



May 2009

Assistance Package for Disability Sector

The Minister for Human Services, Lin Thorp, announced that the State Government would provide an assistance package of around \$7 million per annum to the Disability Services sector.

Ms Thorp said it will help employers meet their commitment to lift wages in a recently ratified industrial agreement.

“The Tasmanian Government values the role that the 1500 hard-working disability support workers play and this financial assistance shows that we understand the challenges they face as some of the lowest paid workers in the State,” Ms Thorp said.

“The pay issue has been a difficult matter for Government to consider, especially in light of the tough economic times we are experiencing.

“However, without this support, the disability sector would face even further hardship, potentially leaving some of our most vulnerable citizens without the support and care they require. This was not an acceptable outcome to me.”

Ms Thorp said the Government recognised the need for the disability sector to be able to attract and maintain appropriately skilled and qualified staff.

Ms Thorp said the pay rise would take effect from 1 July.

“About \$7 million extra per year will go into the pay packets of Tasmanian disability support workers as a result of this decision,” she said.

“The Tasmanian Government will continue to make a significant investment in disability services because we believe in the need for our most vulnerable to be supported to live active, productive lives and to engage in their communities in positive ways.

“The significant reforms of Disability Services going on will mean the non-government sector will have an even greater role in service delivery in the future.

“These reforms are strengthened by the sector being able to attract suitably skilled workers and this assistance package supplementation will contribute to achieving this aim.”

Student Enrolment Figures reveal a Positive Start

Results are in for student numbers in Tasmania’s new Post Year 10 education system, and figures show a positive start.

Premier and Minister for Education & Skills, David Bartlett congratulated the Tasmanian Polytechnic and the Tasmanian Academy on enrolment numbers which indicate a strong basis for future growth.

Mr Bartlett said the most positive sign was an indication of increased retention rates amongst young students.

“Overall numbers of traditional Year 11 and 12 students are encouragingly up across all regions; with the biggest increases occurring at the Hellyer Campus in the North West and the Hobart Campus in the South.”

Student numbers have increased 12 per cent across previous college Polytechnic and Academy campuses state-wide, from 3,470 in 2008 to 3,888 in 2009.

And the post-Easter attrition rate of 0.5 per cent across all campuses is very low compared to previous years.

“Easter is traditionally a time of decrease in student numbers as some reconsider options, obtain employment or drop out.

“Such a low rate compared to previous years indicates the new system is working; student engagement and retention rates are up, and this is what we are aiming for,” Ms McLennan, CEO of the Tasmanian Polytechnic said.

At present, the split of students between the Tasmanian Academy and the Tasmanian Polytechnic in the traditional Year 11/12 cohort is approximately 57 per cent to 43 per cent.

“Given the Academy is the more traditional option in the new system, this is not a surprise,” Ms McLennan said.

“However, the Polytechnic has been established to provide Tasmania with a new, fresh and innovative approach to applied education; and this figure is very encouraging.

“It will only get stronger with time.”

Enrolment data also indicates that the new system is supporting an increased number of students through flexible learning with an additional 120 enrolments this year.

“This is particularly encouraging given one of our main aims is to increase both Academy and Polytechnic education outcomes in rural and isolated areas; and also facilitate learning for those who can not make it to a campus,” Mike Brakey, CEO of the Tasmanian Academy said.

“More students are able to engage with education through our flexible and tailored learning systems.”

Figures are also strong amongst the Polytechnic’s mature-aged students – which make up around 80 per cent of all Polytechnic students.

As at the end of April, the Polytechnic has enrolled 68 per cent of its target for 2009; which is up from TAFE Tasmania’s figure of 57 per cent at the same time last year.

At the end of April 2009 the number of students in the Polytechnic and Academy state-wide stands as follows:

The Tasmanian Academy: 1,925 students.

The Tasmanian Polytechnic: 9,392 students (7,919 from previous TAFE campuses; and 1,473 from previous college campuses).

International student numbers total 96, and students engaged in flexible learning total 394.

