dependency Unit. Approximately 750 people a year are treated in the Mersey's High Dependency Unit. The system is improving regional care for these patients through sophisticated technology by breaking down geographic boundaries and distance. It also provides teaching and training opportunities for medical students and clinical staff.

- Five new nurses have been appointed in the Department of Emergency and a significant amount of new equipment purchased. Emergency now has four new specialised monitors for cardiac patients to enhance monitoring capabilities as well as a new infant resuscitator to provide best practice in the care and resuscitation of babies. In 2007/08 there were 22,853 presentations to the Department of Emergency.

- The High Dependency Unit now has three additional specialised nursing staff thanks to a hospital-run post graduate course. Because of the difficulty attracting nurses to such a specialised area, the hospital started the program to 'grow their own' HDU nurses.

- The hospital's Education Department has significantly strengthened and grown. The hospital now has six Clinical Nurse Educators, a Professional Development/Graduate Coordinator and a Staff Development/Clinical Education Coordinator. The expansion of higher level education practitioners is improving training outcomes for students and new staff by increasing access to expert advice.

Ms Giddings said the service improvements, which have been implemented by the North West Area Health Service, are in line with the Tasmanian Health Plan and proof the system is working.

"It's very encouraging to see the Mersey going from strength to strength and I applaud Jane Holden and her team for working so hard to improve services for patients through the implementation of the Health Plan."

Questions of Greens Donations Must Be Answered

Attorney General Lara Giddings has called on the Tasmanian Greens to answer serious questions about the party's fund raising activities.

Ms Giddings said a story in the *Herald Sun* (10/03/2009) (full text below) raised major concerns about the transparency and integrity of the Greens' political donations.

This story raises many serious and unanswered questions and they deserve thorough and proper investigation," Ms Giddings said.

"Greens leader Nick McKim now needs to meet the same level of transparency that he demands of everyone else but which his own party so often fails to meet.

"I know political staff can be very loyal, but it seems a bit much for a political staffer to donate \$45,000 to their political party - let alone an interstate one.

"Similarly, local environmental groups are very dedicated but again I have never heard of an interstate group donating these sorts of funds to another political party," Ms Giddings said.

Ms Giddings called on Mr McKim to clarify:

1. Who or what is Gladneys and what is the connection between this entity that operates from a vacant bush block in NSW and the Tasmanian Greens?
2. Has any other funding come to the Tasmanian Greens in this unusual manner?
3. What does Mr McKim know about this matter?
4. Have, as the story claims, "the names of donors to the Greens been disguised."

The full story reads:

Tens of thousands of dollars in political donations to the Greens appear to have come directly out of the wilderness, according to documents lodged with the Australian Electoral Commission.

The second-largest donation to the Tasmanian Greens last year came from a trust, Gladneys Pty Ltd, which according to the AEC has its registered office in 530 Little Collins St, Melbourne.

However, Gladneys operates its principal business from a vacant piece of bush-land at Elands, 85km inland from Port Macquarie on the north coast of NSW.

The \$45,000 donation raises questions over whether the names of donors to the Greens have been disguised.

Disguising the names of political donors is not uncommon. However the Greens have been highly critical of these sorts of arrangements.

Trust directors include Susie Russell, 52, a Greens candidate and staffer to NSW Greens MLA Ian Cohen. Another director is Greg Hall, 58, secretary to the North Coast Environment Council.

The Herald Sun attempted to contact directors of Gladneys without response.

Funding Welcome for Public Housing Upgrades

The Minister for Human Services, Lin Thorp welcomes the Australian Government's investment of \$9 million into the upgrade of Tasmania's existing public housing stock.

The Hon Tanya Plibersek has agreed to provide \$9 million to Tasmania for the refurbishment of existing public housing that is currently unsuitable for occupancy.

This is a terrific opportunity for Housing Tasmania to make much-needed improvements to its existing public housing stock.

A number of our public rental properties are sitting vacant because they are just too run down. The new money will mean that these houses can be renovated and made available to low-income Tasmanians from mid 2009 onwards.

The extra funding will allow us to make our public housing safer and more comfortable for people to live in, and will add to our overall supply of public housing.

Up to 40 three bedroom family homes across rural and regional Tasmania will be fully renovated, and 20 of these will be ready for occupancy prior to June.

At the same time, 32 one and two-bedroom units will also be renovated.

Further maintenance projects will include improvements to Aboriginal housing and retro-fitting energy-efficiency features into 350 homes in the areas of Bridgewater, Gagebrook, Clarendonvale, Ravenswood and Shorewell.

The \$9 million is the result of a State Government funding application under the national economic stimulus package - just one of a number of good things to come from this initiative.

The national economic stimulus package has the potential to provide additional funding of up to \$150 million to Tasmania over the next three and a half years to increase the quality and supply of social housing.

Access to safe and stable housing allows people to participate in work, education and training and has lasting impacts upon the health and wellbeing of communities.

Pharmacists Enlist for Tobacco Fight

Health Minister Lara Giddings welcomes the enlistment of a new army of recruits to help fight addiction to tobacco in Tasmania.

Ms Giddings has launched a new State Government funded campaign - including a new TV advertisement - to promote community pharmacies as an option for advice and support for Tasmanians trying to give up smoking.

One of the objectives of Tasmania's Health Plan was to make smoking cessation advice a routine part of health care, particularly for health professionals who are in regular contact with smokers.

The involvement of pharmacies in promoting smoking cessation is an important step towards reducing the high smoking rates in Tasmania.

Community pharmacies are well respected and accessible across the State and more than 90% of the Tasmanian population has access to a community pharmacy within 20 kilometres of their home.

Ms Giddings said as a result of the 2007 smoking cessation review the Government had provided \$2.7 million over four years in last year's Budget to enable smokers to have better access to a range of interventions and supports to help them quit.

This has included additional funds - some \$200,000 a year - for social marketing campaigns to educate the public about the dangers of smoking and to promote the range of options for giving up.

This funding initiative through this campaign is a partnership between the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, the Pharmacy Guild and Quit Tasmania.

Ms Giddings said the pharmacy TV advertisement would go to air from Monday 9 March and would be screened in conjunction with another campaign being conducted by Quit Tasmania.

"The Quit campaign, called 'Everybody Knows', presents a sequence of scenes from campaigns over the past decade showing the range of diseases caused by smoking.

"The Quit campaign will further reinforce the pharmacy message by finishing with the tag line of 'Call the Quitline, talk to your GP or pharmacist'.

Ms Giddings said in addition to the TV ad the community pharmacy campaign was also providing training to pharmacists and pharmacy assistants across the State to ensure the advice they provide to smokers is both accurate and consistent.

More than 300 pharmacists and pharmacy assistants across Tasmania have already received the training.

"Pharmacies will also be encouraged to refer smokers to the Quitline for additional support with their efforts to give up.

Further Drought Assistance Package

The impacts of the persisting drought in parts of Tasmania are being tackled with an additional suite of measures to assist affected communities.

Tasmanian Drought Taskforce has provided advice to Government on extending existing support and the introduction of new assistance measures.

Even if the global financial crisis places limits on what can be offered, it remains appropriate to expect support for both communities and individual enterprises suffering from the prolonged dry conditions.

These measures focus primarily on helping with the community impact of the drought, and extend assistance through to the end of June.

Business-related support and continuation of the community and social support packages will be developed as part of the budget process in line with the commitments of the Premier during the State of the State address.

Drought Package summary:

Small grants program – CWA:

- The Country Women's Association will receive an additional \$100,000 to continue its distribution of small grants to households in need. The grants can be used to pay family bills such as power, clothing, school and similar expenses and will be a welcome supplement to Centrelink benefits. Already, \$115,000 has been provided to the CWA for these grants since May 2008.

Community events and forums – TFGA:

- The Drought Task Force highlighted the benefit of community-based events, especially those which linked people with service-providers offering support. A number of successful events were held on Flinders Island and in the Midlands over the past year. The Drought Network will work to identify opportunities and areas for the events, and the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association will receive \$100,000 to organise and run them.

Rural Financial Counselling (RFC) and Rural Alive and Well (RAW):

- Considerable suffering results from the prolonged impact of the drought on household finances and personal well-being. RAW will receive a further \$50,000 in addition to the \$165,000 already provided, enabling it to extend its mental health work to the East coast. RFC will be supported with a further \$45,000 in recognition that the need for its services is continuing. This is in addition to the \$115,000 already provided.