Housing Efforts Reaps Rewards for Tasmania

Australian and Tasmanian Government efforts to increase the supply of social and affordable housing in Tasmania are beginning to reap rewards.

The Tasmanian Government is advertising 16 properties for sale in southern Tasmania under the first release of its Quick Build Affordable Home Ownership Program, with a further 34 to go onto the market across Tasmania.

A call for expressions of interest has been issued providing Not-For-Profit Housing Organisations with the opportunity to contribute to the reform of Tasmania's social housing system under the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan.

Quick Build properties will provide a fantastic opportunity for home buyers who have been struggling to enter the real estate market to finally own their own home.

These properties will be available for sale under the Tasmanian Government's affordable home ownership programs, HomeShare and Streets Ahead. Interested buyers will enter a ballot for the chance to purchase a property.

For HomeShare buyers, the Director of Housing will share up to 25% of the cost of these Quick Build properties for up to 15 years, providing home buyers will a lower initial purchase cost and significant savings on mortgage repayments.

Alternatively, under Street Ahead eligible home buyers can receive to \$6,000 deposit assistance and up to \$1,000 towards mortgage insurance and legal costs to help them buy a Quick Build.

Together with the Australian Government's first home buyer's boost, these programs will make home ownership affordable for the first time for as many as 50 Tasmanian families."

Under the National Partnership Agreement on the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan, Tasmania has committed to the delivery of a significant number of reforms to the social housing system.

These reforms will require the involvement of suitable Not-For-Profit Housing Organisations that can achieve the scale and capacity to drive growth in the future supply of social and affordable housing.

The Tasmanian Government's Housing Innovations Unit is seeking expressions of interest from eligible Not-For-Profit Housing Organisations that wish to submit proposals which can support and contribute to meeting the reforms."

For further details on both announcements visit the Department of Health and Human Services' website at www.dhhs.tas.gov.au.

McKim Must Condemn Illegal Protests

The Labor Member for Franklin, Daniel Hulme, has called on Nick McKim the leader of the Greens to condemn the action of illegal protesters in the Upper Florentine Valley.

Mr Hulme said that Nick McKim should stop sitting on the fence when it comes to illegal protests.

"McKim must condemn all illegal protests by activists, not pick and choose which laws he supports.

"The illegal protesting that is going on the Upper Florentine is putting the lives of Forestry Tasmania staff, contractors and that of other protesters at risk and I utterly condemn all action that places peoples' lives in danger.

"Nick McKim should do the same otherwise he sends a message to the protesters that this sort action is supported by the Greens party.

"It was horrendous to hear that the Styx was booby trapped with three wires strung between two trees without any warning.

Mr Hulme said that everybody had the right to protest safely and legally about things they cared passionately for, but the actions being carried out in the Upper Florentine were illegal and extremely dangerous to the Forestry Tasmania staff and contractors.

"I can't believe that Nick McKim would want anyone to get hurt, so I am calling on him to stand up and draw his own squiggle in the sand, and situate himself within law that he is governed by.

"Illegal is illegal, no matter what you passionately care about.

Tasmanian Schools Secure First Round Stimulus Funding

Premier David Bartlett welcomes the Australian Government's announcement that 51 Tasmanian schools have secured infrastructure funding in round one of Primary Schools for the 21st Century, a key element of the Australian Government's \$14.7 billion Building the Education Revolution.

Mr Bartlett joined Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard in touring one of the successful schools - Blackmans Bay Primary in the state's south - said that 35 Government schools, 10 Catholic schools and 6 Independent schools had secured funding.

"I'm delighted that a total of 51 school communities around the state are going to benefit from projects under the first round of Primary Schools for the 21st Century," Mr Bartlett said.

"These projects range from \$850,000 to \$3 million, totalling more than \$99 million.

"They include 11 multi-purpose hall refurbishments, 15 new gymnasiums or multi-purpose halls, two new performing arts centres, six school library refurbishments, and 17 projects relating to the construction of new classrooms or upgrade of existing classrooms.