Flinders Island Water Monitoring:

- Flinders Island farmers are heavily dependent on groundwater resources for essential farming needs. There are concerns that these resources have been drawn down because of the drought. DPIW and the Flinders Council will work together on a groundwater assessment of the island. \$80,000 has been allocated for this purpose.

Flinders Freight Equalisation Scheme

- The Commonwealth's Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme largely offsets the costs of transport to and from Flinders Island. However, real differences exist between the cost of primary production on Flinders Island and equivalent production costs on mainland Tasmania. \$100,000 will be offered during the first half of calendar year 2009 to assist with the cost of transporting feed to the island, so that this cost is no more than for a similar road distance within mainland Tasmania.

Further support will be offered through loan funds by extending the Tasmanian Industry Support Scheme to allow eligible farmers access to capital for restocking or re-pasturing if they have been denied funds from mainstream financial institutions.

These three individual business assistance measures will be administered through the Department of Economic Development and Tourism.

Government Acts to Protect Renters

The State Government was committed to ensuring the speedy return of renters' bonds through the Rental Deposit Authority.

The Rental Deposit Authority, which is set to start 1 July 2009, will then hold all rental bonds and deal with claims at the end of the lease.

At the beginning of a rental agreement, tenants are usually required to give a bond to their landlord. Under the new system, tenants will give their bonds to Service Tasmania, their real estate agent, or their community housing organisation who will transfer them to the RDA.

The RDA addresses an imbalance felt by some tenants where the landlord has held the purse strings on a tenant's bond when a lease has ended," Ms Singh said. Since the RDA will already be holding bonds, the time taken for returning tenants' hard-earned rental deposits to them at the end of a lease should be greatly reduced.

The Residential Tenancy Commissioner will continue to deal with disputes about housing agreements. If a tenant believes they have been unfairly treated, they can ask the Commissioner to intervene.

There will be a significant public awareness campaign in the lead up to the establishment of the Rental Deposit Authority so that tenants and landlords were informed about the changes. .

For current disputes about bonds, the Residential Tenancy Commissioner can be contacted on 1300 654 499.

Liberals Kowtow to Greens Over Tarkine Tourist Road

Labor Member for Braddon Bryan Green has said Liberal Leader Will Hodgman had betrayed the Circular Head region by flirting with the Tasmanian Greens to try to stop the development of the Tarkine Tourist Road.

"Mr Hodgman is putting politics and his own misguided political aspirations ahead of the interests of the Circular Head region," Mr Green said.

"This is a capitulation to the Greens and we can expect a lot more of it in the lead up to the next election as Mr Hodgman sets his sights on a Liberal-Green hung parliament that will cripple Tasmania's economy."

"Mr Hodgman lacks the ticker to lead in his own right and kowtowing to the Greens on this issue is clear evidence that he cannot make the tough decisions."

Mr Green said it was further evidence a coalition with the Greens would spell disaster for Tasmania's economy and jobs.

"The economic stimulus in terms of jobs during the construction phase and the boost to tourism from the Tarkine road would be lost."

Mr Green called on Braddon Liberals Brett Whiteley and Jeremy Rockliff to stand up and convince Mr Hodgman of the importance of the Tarkine Tourist Road for tourism growth and employment in Circular Head.

"Mr Whiteley and Mr Rockliff must know this is a real slap in the face to the community and tourist operators in the region."

Mr Green said the Government was committed to achieving maximum benefits from the Tarkine Tourist Road.

"I am confident there will be opportunities in the future to build on tourism infrastructure throughout the region when the road is completed," Mr Green said.+

Amalgamation To Streamline Planning System

The Minister for Planning, David Llewellyn, announced the establishment of the new Tasmanian Planning Commission in Tasmania signals a more dynamic and responsive planning system for the state.

“The amalgamation of the Resource Planning and Development Commission with the government’s own planning resources into a single entity like the Tasmanian Planning Commission enables us to provide significant efficiencies both in policy development and response times,” Mr Llewellyn said.

“The initiative announced by the Premier for a new assessment process for major projects or ‘projects of regional significance’ will enable larger development proposals to receive planning assessments in significantly less time.

“I call on the Liberal opposition to abandon its weak, negative position of opposing for the sake of opposing, and to support this important initiative.

“We are moving forward, and we are moving forward responsibly.

“It is important to recognise that combining the Land Use Planning Branch with the RPDC will not alter the statutory responsibilities currently exercised by the RPDC.

“We will be legislating to ensure that the existing independent functions of the RPDC are carried over to the new Tasmanian Planning Commission.

“The steering committee that carried out the planning review recommended that the Government needed to take a more pro-active approach to planning, particularly the coordination of future growth patterns and infrastructure.

“The committee recommended that a single authoritative voice on planning and a critical mass of planning resources was required.

“You simply cannot plan for the diverse range of eventualities that keep confronting us under the fragmented system we have at the moment,” Mr Llewellyn said.

Mr Llewellyn said that to ensure Government responsibilities are coordinated and form part of future planning decision making, it is proposed that key government agencies be represented on the new Tasmanian Planning Commission.

“These appointments will not be at the expense of existing (RPDC) members.

“The government proposes that projects of regional significance will be able to be ‘called-in’ by the Planning Minister and sent for assessment to expert panels.

“Particular projects would have to pass a criteria test before they could be ‘called-in’, and I will be consulting with local government on that issue in coming weeks.

“Following an assessment of projects of regional significance there would be no appeals, given that the assessment has been undertaken by a panel of experts.

“There would be public consultation conducted by the expert panels as part of their assessment process.

“The reform package also includes a range of other initiatives involving changes to the convoluted processes we have for making state policies and planning directives and projects of regional significance.

“The changes proposed complement the significant work already occurring statewide where regional planning initiatives are underway, and when completed will form the basis of new planning schemes for each council in those regions.

“The planning reforms are a not only a significant response to establishing a contemporary planning system.

“In view of the current economic climate, the reforms proposed are now both essential and urgent,” Mr Llewellyn said.

New Era for Public Transport in Tasmania

The Minister for Infrastructure, Graeme Sturges announced Tasmania was embarking on a new era in public transport that will better connect communities and make it an increasingly popular and relevant travelling option for all Tasmanians.

Mr Sturges said a key to ensuring Tasmania's public transport system delivered for the travelling public was ensuring its efficient operation.

"A smart ticketing system will have enormous benefits for our public transport system.

"It will facilitate bus operators working together to provide integrated timetables, simplifying travel arrangements for bus users.

"This step will allow for seamless bus travel across the State, meaning that passengers can use just one ticket when they start a trip and smoothly interchange to another bus from another operator to get to their destination.

"One of the exciting outcomes of this technology is that bus users will be able to get a SMS text message on their mobile phone telling them when their bus is due, allowing them to arrive at their bus stops knowing their bus is just a minute away."

Mr Sturges said this technology represented an investment in transport infrastructure that went well beyond just building roads.

"Through innovative solutions and the latest technology, the State Government is helping Tasmanians travel conveniently and efficiently.

"This will help people get to and from work, into and around their communities, and connect communities all over the State."

"We are ensuring our road network is used more and more effectively, and by investing in environmentally friendly buses, taking action on bus priority measures, Tasmania will become a showcase of what can be achieved by an innovative and caring society," Mr Sturges said.

Tasmania Records Strong Economic Growth

The Tasmanian economy was one of the fastest growing economies in the nation in the December quarter, data released today by the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows.

The Treasurer, Michael Aird, said state final demand increased by 0.8 per cent in the December quarter 2008 in real, trend terms.

"This was the third highest increase in quarterly growth, behind only the Northern Territory and Western Australia," Mr Aird said.

"Tasmania's rate of economic growth from this time last year was 6.5 per cent, second behind the Northern Territory.

"Consumers showed confidence in the economy with spending strong and up by 0.9 per cent in the quarter to a record high \$3.2 billion."

Mr Aird said Tasmania's quarterly growth in private investment was the third strongest in December 2008, behind only the Northern Territory and the ACT.

"Private investment in the Tasmanian economy increased by 2.3 per cent in the December quarter to be at the record high of \$1.24 billion, a massive 23.3 per cent above the level recorded in the December quarter 2007."

“These figures continue the run of very strong economic data where Tasmania has outperformed the nation.

“But the impacts of the global financial crisis are being felt and we are not immune.

“However, as the Premier outlined in his State of the State address yesterday, the Government will continue to do all it can to invest in job creating infrastructure to fight the effects of the crisis.

Audit Exemption for Community Groups

Community groups now have the option of applying for an exemption from audit requirements announced by Minister for Corrections and Consumer Protection, Lisa Singh.

“Our clubs, societies and associations connect community members together and provide opportunities to participate in education, sport and recreation.”

Ms Singh said that many incorporated associations dreaded the end of the financial year, because they were obliged to have their accounts audited by a professional accountant no matter what their revenue.

“After conducting a review, Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading has found previous audit requirements were particularly onerous for some small associations,” Ms Singh said.

“Many community groups have very little revenue, and an audit can be an enormous cost and worry.”

Ms Singh said that many community organisations had been discouraged from becoming incorporated by these requirements.

“Incorporation can provide many benefits to community organisations, such as limiting the liability of individual members and opening up access to a range of grants.

Associations with less than \$40,000 revenue and less than \$40,000 in assets will now be able to apply for an exemption from the audit requirement. Associations must still be accountable, and an audit may be requested by members.

“I encourage community groups to take advantage of this exemption and to not let audit requirements deter them from incorporation.”

Enquiries regarding this matter can be directed to Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading on 6233 3450.

Don River Rail to Keep on Rolling

The Premier has announced more than \$180,000 in State Government funding to preserve an important piece of Tasmania’s railway heritage.

Mr Bartlett said \$183,840 would be provided to Don River Railway to repair carriages and locomotives and maintain them in good operating condition.

“I want the State Government to pitch in to support groups like this to preserve our heritage and enhance our visitor appeal as a state,” Mr Bartlett said.

“Tasmania’s rail history has the potential to become one of our great tourist drawcards and I want to invest in helping groups like Van Diemen Light Railway Society to keep operating.

“This funding will help facilitate the return of Don River Railway’s popular steam train trips, which have great visitor appeal and potential.

“There are also benefits for the local community through added leisure options and jobs protected through these maintenance works are another measure to help secure the local economy.”

Mr Bartlett said the State Government funding would help Don River Railway once again undertake charter services on the main rail line.

“I am very keen to look at ways we can coordinate the great services offered by various volunteer rail groups around Tasmania because I believe there is real potential to showcase their work,” he said.

“This will have the dual benefits of celebrating our rail heritage, boosting tourism and supporting our economy in a time of global economic uncertainty.”

Queenstown to be Base for New LINC Service

Queenstown has been announced as one of five locations around Tasmania to be selected for the State Government’s new \$14.9 million regional Learning and Information Network Centres (LINC) program.

Announcing the decision in Queenstown, Premier David Bartlett said the entire West Coast region would enjoy significant short and long-term benefits from establishing a LINC facility that would ‘connect up’ a range of State Government services under one roof.

“The Queenstown LINC will integrate community education and training programs, library facilities and community services in a ‘one-stop shop’ for the local community,” the Premier said.

“It will include Service Tasmania services and create a service precinct that will make it quicker and easier to complete transactions as well as seek advice.”

The State Government and West Coast Council are aiming to have the Queenstown LINC up and running by early 2010.

Mr Bartlett congratulated West Coast Council for quickly recognising the benefits a LINC would provide and for enthusiastically supporting the concept.

He said the construction project would support the local economy and help in a small way to insulate the region against the impacts of the global financial crisis.

“I have often said that in the current economic environment, it is better for us as a state government to invest in 100 \$1 million projects rather than pin our hopes on a single \$100 million development,” the Premier said.

“This is because by supporting smaller, local projects and by working with progressive councils like here on the West Coast, we can get the money out the door quicker to fill private sector order books and protect Tasmanian jobs.

“Apart from providing the ongoing benefit of convenience to the West Coast community, the Queenstown LINC will be another project that helps stimulate local economic activity in the short-term while we ride out the impacts of the global financial uncertainty.”

“They will make it easier for people to access information and government services and lifelong learning opportunities,” Mr Bartlett said.

“Tasmania’s future depends on information, knowledge and connected communities that embrace lifelong learning and the Queenstown LINC will help set the scene for the future of the region.

“By forging these links we can help build a clever, kind, connected and knowledge-based society.

“The Queenstown LINC fits neatly with the Government’s aim to keep Tasmanians learning throughout their lives.

“I hope the new Queenstown centre will offer life-changing experiences.”

Shoddy Research Again Undermines Lib RHH Plan

Health Minister Lara Giddings said the Liberals’ amateurish approach to planning a new Royal Hobart Hospital had been exposed once again.

Ms Giddings said Mr Whiteley had cited examples of hospital redevelopments in Australia and overseas to support his plan.

But closer analysis showed his examples either undermined or completely contradicted his claims, and one was 23 years out of date.

“Last year Mr Whiteley was exposed for basing his costings on a library book, doing his research via Google, and drawing his plans on the back of an envelope,” Ms Giddings said.

“Now Mr Whiteley has again been on Google so we checked the links he provided and once again his shoddy research has been exposed.

“If Whiteley reads carefully the internet sites he refers to he’d find:

- Royal North Shore has blown out in cost by \$250 million in just 16-months – a 35% rise from \$702m in November 2007 to \$950m in February 2009;
- Sydney Northern Beaches is described as ‘a virtually greenfield site’, with its advantages including less disruption than ‘if the hospital was being constructed on an existing hospital site’;
- building a new seven-storey building at Liverpool Hospital and refurbishing others is costing not the \$296m he claims but \$390m, and that on a 15.5 hectare site - some seven times bigger than the constricted RHH site and hardly comparable;
- Great Ormond Street Hospital will take eight years to redevelop and its internet site says ‘we have planned for years towards this’ as it is ‘the biggest logistical and financial challenge that the hospital has ever faced’ – yet Mr Whiteley claims his new RHH could be planned in one year and built in three;
- Ysbyty Glan Clwyd is still in a two year service planning process that will include an Outline Business Case and a Full Business Case – that’s double the time Mr Whiteley is allowing, and it’s far too early to judge whether the project will be a success; and
- the New York article the Liberals refer to is dated November 7 1986 – hardly an example of modern hospital construction.

“Mr Whiteley needs to stop trying to fool Tasmanians into thinking a new RHH can be planned and built quickly on the cheap.

“He clearly hasn’t learned that building a new hospital is a complex and specialised process that can require years of detailed work and is never the ‘quick and dirty’ process he apparently favours.

“Proper service planning is required based on sound expert advice.

Rail Investment Helping the Economy

The Minister for Infrastructure, Graeme Sturges announced millions of dollars being invested by the State Government to upgrade Tasmania's rail infrastructure was also helping the local economy.

Mr Sturges said the State Government had spent \$6.26 million on rail maintenance activities to date.

"These works are underpinning employment in regional Tasmania during a time of global economic uncertainty.

"This investment is ensuring that contractors' order books stay full and they can provide valuable employment to Tasmanians."

Mr Sturges said in addition to the State Government's ongoing investment, \$20.77 million of Australian Government funds has been spent on capital works projects.

"The capital works program will be undertaken over a seven-year period.

"This will restore the track to its previous standard when it reliably carried greater volumes of traffic.

"The initial focus of the capital works program is the safety and reliability of the track infrastructure.

"A \$30 million project, which started in January, involves the replacement of 20 kilometres of rail and 140,000 sleepers.

"This contract has seen the employment of 67 people in the north of the State by local firm Van Ek Construction.

"It demonstrates how the investment in rail projects is not only improving the State's rail network, but providing employment and helping the economy."

Mr Sturges said bridge works had been completed on the Leven River Bridge (\$300,000) and Emu River Bridge (\$120,000).

He said the replacement of the Jordan River Bridge (\$1.5 million) is nearing completion, with the main civil works now concluded.

"A project to upgrade 67 level crossings across the Tasmanian rail network will begin this month at a total cost of \$4.4 million.

Empowering Local Communities and Increasing Access to Services

Premier David Bartlett has taken a major step towards ensuring all Tasmanians have equal access to vital services, training and employment opportunities.

In his State of the State address, the Premier said addressing transport needs was the key to Tasmania becoming more socially inclusive.

"With that goal firmly in mind today I am proud to announce the establishment of the Tasmanian Community Transport Trust.

"Through this trust, every Tasmanian community will be able to apply for a vehicle by establishing their ongoing capacity to support its management and use in the community."

The Trust will improve transport services for remote communities, including a trial of the use of wheelchair accessible taxis in remote areas.

“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.”

Mr Bartlett said the Tasmanian Community Transport Trust was only one component of his 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. This Government will ensure services are where they are needed most.”

"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."

The Premier also had good news for community organisations who provide a helping hand to the most disadvantaged.

“The Government will commit \$1 million 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.”