"Building the Education Revolution is the greatest school modernisation program in Tasmanian history and is a critical component of the Australian Government's Nation Building – Economic Stimulus Plan, giving our schools the facilities they so richly deserve."

Mr Bartlett said that all projects funded in the first round must start construction by June 2009 and be completed by December 2010.

"I'd like to commend the successful school communities for working together to achieve what will be an outstanding educational outcome for their students.

"They really have seized an opportunity to significantly improve their school for children in their communities."

To view the list of successful Tasmanian schools, visit www.deewr.gov.au

New Protocol for Judicial Appointments

Attorney General Lara Giddings has released a new protocol for judicial appointments in Tasmania.

Ms Giddings said improving the process for judicial appointments was a key part of the Premier's 10 point plan to restore public confidence in democracy and the State's political processes.

"The new approach has been developed after extensive consultation with key stakeholders and I am confident it will lead to a more transparent and thorough process for judicial appointments," Ms Giddings said.

"I have had discussions with representatives of the legal profession and judicial officers as well as providing key stakeholders an opportunity to provide formal written feedback.

"We have also taken into account the recommendations of the Select Committee on Public Sector Executive Appointments.

"This protocol will ensure that public confidence in the appointment of judicial officers is maintained.

"The new protocol strengthens and enhances the previous appointment protocol released last year, and includes:

- local and national advertisement of vacancies except in exceptional circumstances;
- assessment of candidates against published selection criteria;

- a three-person assessment panel with representation from the legal profession to assess expressions of interest and provide advice to the Attorney-General on candidates;
- capacity for the Attorney-General to seek the views of stakeholders in the legal profession;
- due diligence and criminal history checks prior to appointment; and
- continuation of the practice of Cabinet considering the Attorney General's recommendation prior to submission to Executive Council.

"The views of the Opposition parties will also be sought on potential nominees.

"The new protocol will apply to all future appointments, however we have already been following the draft protocol since my appointment as Attorney General, and each magisterial appointment that I have made has closely followed this process.

Ms Giddings said the stakeholders consulted in the development of the new process included the judiciary, Opposition spokespersons and the legal profession.

"While stakeholders expressed different views on some of the detail of the protocol there was very strong support for the key principles designed to achieve transparency.

Ms Giddings said significant progress had been made on a range of initiatives under the Premier's 10 point plan.

"I recently released a directions paper that recommends a major change in direction for our Freedom of Information laws and we are close to finalising a directions paper to allow consultation on the State's whistleblower legislation.

"The Treasurer released the Governance Framework Guide and the Corporate Governance Principles for GBEs last year.

"The Government looks forward to receiving the advice of the Joint Standing Committee on Ethical conduct in relation to the establishment of an Ethics Commission which is ideally placed to provide advice on Codes of Conduct for Members of Parliament and staff.

"I look forward to making further announcements as these and other initiatives progress," Ms Giddings said.

The protocol is available at www.justice.tas.gov.au

Water and Sewerage Concessions

The Treasurer, Michael Aird, has said the draft policy on the new concessions framework for the water and sewerage sector was now publicly available.

Mr Aird said the Government committed to introducing new concessions legislation as part of the water and sewerage reforms to provide guaranteed support to low income customers.

Under the draft Community Service Obligation (CSO) legislation, the new concession for water and sewerage services will be a minimum of \$130 per eligible customer per household.

This is higher than the amount of the implied concession received under the existing Pensioner Rate Remissions Scheme and will increase over time under an indexation arrangement.

The eligibility criteria are the same as for electricity and include the holders of a Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card and those who hold a Department of Veterans' Affairs Repatriation Gold Card.

Under these criteria, approximately 73 500 customers will be eligible for the concession.

This means thousands of new customers will now be eligible for a concession for water and sewerage.

The concession will be administered by the water and sewerage Corporations, which are also required to develop a hardship policy to assist disadvantaged customers.

It is appropriate that Councils, who receive a return from their ownership in the water and sewerage assets, fund the concession.

This is the same model used for State Government funding of electricity concessions through its ownership of the electricity businesses.

The State Government will continue to support the Pensioner Rate Remissions Scheme in relation to those services that remain with councils."

Subject to the public consultation and parliamentary approval, the legislation is expected to come into effect on 1 July 2009.

The draft CSO legislation and information sheet is available on the Department of Treasury and Finance website at www.treasury.tas.gov.au.

Further information on Tasmania's water and sewerage reform can also be found on the Local Government website at www.taswaterandseweragereform.com.au.

Consultation on New Community Grants Program

The Treasurer, Michael Aird, has announced the process for community input into the development of a new Tasmanian community grants program that will replace the Community Support Levy and the Tasmanian Community Fund.

"I want the community to contribute its vision to the establishment of a new Tasmanian community grants program," Mr Aird said.

"The Government is creating a new community grants program that will incorporate best practice features and find new ways of delivering outcomes for the community. Therefore, it is important that the community plays a role in developing the new program."

Mr Aird said a Discussion Paper has been prepared as a basis for engaging stakeholders and the community in the development of the new community grants program. The Discussion Paper is available from the Department of Treasury and Finance website www.treasury.tas.gov.au.

"The public consultation process will ensure that we have a responsive, flexible and adaptive community grants system that listens to the community and responds accordingly."

Mr Aird said that the stakeholder and community consultation process will be open until 19 June 2009. Legislation to establish the new fund will then be prepared and introduced into Parliament after the consultation process has been concluded.

Forestry By Agreement, Not Demand

The Minister for Energy and Resources, David Llewellyn, reaffirmed that there would be no moratorium on logging, in the Upper Florentine or anywhere else.

The Tasmanian Regional Forests Agreement is an agreement between the Tasmanian and Commonwealth governments, supported by legislation passed in state and federal parliaments.

Almost half of Tasmania's native forests and 80% of old-growth forests are reserved under the RFA, which was independently reviewed in 2008.

Those parts of the State Forest in the Upper Florentine which are currently being harvested are designated for wood production in the RFA.

We will continue to manage forests strictly in accordance with the RFA, a properly reached agreement – not on the basis of the demands of the Greens.

That agreement is in place until 2017.

We operate on an appropriate, sustainable plan; balancing the need for conservation and economic development.

Unemployment Rate Below National Average

Tasmania's unemployment rate remains below the national average.

The Treasurer, Michael Aird has said data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that the labour market continues to perform relatively well compared to other States and Territories.

Tasmania's trend unemployed rate rose by 0.3 percentage points in April 2009, to 5.3 per cent.

Encouragingly, this remains below the national average of 5.5 per cent, although the gap is narrowing. It is again below the unemployment rates of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

Mr Aird has said seeking private capital investment is a key element of ensuring the Tasmanian economy will emerge strongly from these challenging economic times.

"There are tough decisions to come, but the Government's aim is to provide leadership and policies to ensure that the State is well placed to take advantage of the recovery when it arrives" said Mr Aird.

Paid Parental Leave Scheme Welcomed

The State Government has welcomed moves by the Commonwealth to fund a paid parental leave scheme.

The move was a significant step forward in getting the balance between work and family right.

The Federal Labor Government is to be commended on this initiative. Paid parental leave is an important reform and its introduction in Australia has been long overdue.

The Rudd Government's commitment to supporting working parents and recognising that a work-life balance is essential for our workplaces, productivity, wellbeing and, most importantly, our children's development, is welcomed.

The Tasmanian Government firmly believes that paid parental leave is a key strategy to encouraging workforce attachment, boosting productivity and providing families with the capacity to deal with the financial pressures of a newborn.

Small Business Learns How to Tackle Climate Change

Tasmania's small business community have attended a series of workshops delivered by Sustainable Infrastructure Australia on how climate change and carbon management will affect their businesses.