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 through the Global Financial Crisis,” Mr Bartlett said.

Celebrate Tasmania Day

Premier David Bartlett announced the Government would designate a Sunday every November to celebrate what it means to be Tasmanian.

“I have visited every corner of Tasmania as Premier over the last few months, and the abiding sentiment that I hear is that people are pleased that they live in Tasmania.

“Our way of life is something to celebrate and our sense of community pride is something to nurture.

“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,” Mr Bartlett said.

“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 these 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 potato 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 Bartlett said he also wanted to make sure we can encourage the next generation of volunteers to get involved in their local communities and give for the greater good.

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

Bay of Fires National Park

The Premier added strength to the Government’s environmental credentials announcing an intention to establish the Bay of Fires National Park.

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

“Our conservation record is very strong. Every Marine Protected Area and every National Park in Tasmania bar one, has been established under a Labor Government – I am proud continue this long established tradition of responsible conservation.

“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.

“Part of this process will be to ensure appropriate management structures are put in place.”

Mr Bartlett also acknowledged Tasmania as a haven for a diverse range of fauna and flora and the need to support endangered species such as the swift parrot, whose habitat is concentrated within 10kms of coastline in certain parts of the state.

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

“I am pleased to announce today a five year program of re-planting along coastal areas, at the rate of 500 hectares per year.”

Minister for the Environment Michelle O’Byrne said research indicated that plantings of blue-gums along cleared parts of the coastline could create significant new areas of foraging habitat within 10 years.

“This is not only a good example of responsible forest management, but of how we can work together to create and protect the habitat of endangered species in this State.”

The Government will also enter a partnership with Conservation Volunteers Australia.

“The Tasmanian Islands’ project will see restorative and maintenance work on small Tasmanian islands. The islands that will be considered for work under this partnership include Tasman Island, Maatsayker Island, Breaksea Island, Bonnet Island, Hunter Island, Three Hummock Island and Waterhouse Island,” Ms O’Byrne said.

Tasmania to Train Australia’s Top Chefs and Farmers

Premier David Bartlett has highlighted Tasmania’s potential to become a place of innovation. He also explained how an investment in enhancing skills could result in an enhanced reputation for quality products and food tourism.

In his State of the State address to parliament, the Premier said his vision for innovation stretched from crops in the field through to quality food on restaurant tables.

“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, I am convinced Tasmanian agri-business will lead an economic recovery in this State and entrench it for the future.

“ I can announce we will work with the University of Tasmania and other stakeholders, such as the TFGA, 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 such a university course.

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

“That is why we will also establish Australia’s leading institute for high-end chefs.

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

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

To demonstrate local culinary possibilities, Mr Bartlett announced Brand Tasmania will run an 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.”

Aggressive Plan for Action for 2009

Premier David Bartlett today delivered his first State of the State address to parliament. Mr Bartlett said he was outlining an ongoing stimulus package that would deliver on-the-ground action across Tasmania.

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

The Global Financial Crisis was identified as the ‘greatest challenge of 2009’ however the Premier said there were some good reasons to be optimistic 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.

“Labor has produced ten budget surpluses. This strong economic management shows we have the ability to make the sound judgements to keep Tasmania moving forward.”

The economy was the major theme, topics touched on included education and skills, innovation, planning reforms, the Tasmanian brand, telecommunications, low emissions intelligent transport, social inclusion, health, public housing, tourism, celebrating Tasmania, climate change, the environment, parliamentary reform and trust in democracy.

Major announcements included:

- Low cost loans for farmers who invest in irrigation infrastructure
- Planning reforms

- An intention to establish a Bay of Fires National Park
- Establishment of a Tasmanian Culinary School of Excellence
- Creation of a top flight farm management course
- Water infrastructure timelines
- Conversion of Metro's bus fleet to bio-diesel fuel
- A Community Transport Trust to improve transport services for remote communities and low income earners
- Locations announced for community based LINC's and Family and Child Centres
- Plans to develop Oatlands into a heritage destination equal to Port Arthur and Richmond
- Support for volunteers and;
- Creation of an annual Celebrate Tasmania Day.

Mr Bartlett said he had no doubt that Tasmania's best days still lie ahead.

"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 taking this State into the next decade with confidence and with vision for tomorrow."

"I am looking forward to a year of action as part of the ten year vision that this new Government has for our State," he said.

Continued Investment in Infrastructure

Premier David Bartlett has said the Government would continue its strategy of investing in job creating infrastructure projects to see Tasmania through the affects of the Global Financial Crisis.

In his State of the State address, the Premier said Labor had built up the strongest Government finances in Tasmanian history with ten budget surpluses.

"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."

The Premier has 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 project is making a difference in local communities.

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

Mr Bartlett said the Government will continue to invest in towns and communities across Tasmania in the coming months.

“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.

“Capital investment expenditure in 2008-09 will be 39 per cent more than the previous year, increasing to an average of 50 per cent over the forward estimates.

“The way that Tasmania can fight the effects of the 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.”

Minister for Infrastructure Graeme Sturges has confirmed 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 \$500 million for transport projects and an expanded State Government commitment, Tasmania will be well placed to meet future challenges and growth in our economy.”

Mr Sturges said the State Government was also determined to invest in public transport.

“We need to move to a new and smarter era of public transport that sees all Tasmanians as potential customers.

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

“Through Metro Tasmania, the State Government has introduced 12 clean, energy efficient Euro 5 buses, with another six on order.

“Also five new state-of-the-art hybrid diesel-electric buses will be introduced.

“The Premier has announced today that the remainder of Metro Tasmania’s existing bus fleet will be converted to bio-diesel during the next 12 months.”

Mr Sturges said along with setting new environmental standards for the State’s public transport system, passengers will also benefit from innovative technology making buses easier and more efficient to use.

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

“Bus priority measures will also be developed along the Brooker Hwy this year, and the Southern Outlet bus lane will be further extended along Macquarie St.

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

“These measures will deliver a modern public transport system for all Tasmanians,” Mr Sturges said.

New Therapeutic Support Services for Children and Young People

The Minister for Human Services, Lin Thorp has announced that the Tasmanian Government will join with the Australian Childhood Foundation to fund a \$1.8 million therapeutic intervention service for children and young people involved with child protection services.

Ms Thorp said the Government would provide \$1.65 million over three years towards the program, with the remainder to come in cash and in kind from the Australian Childhood Foundation.

“This is a major step forward for both the Australian Childhood Foundation and more importantly for the children and young people involved with child protection services in Tasmania,” she said.

“The new service for children and young people will operate across the State, giving them improved access to professional assessments and tailored therapeutic interventions.

“Young people in rostered care will be a priority group for the new service because we know that these young people require specialist interventions.

“These children need therapeutic interventions to make a difference.”

Ms Thorp said the new service would also provide intensive support and training for both carers and staff who are working with children in care.

“It will develop a body of knowledge on the complex needs of children and young people who are damaged as a consequence of abuse and family violence,” he said.

“Research on the negative impact of trauma during early childhood on brain development and the capacity for children to form new attachments is now clear.”

“It recognises that specialist counselling and support is essential in order to assist children recover from the devastating impact of abuse and violence in their lives.

“The establishment of Tasmania’s first ever dedicated service for children who have experienced abuse is a significant outcome achieved by the Tasmanian Government in its aim to strengthen responses to the state’s most vulnerable children,” he said.

Ms Thorp said the new therapeutic intervention service would also provide a strong platform for the reform of child protection services over the next three years.

“The reforms will result in major changes to the provision of out of home care services over the next three years.

“Although the reforms will make a positive difference for children and young people in State care, they will take time to fully implement.

“The new therapeutic intervention service will have an immediate impact.”

Greens’ Irresponsible Energy Policy

The Minister for Energy and Resources, David Llewellyn, has warned Tasmanians of the economic dangers of the Greens’ energy policies.

“The Greens’ commitment to 100 per cent renewable energy and a 40 per cent cut in emissions by 2020 will devastate heavy industry and cost thousands of jobs,” Mr Llewellyn said.

“The media should ask the Green Premier in waiting what he intends to do with the new \$360 million Tamar Valley power station.

“People should also consider what the future will be for Basslink under the Greens with their plans to focus on household power generation.”

Mr Llewellyn reminded Tasmanians that despite paying lip service to renewable energy, the Greens had opposed wind farms on the West Coast and in the North East.

“Tasmania is currently facing pressure on electricity supply due to reduced storages supporting hydro-electric generation. As at 2 June 2008, storages were at 17.5 per cent of capacity, following several years of drought.

“As a result of these low storage levels, electricity is currently being imported across Basslink, with 291 gigawatt hours being imported during the month of April, compared with less than a gigawatt hour being exported.”

During the same month, 106 gigawatt hours were generated by the Bell Bay gas-fired power station, as shown in Hydro Tasmania’s statement of 2 May 2008. Hydro-electric generation contributed 487 gigawatt hours, and wind 25 gigawatt hours.

“In relation to scale, in order to displace the 291 gigawatt hours imported over Basslink during April 2008, and on the basis of a household installation of 3 kilowatt capacity generating an average of 10.5 kilowatt hours per day, there would need to be over 900,000 household solar pv installations.

“At an average cost in the vicinity of \$30,000 per household installation, there would need to be an investment in the order of \$27 billion to replace the electricity imported over Basslink for the relevant period.

“On a more realistic basis, if every household in Tasmania were to have a 3 kilowatt installation, the cost would still be in the order of \$4.5 billion, with capability to displace only one sixth of the import capacity over Basslink.

“The Liberals have shown their willingness to roll over for the Greens on the Tarkine and it is now time for them to distance themselves from the lazy, extremist mish-mash that passes as a Greens’ energy policy.”

Funding for Five Tasmanian trade Training Centres

Premier and Minister for Education and Skills, David Bartlett, has welcomed the Australian Government’s announcement that it will fund five Trade Training Centres in Tasmania.

Mr Bartlett said the Tasmanian centres would receive funding of up to \$20.8 million under the program.

“These centres are an important element of the Australian Government’s Education Revolution and will provide training and help address skills shortages across a range of areas including building and construction trades, automotive, electrical, metal trades, rural, hairdressing, and forestry,” Mr Bartlett said.

“The five centres are the result of collaboration between local schools, the Tasmanian Polytechnic and Skills Tasmania with support from industry, communities and Local Government.

“I want our local communities to be connected to each other and to Government services.

“We need to embed Government services as part of community life.

“That’s why the State Government has committed to building five new Learning and Information Network Centres around Tasmania and up to 30 Child and Family Centres.”

Mr Bartlett said the Tasmanian Polytechnic and Tasmanian Academy were giving young people access to a range of quality education and training pathways.

“These Trade Training Centres will ensure that the range of pathways will be extended, providing greater opportunities for our young people, no matter where they live,” Mr Bartlett said.

The successful trade training centres are:

Bridgewater Regional Trade Training Centre (lead organisation: Tasmanian Polytechnic – Claremont Campus, and Bridgewater High, Campania District High, Glenora District High, New Norfolk High, Oatlands District High).

Dorset Trade Training Centre (lead organisation: Tasmanian Polytechnic – Newstead Campus, and Scottsdale High, Winnaleah District High).

George Town Trade Training Centre (lead organisation: Tasmanian Polytechnic – Thynes campus, and Port Dalrymple School, Star of the Sea College).

Southern Tasmanian Catholic Colleges' Trade Training Centre (lead organisation: Guildford Young College, and Dominic College, Mackillop College, Mount Carmel College, Sacred Heart College, St James' College, St Mary's College, St Virgil's College).

North-West Hair and Beauty Trade Training Centre (lead organisation: St Brendan Shaw College).

Tourism Driving Tasmania's Economy

The Minister for Tourism, Michelle O'Byrne, has said the State Government was committed to investing in the tourism sector which was continuing to deliver economic benefits to Tasmania.

"Tourism dollars flow throughout our regional economies, and support jobs not just in hospitality, but across all other sectors.

"Bringing people to our State injects money into our towns and cities, creating investment and employment opportunities.

"The most recent figures show tourism directly contributes 4.7 per cent to Gross State Product and supports about 6 per cent of total Tasmanian employment.

"During the past decade, we have seen strong tourism growth in Tasmania, and this will continue to be supported by the State Government into the future.

Ms O'Byrne said destination marketing was pivotal in giving confidence to the tourism industry.

"Projects like the Doherty family's new \$30 million Inner Collins development, which got underway last week, is just one example of the industry's commitment to new tourism experiences and confidence in our future.

"These investments are another important factor in keeping Tasmania's economy moving, demonstrating that the benefits of a strong tourism industry go well beyond simply bringing tourism dollars into the State."

Ms O'Byrne said the State Government's plans to establish the Bay of Fires National Park, would provide a further opportunity to highlight and develop the natural attractions for which Tasmania is internationally renowned.

"With the Bay of Fires already named the number one place to visit in 2009 by Lonely Planet, the State Government will commence the statutory process required to declare a new national park.

"This builds on our efforts to ensure visitors to the Bay of Fires already enjoy a quality experience, having invested \$150,000 to develop an interpretation site.

"Tasmania's strong tourism performance in the past 10 years clearly demonstrates the strength of the State Government's tourism plan, which is a plan that recognises the critical relationship between effective marketing, improved air and sea access to our State, and high quality experiences that exceed visitors' expectations," Ms O'Byrne said.

Trade Training Quarantines to be Lifted

The State Government has committed to giving Tasmanian apprentices a greater choice of training providers from 2010.

Premier and Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Bartlett has confirmed that the user choice policy will be amended so that all trade training quarantines are lifted on a staged basis.

“The user choice policy, adopted by state and Australian governments in 1998 to apply to all publicly-funded training apprentices and trainees, acknowledges that choice of registered training organisations (RTOs) may be restricted in rural and remote areas,” Mr Bartlett said.

“In Tasmania, this means that in a number of traditional trades, the Tasmanian Skills Institute is the only publicly-funded RTO offering such training.

“These exclusions apply in relation to all Certificate II, III and IV qualifications in the automotive, metal trades, agriculture, furniture (hard sector) and building and construction.”

Mr Bartlett said that providing Tasmanians with more diverse choices was a key priority for the State Government.

“I want to create opportunities for Tasmanians who have missed out in the past because the education system has not provided the choices to get them excited about their own future,” Mr Bartlett said.

“Through the new Tasmanian Academy, Polytechnic and Skills Institute, we’re delivering a better range of new and continuing education and skills opportunities to Tasmanian children and families in a growing economy.”

Mr Bartlett said that RTOs contracted to provide trade training would be subject to ongoing monitoring and audit against quality standards.

“I am confident that the quality of trade training in Tasmania will continue to be of the highest standard so that the opportunities for all Tasmanians to gain skills will be increased.”



Low Cost Loans to Grow Agri-business

Premier David Bartlett announced farmers investing in irrigation infrastructure will receive access to low-interest loans. The scheme is part of the Government’s innovation push to establish Tasmania as the food bowl of the nation.

In his State of the State address to parliament the Premier said the Government would reactivate 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 position Tasmanian farmers to make the most out of the massive irrigation projects the government is implementing.

“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, I am convinced 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.

“Water is the essential ingredient and that is why the State Government is rolling out irrigation infrastructure projects around Tasmania worth a total of \$400 million.”

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

“Construction for the Whitemore irrigation scheme will commence in September,” Mr Bartlett said.

Minister for Primary Industries and Water David Llewellyn confirmed that in coming years 200,000 new hectares will be under irrigation.

“This is an investment not just in water and crops, but in the communities they support. This is about preserving rural townships.

“Tasmania has the potential to become the food bowl for the rest of the nation and significantly contribute to Australia’s food security for years to come,” he said.

Work already completed on Tasmania’s first ever Innovation Strategy suggests that strategic investment now in irrigation and food production will lead to a doubling or more of the totality of Tasmania’s current export base.

“We are taking action in order to see that vision realised,” Mr Bartlett said.

Liberals’ \$48m Public Dental Cavity

Health Minister Lara Giddings has said Tasmanians should be outraged at the Liberal Party’s long-running war of attrition against attempts to improve the State’s dental services.

Ms Giddings said the Liberals’ refusal to support Labor’s Commonwealth Dental Health Program had denied Tasmania access to \$10.6 million in federal funding for public dental services.

“This \$10.6 million would provide 30,000 additional occasions of service to address the oral health needs of the neediest people in Tasmania,” Ms Giddings said.

“It is appalling to see Tasmanian Liberal Senators wilfully voting against this support.

“And it is even more galling to see Liberal members of the Tasmanian Parliament endorsing this callous treatment of vulnerable Tasmanians by their total silence on the issue.”

Ms Giddings said Tasmanian Liberals had an appalling record on dental care.

“They stood by and did nothing when the Howard Government axed the previous Commonwealth Dental Health Program in 1996.

“That decision cost Tasmanians \$37.4 million in Commonwealth funding over the life of the Howard Government.