Minister Assisting the Premier on Climate Change, Lisa Singh, was invited by Sustainable Infrastructure Australia to open the first Carbon Management 101 workshop in Tasmania.

“Three hundred Tasmanian businesses are expected to attend the four Carbon Management 101 workshops being held across the state,” Ms Singh said.

“It’s great to see small businesses being proactive and educating themselves on climate change and carbon management.

“Tasmania’s 35 000 small businesses will not be immune from the economic pressures that stem from the introduction of an emissions trading scheme.

“On one hand, it is important for business to be aware of the growing costs of energy and fuel.

“But being carbon-conscious is about capturing the opportunities to implement innovative and sustainable business practices.

“The State Government, through the Tasmanian Climate Change Office and various government departments, is developing a range of tools to help Tasmanian businesses to transition to a low carbon economy.

“Through the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, small businesses already have access to programs that help with innovation, commercialisation and diagnostics concerning environmental sustainability.

“I commend Sustainable Infrastructure Australia in offering these workshops, and Tasmanian small businesses for being prepared to tackle climate change in a real and practical way,” Ms Singh said.

For more information on programs offered by the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, please call Business Point on 1800 440 026.

\$1 Billion Write-Down in Tasmania’s GST Revenue

The Federal Budget figures confirm that the Tasmanian budget on June 11 will be a tough one.

We have already made some hard Budget decisions and what the Federal Budget tonight confirms is that there will be more to come in the State Budget.

“The collapse in GST figures confirms that public sector wage restraint is a must, not an option and we will be seeking a further discussion with the unions in the light of these figures.

Despite these difficult times we remain committed to maintaining frontline services to the community and to continuing to roll-out a substantial infrastructure program.

The Federal Budget confirms that this strategy of building for the future is the right one, with the National Broadband Network confirmed to be built first in Tasmania.

We have dealt with the hard economic and financial times before and we will effectively deal with them again to ensure that Tasmania continues to have a strong future.

GST receipts estimates have now fallen by \$125 million in 2008-09, \$306 million in 2009-10, \$273 million in 2010-11 and \$274 m in 2011-12.

13 per cent of the Tasmania’s GST revenue has now evaporated from our Budget and Forward Estimates.”

We will now take stock and incorporate the new GST estimates in our state budget calculations.

The Rudd Budget makes the hard decisions necessary to secure a strong future.”

We recognise and appreciate the infrastructure funding support provided to the states by the Australian Government.

Farmers Urged to Be On the Lookout for Weeds

Farmers bringing cattle and sheep into the State are being urged to be on the lookout for burrs and other weed seeds in the fur of stock to help prevent weed incursions.

Department of Primary Industries and Water Regional Weed Management advises that good weed management and biosecurity means that all sections of government and the community work together to manage and prevent the establishment of weed species.

Recently we had an incursion of Bathurst Burr in the north-west of the State which we believe may have come in on the tails of livestock purchased in northern Victoria.

Fortunately, it was identified early on and a management response was able to be put in place to manage the weed threat at that location.

There have been a small number of Bathurst Burr infestations previously in Tasmania, but all sites have been contained or eradicated, and preventing its further spread was important.

The weed is widely spread on the mainland but we are fortunate in that it remains relatively uncommon in Tasmania.

The weed is spread by seed and, as its name suggests, is easily entangled in the wool and fur of stock such as sheep and cattle.

Its main impacts are on crops such as peas, potatoes and grapes. However, it also invades pastures, roadsides, watercourses and waste areas.

Land holders can play an important role in preventing the dispersal of the weed by being alert when bringing stock in from mainland areas where the weed is present.

People can assist in reducing the threat of weed introduction by:

- checking the tails of cattle being brought in;
- quarantining livestock;
- recording paddock movement and rotation when first introducing stock from the mainland; and
- shearing sheep as soon as practical.

It is also important to monitor paddocks for any new weeds so they can be dealt with as early as possible if required.

Premier Reveals More Detail on Innovations Strategy

Premier David Bartlett has further outlined the Government's Innovation Strategy.

"I have spoken openly about my vision for Tasmania to become the food bowl of the nation and how the massive investment the Government is making now in irrigation, can make this vision a reality.

"The food bowl concept is only the first of five key components of the Innovations Strategy.

"I am outlining some of the other components of a strategy that will underpin Tasmania's economic growth for decades to come," Mr Bartlett said.

“Clean energy has been identified as an area of significant opportunity. Tasmania is already a leader in renewable energy, however there is still huge growth potential, particularly in wind and geothermal energy that I want to ensure we capitalise on”

A third element involves initiatives to harness the full potential of broadband infrastructure. The roll out of the National Broadband Network in Tasmania is a major windfall that is expected to bring huge economic benefits to the state.

“ICT infrastructure will deliver an economic injection for this State comparable only with the effect Hydro-industrialisation had last century.

“Effective ultra fast broadband infrastructure will be the dams, poles and wires of the 21st Century.”

Mr Bartlett said the NBN was not just about delivering better information technology. Outcomes would also include:

- Jobs growth
- Creative economy
- Opportunities for health diagnosis, educational tutoring and skills retraining all on-line.
- Small businesses link to clients
- Tasmanian households linked to services

“High speed broadband will underpin our economic strength and jobs growth for decades to come.”

“It will support those Tasmanian businesses that are willing to look for new ideas to embrace and new ways to make use of that technology.”

Mr Bartlett said he expected the Innovations Strategy would be completed in August.

“It will be creative ideas that grow our economy and underpin our ability to build on the things that already make Tasmania such a great place in which to live, work and do business,” Mr Bartlett said.

“I am very encouraged by the number of Tasmanian businesses that are already market leaders through innovation.

Demonstrating Real Leadership in Tough Times

The next round of public sector efficiencies to be implemented by the State Government will see a further \$15 million saved over the next four years.

Premier David Bartlett confirmed the responsibilities of the Department of Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts (DEPHA) would be transferred to other agencies to get the best possible result for taxpayers' money.

“This is a difficult but necessary decision - and it will not be the last tough call we have to make in response to the global recession that has already slashed our GST income by around \$1 billion,” Mr Bartlett said.

“I am determined to lead a Tasmanian Government that is financially responsible and that does not shirk the difficult decisions in response to the unprecedented economic and financial challenges we now face.

“I recognise restructuring the public service will not be universally popular but we are prepared to make the tough decisions to see us through this challenge so that when we come out of this dip, Tasmania is in the strongest position it can be.”

The reallocation will see DEPHA cease to exist as a stand-alone agency.

Environment and Parks and Heritage responsibilities will be transferred to the Department of Primary Industries and Water.

Arts responsibilities will go to the Department of Economic Development and Tourism.

The agency restructure will save \$2.15 million in 2009-10 as the necessary changes are put in place and \$4.3 million in each of the following years.

These savings are in addition to savings announcements in recent weeks such as:

- \$64 million over four years including a reduction of 25 State Executive Service positions and cuts to MPs' resource allowances, the Government vehicle fleet, advertising, travel costs and mobile phone bills;
- State Government belt-tightening in the current financial year saving around \$34 million; and
- The divestment of the Tasmania's Temptations Holidays wholesale tourism business, resulting in a saving of \$3 million over the next year alone.

Further carefully-targeted cuts would be announced in the State Budget on June 11, the Premier said.

Minister for the Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts, Michelle O'Byrne, stressed that the changes to DEPHA would not see wholesale redundancies.

"The considerable expertise that exists in DEPHA will not be lost to Tasmania as a result of these changes nor are we seeking to cut the important services and activities currently provided by DEPHA," Ms O'Byrne said.

"For the vast majority of public servants currently employed within DEPHA, life will go on with them still providing the same important service to the people of Tasmania, albeit under a department with a different name.

"However, these changes will allow sensible efficiencies to be achieved in areas like rent, electricity, information technology, human resources and administration structures.