“The Liberals tried to camouflage their disgraceful dental record through the Howard Government’s completely ineffective chronic disease dental program.

“That was such an abject failure that in the four years to last July just three Tasmanians under 20 were able to access any help at all.

“While Tasmania has 3% of Australia’s concession card holders, Tasmanians have received just 0.3% of benefits.

“The new scheme proposed by the Rudd Government would deliver 38 times the benefit to Tasmanians of the failed Liberal plan.

“Yet Tasmania’s Liberal Senators continue to refuse to support repeated attempts by the Rudd Government to introduce meaningful reform and real benefits to Tasmanians doing it tough in these difficult economic times.

“Mr Hodgman needs to show some leadership and put the interests of Tasmanians ahead of the dictates of his party bosses in Canberra,” Ms Giddings said.

Government Committed to Tarkine Tourist Road

The State Government is firmly committed to the Tarkine Tourist Road and today condemned as misguided and politically-motivated the Tasmanian Liberals' and Greens' campaign to stop the project.

What we are seeing from Jeremy Rockliff and Cassy O'Connor is hyper rhetoric as they try to outdo each other in opposing the full tourist loop road.

It wouldn't be surprising now if Mr Rockliff supported the Greens call for the Tarkine to become a national park.

This would not only destroy jobs but threaten a way of life that has existed for generations in the Circular Head region.

Bryan Green said he was disappointed by Mr Rockliff's attempts to demonise Forestry Tasmania in the way the Tasmanian Greens are renowned for doing.

"Mr Rockliff has lost the plot by joining with the Greens and trying to undermine Forestry Tasmania over its Tarkine Tourist Drive proposal."

Mr Green said Forestry Tasmania had endeavoured a number of times to provide Mr Rockliff with a full briefing on its proposal but he would not return its calls.

"How can Mr Rockliff know what he is talking about if he has no understanding of the Tarkine Tourist Road proposal?"

"Mr Rockliff prefers to deal with the Tarkine National Coalition and a small number of business interests associated with it who want a monopoly on the Tarkine."

Mr Green said the Tarkine National Coalition is a front group for the Tasmanian Greens and called on Mr Rockliff to distance himself from the organisation.

"Is Mr Rockliff aware the Coalition's chief campaigner is prominent North-West Green Scott Jordan who is currently conducting an on-line 'Save the Tarkine' campaign urging people to join, donate or volunteer to the Tarkine National Coalition."

"Mr Jordan stood for the Greens at the last State and Federal elections and through his campaign with the Tarkine National Coalition is urging people to make tax deductible donations to the group."

Mr Green called on Rockliff to reveal what discussions he has had with the Tarkine National Coalition or a group it convened known as the Tarkine Business Coalition in preparation of the State Liberals plan for the Tarkine.

He also called on Mr Rockliff to release the State Liberals' business case and supporting data for its proposal."

"The full loop road is clearly the best option which is supported by independent expert consultants commissioned to assess the tourist potential of the Tarkine Road."

"What the full tourism loop road is about is creating an iconic tourism destination for the North-West Coast and Mr Rockliff has lost sight of what is in the best interests of the electorate in his attempts to play politics with the project," Mr Green said.

Liberals Fail to Support Regional Communities

The Treasurer, Michael Aird, says the Liberal Party has again been exposed for being lazy and failing to support regional Tasmanian communities.

Mr Aird said he was surprised that Liberal frontbencher Peter Gutwein had asked questions in Parliament about guidelines for the \$25 million Urban Renewal and Heritage Fund.

“Mr Gutwein asked about the guidelines for the fund when he could have gone to the Treasury website and found them himself,” Mr Aird said.

“They are there for everyone to see and understand that, under the guidelines, all applications for funding are assessed in accordance with the Infrastructure Funds Protocol.

“The Auditor-General was consulted in the course of the development of the guidelines.

“Under the protocol Ministers make applications for funding.

“The applications are assessed independently by the Department of Treasury and Finance, who make recommendations to me.

“Under this Fund community infrastructure projects can be funded, including local government, community groups or not for profit projects.

“It is quite clear that the Liberal Party does not want to support regional communities where even a small amount of funding can make a real difference.

“I challenge Mr Gutwein to explain which regional projects he would not fund and explain why he wants to withhold funds to important community projects.”

Tasmania’s Unemployment Rate Below National Average

Tasmania’s unemployment rate has remained below the national average, ABS figures released today show.

The Treasurer, Michael Aird, said Tasmania's unemployment rate for February was 4.6 per cent in trend terms, well below the Australian average trend rate of 4.9 per cent and lower than New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

“Despite the softening in the labour market over the past six months in the wake of the global financial crisis, the number of Tasmanians with jobs is still 7 800 people higher than in February 2008,” Mr Aird said.

“Since January 1999, employment in Tasmania has risen by around 46,100 people or 23.8 per cent.

“The Government is doing everything it can to support the economy through these difficult and challenging times.

“The Government is continuing to invest in job creating infrastructure, as outlined by the Premier in the State of State address.

“Will Hodgman and the Liberals opposed these and other benefits flowing to Tasmanians under the Commonwealth's \$42 billion economic stimulus package.

“No doubt they will also be silent on this good economic news.

“All the Liberal Party do is talk down our economy and damage consumer and business confidence.

“Unlike the Liberals, I am very confident about Tasmania's future and strongly believe our best years are ahead of us.”

Supporting the Early Years

New Child and Family Centres will complement the State Government’s existing early years initiatives, announced by the Premier and Minister for Education and Skills, David Bartlett.

Mr Bartlett said both initiatives aimed to support families and give the youngest Tasmanians the best start in life.

“Child and Family Centres are a groundbreaking investment in the wellbeing of Tasmanian children.

“They will bring together key services that make the most difference in the early years of a child’s life, providing a one-stop shop for children and their families within the heart of their local community,” Mr Bartlett said.

The State Government has committed up to \$90 million to build up to 30 Child and Family Centres state-wide.

Construction on the first eight centres will commence this year and located at Risdon Cove, Clarendon Vale, Ravenswood, Chigwell, George Town, East Devonport, Beaconsfield and Queenstown.

“These multi-service centres will offer a range of possible services based on community need which could include health, education and care services for children from birth to school age as well as support for parents.

“Child and Family Centres complement the \$12.6 million Launching into Learning program which helps schools support young children and their families before children formally start school.

“Establishing positive relationships with families prior to school will support children’s smooth transition into school and promote strong partnerships throughout the years of schooling.

“Participating Launching into Learning schools not only work in partnership with families, they are also making strong links to services and agencies to build on what is already available in the local community.

New Reforms to Help Protect Tasmanians from Bushfires

Tasmania will consider changes to planning and construction standards to help protect Tasmanians from the tragedy of bushfire, the Premier David Bartlett announced.

“The tragedy of the Victorian bushfires has shocked all Australians and all Tasmanians”, Mr Bartlett said.

“Even as our thoughts are with Victorians as they now begin to rebuild their lives and communities, we need to make sure in Tasmania that we are doing everything we can to protect this State from further Bushfire tragedy.

“I have asked my department to urgently prepare a report on a package of changes that can help to strengthen Tasmania’s bushfire readiness.”

The three main reforms to be considered are:

- 1) To define by regulation which parts of Tasmania should be considered a “bushfire prone area”. This would make them subject to relevant components of the Australian Standard for Construction of Buildings in Bushfire Prone Areas;
- 2) To implement a uniform approach to considering the risk of bushfires in all planning schemes throughout the State by creating a draft Standard Bushfire Schedule that the RPDC can consider for State-wide application; and
- 3) Strategies to streamline the bushfire management planning process to ensure that it does not unnecessarily hold up the development approvals process.

“My department will hold urgent consultations with Local Government and with bodies like the HIA and the building industry to then provide a report for Cabinet on how these three things can be implemented”, Mr Bartlett said.

“Our overriding obligation here is to protect the safety of Tasmanians – which we will do – but to do so in such a way as to minimise any extra costs for home builders.

“The emphasis here needs to be on having strong, uniform bushfire standards right across Tasmania.

“Longer term, we will of course also consider future changes based on the findings of the Victorian Royal Commission into the fires.

“Bushfires are a tragic part of life in Australia in summer, but I want to make sure that we are as ready as we can be to prevent the kind of tragedy we have recently witnessed interstate.”

Distribution Initiative Taking Tasmania to the World

The Minister for Tourism, Michelle O’Byrne, has announced that Tourism Tasmania was responding to rapid changes in consumer behaviour and online technologies by broadening the way it distributes Tasmania to the world.

Tas e-Connect is an initiative developed by Tourism Tasmania to give Tasmanian tourism operators big and small, the means to connect their products and experiences with consumers across the world.

Tas e-Connect is about creating more opportunities for Tasmania to be purchased online and in real time by growing the number of distributors taking Tasmanian product to market and increasing the number of tourism businesses participating in these programs.

Using an open booking exchange technology, Tas e-Connect allows consumers to search and book their Tasmanian holiday online in a seamless and efficient process.

Tasmania is among the first states in Australia to fully implement the Open Booking Exchange solution and make it live for its tourism industry.

The open booking exchange allows operators to present consumers with real time availability and rates, to take bookings and transact payment instantly online – all the time.

The introduction of this new technology will reduce the back of house costs for our operators and dramatically improve their cash flows – something that is vital to small business in any industry.”

Tas e-Connect was part of Tourism Tasmania’s broader, long-term strategy to support and build the distribution capacity of tourism operators and maximise benefits to the Tasmanian tourism industry as a whole.

We are competing in a totally new environment today – the Tasmanian tourism industry and consumer demands are becoming extremely sophisticated.

“In order to remain competitive in this new tourism world, we must adapt the way we do business, and this means broadening the way we distribute tourism product and experiences to the world. Tas e-Connect is a very important part of this progression.

Tourism Tasmania is implementing an on-going learning and development program to help the industry to become e-commerce enabled and to get the competitive edge online.

Tas e-Connect is a big step forward to ensuring that Tasmanian tourism product is accessible anywhere, anytime that consumers are searching for holiday inspiration.

Working in partnership on this latest initiative, we will ensure that Tasmania not only remains ‘top-of-mind’ with consumers across the globe, but they will be able to easily close the sale on their interest and book their holiday online.

Record Tasmanian Visitor Numbers

Tasmania has bucked the national trend of a softening domestic travel climate, and posted strong visitor growth in 2008.

The latest Tasmanian Visitor Survey figures for the 2008 calendar year, show that visitor numbers were up nine per cent, visitor nights were up five per cent and expenditure levels were up 12 per cent compared with 2007 – all to record levels.

These results signal a strong performance by Tasmania, particularly in light of the global financial challenges that unfolded during September 2008.

In contrast to Tasmania's positive performance, domestic overnight travel activity at the national level was weaker in 2008 according to the National Visitor Survey results also released today.

At a national level, domestic overnight trips fell by four per cent, visitor nights declined by six per cent and the overnight spend grew by two per cent.

The TVS shows that 897,100 people visited Tasmania on scheduled air and sea services in 2008, and when cruise ship visitors are included, this number climbs to more than nine hundred thousand people coming to Tasmania. In addition, expenditure in Tasmania grew to \$1.48 billion.

Tasmania also continued to perform strongly as a leisure destination with growth in holiday visitors up 16 per cent and those visiting friends and relatives up 11 per cent.

In addition to the increased number of visitors last year, Tasmania also enjoyed an increase in national advertising awareness, according to the Roy Morgan Research Holiday Tracking Survey for the December 2008 quarter.

The survey showed that almost 17 per cent of the interstate population were aware of Tasmania's tourism advertising, without any prompting. The only other State to achieve a positive growth for the quarter was New South Wales with just over 12 per cent.

This is a strong endorsement for the State Government's commitment to Tasmania's tourism industry through Tourism Tasmania's innovative marketing strategy.

While the latest figures are a positive sign for Tasmanian tourism, prevailing global economic conditions mean this is a challenging and volatile time for Australia's tourism industry.

We would be naïve to think Tasmania will not be impacted by these global market conditions, but the figures show we are heading into this difficult period in a relatively strong position and are well-placed to ride out the challenges ahead.

\$5.2m Smithton Hospital Redevelopment Open

Premier David Bartlett and Health Minister Lara Giddings have opened a \$5.2 million redevelopment of the Smithton District Hospital and Community Health Centre.

Mr Bartlett said the redevelopment would allow comprehensive, accessible and integrated health services to be delivered to the Circular Head region.

"This is an excellent outcome for local residents and further good news for health services in the North West," Mr Bartlett said.

"The Tasmanian Government, in partnership with the Commonwealth and the community, has now invested over \$14 million in the past two years into health and aged care services in the Circular Head region.

"This includes the \$8 million aged care home in Smithton - Emmerton Park - which opened in April last year.

"The new hospital will cater for the needs of the whole community by bringing together a number of important services, including Oral Health and Child Health and Parenting Services.

"I am committed to leading a government for all Tasmanians and this significant investment is part of a major upgrade and modernisation of regional health facilities and infrastructure around the State," Mr Bartlett said.

Ms Giddings said the redevelopment was crucial to the integration of local health services in line with Tasmania's Health Plan.

"This is exactly what the Health Plan is about – providing a full range of sustainable services locally where possible to cater for the growing needs of our ageing population and to boost primary and preventative health services," Ms Giddings said.

"People's medical needs are often complex, so by integrating services we increase accessibility and improve health outcomes.

"Four additional consulting rooms for visiting services like Physiotherapy, Allied Health and Mental Health have been created as well as a spacious meeting facility for education and community use.

"The redevelopment has also included upgrading existing in-patient facilities and relocating 22 aged care beds to Emmerton Park, to which the State Government contributed \$1 million.

"I congratulate the project team including Architects Philp Lighton, Stubbs Construction and numerous sub-contractors for their professionalism and for minimising disruption to patients during construction.

"I would also like to commend staff, patients and the community for their flexibility, support and patience during the redevelopment.

"Circular Head has for a long time been one of the leaders in promoting better health for the local community, with initiatives like the Sustainable Families Project showing the way for other areas of the State" said Ms Giddings.

Adolescent Drinking – Delay Delay Delay!

The National Health and Medical Research Council advise that not drinking is the safest option for adolescents aged 15 to 17 years.

The recently released Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol advise that where drinking does occur, it should be under parental supervision and within the adult guideline for low-risk drinking (ie. no more than two standard drinks a day).

Adrian Reynolds, Clinical Director for Tasmania's Alcohol and Drug services said that it was important that parents realise that the guidelines are not stating that two standard drinks per day is safe or low risk for adolescents.

"The developing brain of an adolescent or young adult is more vulnerable to damage than the adult brain," Dr Reynolds said.

"There is evidence that adolescents who drink two standard drinks a day on a regular basis are at serious risk of alcohol-related injury as well a range of other health harms."

Dr Reynolds does not believe that parents should introduce or supply alcohol to children and adolescents.

"There is evidence that even a sip may reshape drinking pathways and increase the rates of underage drinking and chances of alcohol problems in adulthood," Dr Reynolds said.

Early uptake of drinking may also increase chances of use of other drugs.

Alcohol currently poses the single greatest threat to young people's health and safety in Australia.

“This seriously contradicts our present social acceptance of adolescent drinking and present social norms”, said Dr Reynolds.

“Parents have strong influence on children’s drinking practices as does the commercial world,” Dr Reynolds said.

Alcohol and tobacco are Tasmania’s biggest drug problems in terms of net health and economic and social impacts.

“These problems are common in the community and they are usually accompanied by other significant human problems that can include financial struggles, marital problems, partner violence, child abuse and neglect as well as increased exposure to crime,” he said.

Veterans’ Advisory Group Established

The Minister for Infrastructure, Graeme Sturges, has announced the establishment of a veterans’ advisory group to strengthen the role of ex-servicemen and women in the community.

Mr Sturges said the State Government was acting on a proposal put forward by the RSL.

“Tasmania’s veteran community is ageing, and as a consequence, their needs are changing.

“This advisory group will make for strong a meaningful dialogue between the veteran community and the State Government.”

“It will keep the Government connected to veterans and advise on a wide range of issues affecting the veteran community, as well as providing a body for the Government to consult with on other issues of relevance.”

Mr Sturges said the advisory group would play a key role in raising issues relevant to the ongoing commemoration of Tasmania’s military legacy.

“There is an increasing community interest, particularly among young people, in our military history and the service of our veterans.

“It is an immense credit to the RSL that commemorations such as Anzac Day are becoming more and more popular and relevant to the understanding of our country’s history.

“The preservation of this important legacy rests with our younger generation, and this new advisory body will ensure we continue to foster this interest.”

New Housing on the Way for Low Income Earners in Tasmania’s Rural and Remote Areas

The Minister for Human Services, Lin Thorp, announced that more than \$1.5 million will go towards the creation of social housing for low income earners living in rural and remote areas of Tasmania.

Ms Thorp said the funding will help build new residences for over 55 year olds on low to moderate incomes in Tasmania’s south east, the Derwent Valley, King Island and Sheffield. Importantly, the new residences will form part of the State Government’s plan to increase affordable housing.

The unique and important element of this year’s funding round is that it was targeted towards over 55 year olds living in rural and remote areas.

Over 55 year olds can often be forgotten, however the State Government is determined that all groups in our community are considered when it comes to providing affordable housing.

This program is also a wonderful example of what can be achieved when both tiers of Government and the community sector work to achieve a collective goal.

The funding and details of the successful applicants were as follows:

- \$625,000 to STEPS Ltd to construct six cottages for over 55 year olds on low to moderate incomes in Nubeena/Dunally and Orford/Triabunna. STEPS will incorporate age friendly features in the cottages like level access and wider than normal doorways.
- \$250,000 to Tandara Lodge Community Care to construct two units for over 55 year olds on low to moderate incomes in Sheffield. The units will be built on vacant land adjacent to Dyer Court. Tandara already manages 36 units on this site, four of which have been funded through previous Community Housing Program funds,
- \$248,000 to King Island Council towards the construction of two units for over 55 years old on low to moderate incomes in Currie. The King Island Council proposes to build the units on a site at Snodgrass Park, bringing the total number of units on the site to 21. The units will have wheelchair access, wet room bathrooms and non-slip vinyl floor and grab rails.
- \$400,000 to Salvation Army Property Trust towards the construction of three units for over 55 year olds on low to moderate incomes in New Norfolk. The new units will be targeted towards older people who are financially disadvantaged or socially excluded.

Ms Thorp said this joint Federal/State initiative will form part of the State Government's plan to increase affordable housing and demonstrates this Government is getting on with the job of providing the necessary social housing required in this State.

Ms Thorp said Tasmanians should continue to expect more announcements and achievements when it comes to social and affordable housing over the coming months and years.

Road Safety Levy Builds Safer Tasmanian Roads

The Minister for Infrastructure, Graeme Sturges, has said the Road Safety Levy was allowing the State Government to build safer infrastructure and save lives on our roads.

Mr Sturges said that the road safety levy was introduced on 1 December 2007 to provide extra funding for road safety initiatives under the Tasmanian Road Safety Strategy.

"The levy is applied directly to road safety initiatives that have been identified through research and expert advice as most likely to reduce the level of serious casualty crashes."

Mr Sturges said key initiatives funded by the levy included:

- Installation of 21.5 km of Flexible Safety Barrier on Tasmania's major highways and arterial roads (at an average cost of \$120,000 per kilometre).
- Dollar-for-dollar funding for councils to undertake traffic calming treatments in shared urban spaces.
- The roll out of Electronic Speed Limit Signs at schools. A total of 700 signs are due to be installed at around 240 schools across the State by 2011 (a \$6 million investment).
- Installation of motorcycle safety infrastructure, including 'stack cushions' and 'rub rail'.
- Demonstration and trial of safer default rural travel speeds in Kingborough and Tasman Municipalities.

- Reforms to the Novice Driver Licensing System focused on creating safer young road users. This year will see the extension of the minimum learner period from 6 to 12 months, an increased focus on the importance of supervised driving hours and a second practical assessment.
- New mandatory safety standards for the Government vehicle fleet which, in turn, enables the Tasmanian community to purchase second hand fleet vehicles that benefit from additional safety features.
- A public education campaign on choosing safer vehicles.
- A trial of innovative technologies: a wet weather warning system at Constitution Hill; vehicle activated signs at Mount Pleasant interchange; and alcohol interlocks.

“The road safety levy gives us extra funding we need to make our roads as safe as possible for all Tasmanians,” he said.

Mr Sturges said that a lot had been achieved in the first year of the Levy and that there would continue to be a delivery of major projects.

“Unfortunately, 2009 has already seen a tragic loss of lives on Tasmanian roads.

“The State Government, through the levy, will continue to do all it can to build safer roads, but every road user has a role to play in road safety.

“Too many people are still not taking their responsibility to be safe on the road seriously enough, and it is costing lives.

“Every life lost leaves behind shattered families, friends and communities.

“As I have done many times before, I call on all Tasmanians to do their part and drive safely for their own sake and that of other road users,” Mr Sturges said.

For further information on your road safety levy at work go to www.transport.tas.gov.au to get a copy of the First Year Progress Report.

Questions Raised Over Liberals Fundraising

Member for Braddon Bryan Green has revealed in State Parliament MP Brett Whiteley’s involvement in a Liberal fundraising strategy that involved preying on an 80-year-old pensioner.

Mr Green produced an 80th birthday card Mr Whiteley had recently sent to a Burnie woman who had never had any contact with him, his office or anyone in the Liberal movement.

The card was followed soon after by a letter from Liberal state headquarters seeking a donation from the widowed pensioner to fund the Liberals’ state election campaign.

“This is a cold and calculated sting on a vulnerable pensioner,” Mr Green said.

“Mr Whiteley set the trap with a birthday card to a woman he didn’t even know and then State Liberal boss Sam McQuestin attempted to close the deal with a letter hitting her up for a donation.

“Talk about cynical and manipulative. The Liberals should apologise to this lady and to any other unsuspecting Tasmanians they have pestered for money.

“To hit on the less well-off and vulnerable in our community in this way is wrong.”

“The predatory manner in which the Liberal Party is trying to get money out of pensioners for its election campaign is shameful.”

Mr Green called on Liberal Leader Will Hodgman to immediately refund money raised from any unsuspecting donors.

“It is acceptable to ask someone for their vote but to solicit money in this way crosses the line.”

“If Mr Hodgman is aware of or has sanctioned Mr Whiteley’s scheme, it raises serious questions over the way the Liberals operate.”

Cataracts Lead New Surgery Drive

Health Minister Lara Giddings has announced a \$2 million program to remove cataracts from the eyes of an additional 1,002 Tasmanian patients by the end of August, clearing long wait cases from the list.

The cataract surgery surge would spearhead a drive to clear long-wait cases from elective surgery waiting lists, complementing the elective surgery improvement program already in place.

“This is Tasmania’s Health Plan in action, and as Fred Hollows said, the gift of sight is the gift of life,” Ms Giddings said.

“The \$2 million cataract surgery program will enable the completion of an additional 437 cataract procedures through the Royal Hobart Hospital, 325 through the Launceston General and 240 in the North West.

“The RHH will deliver the additional procedures by increasing the volume of surgery contracted through private hospitals as well as within the hospital.

“The North West Area Health Service is increasing the number of cataract sessions at the Mersey Community Hospital to provide an extra 20 cases a week for 12 weeks.”

Ms Giddings said the additional 1,002 procedures would remove all long-wait cases from the cataract surgery waiting list and significantly reduce the extent of the list overall.

“The aim is to not only reduce the cataract waiting list, but to keep it down.

“With our ageing population it would not be possible to eliminate the waiting list completely, but the ability to see with clarity is vital to the capacity to enjoy life and to reduce the risk of falls and the need for further surgery.

“We want to see the list as low as possible and the wait for surgery as short as possible.”

Ms Giddings said the State Government was committed to keep working with the State’s hospitals to make inroads into the numbers of Tasmanians waiting longer than clinically recommended for their operation.

“The treatment of emergency and urgent cases will continue to be the number one priority for all of our hospitals.

“What’s needed is continued improvement in the capacity to provide less urgent elective surgery within appropriate time frames.

“Last year our hospitals increased the total number of elective surgery admissions by 15% to almost 16,000.

“That included more than 2,000 additional cases funded from the Tasmanian Elective Surgery Improvement Plan and the Commonwealth Elective Surgery Initiative across a wide range of surgical procedures.

“However, while the additional surgery was targeted at long-wait cases, at the end of February there were still 2,501 Tasmanians on elective surgery waiting lists who had been waiting for surgery longer than a year.

“That is outside the clinically-recommended time frame and the Department has been working with the hospitals on a strategy to by the end of this year offer an operation to as many as possible of these long-wait patients who are ready for care.

“That does not mean everyone who has waited longer than 12 months will be offered an operation because there will always be some patients who are clinically assessed as not ready for surgery - because for instance they may require further management of a pre-existing condition.

“As with the cataract surgery initiative, the long-wait program will not be a one-off.

“It is our goal to ensure that no Tasmanian patient assessed as ready for care has to wait longer than 365 days for an operation.”