"New staffing requirements will be determined over coming months by the two agencies taking on the DEPHA responsibilities.

"While there is a potential for job losses, I expect these to represent only a small percentage of the more than 700 positions currently within the department.

"It is important to keep this change in context – it will see \$4 million saved from a DEPHA budget of almost \$90 million, so any suggestion this is not a prudent approach aimed at sparing pain to the greatest possible extent is wrong."

Mr Bartlett said the Government had been determined not to make the announcement before first advising staff and unions.

"This was the proper and decent process to follow and only now that those steps have been taken are the Minister and I in a position to make this announcement," he said.

"We will continue to work with public sector unions on using tools such as voluntary redundancies, early retirement and voluntary leave without pay to meet these saving targets in the first instance.

"But what should be becoming increasingly clear to unions as well as to the broader Tasmanian community is that the State Government must act to meet the financial challenges we face.

"Doing nothing is not an option and I hope that Tuesday night's Federal Budget, with its further significant reduction in Commonwealth funds to Tasmania, will highlight to unions the need to be reasonable about public sector wage restraint in these times.

"If unions do not recognise the challenges posed by falling revenue figures as stark as these, it is doubtful they ever will.

“But I will not be the premier who ducked the hard decisions and took Tasmania back into the net debt cycle that the Liberals and Greens irresponsibly foisted upon Tasmanians in the 1990s.

“These are tough economic times and we will manage the state finances in a responsible way at the same times as providing the very best public services Tasmania can afford.”

Ms O’Byrne thanked the dedicated and talented DEPHA staff for their contribution and understanding during an unsettling time.

“As Minister, I look forward to receiving the same high level of service and advice from them as these changes are implemented,” she said.

New Public PET/CT Scanner for the RHH

Public patients will soon have access to a PET/CT scanner at the Royal Hobart Hospital, meaning a comprehensive imaging service will be available for all patients.

Health Minister Lara Giddings said the State Government had decided to continue with its plans for a public scanner at the RHH in the interests of all Tasmanians.

Ms Giddings said the Government was delivering on a recommendation made by Tasmania’s Health Plan to deliver a comprehensive cancer service for the entire State.

“The \$100 million improvements announced for the existing RHH will allow for floor space to be cleared for the new \$3.5 million PET/CT scanner, funded by the Commonwealth in the federal budget,” Ms Giddings said.

“This is welcome news for public patients, many of whom have still been forced to travel to the mainland for scans even though the Hobart Private’s scanner was installed last year.

“Unfortunately, the private PET scanner has not been able to meet the needs of all public patients due to its limited hours of operation and significant cost.

“In the past, PET services were provided free of charge to Tasmanian public patients from centres on the mainland, while the Government subsidised the patient’s travel costs.

“However, the private scanner is not able to provide this service free of charge for all public patients and as a consequence the Government has been meeting the cost to ensure it is not passed on to public patients.

“For the first six months of the private machine’s operation this cost has been \$51 850.

“Since the beginning of November, 96 patients from the Royal Hobart Hospital have been referred for travel to Melbourne for their scan for a range of clinical and availability reasons.

“We have therefore made the decision that a scanner located at the RHH will be the best possible outcome for public patients into the future.”

Ms Giddings said the Government had consistently said that if Tasmania was to have a public scanner it needed to be in Hobart, close to the state-wide oncology service at the Royal and the Menzies Research Centre.

“Some specialised oncology services can only be provided in a safe way in one location in the State, and the PET/CT is an important step in providing a comprehensive service.

“Forging strong research links with the Menzies Research Centre in Hobart is also fundamentally important to the future care of Tasmanian patients.

“Better access to a public scanner will be an invaluable boost to the Menzies’ work, enabling an increase in cutting edge cancer research and treatment,” Ms Giddings said.

Ms Giddings said there had been considerable improvements in the speed and efficiency of PET/CT scanners in the past 18 months and the Royal also intended to use the scanner to perform standard CT scans to boost its usage.

New Royal Hobart Hospital

Premier David Bartlett and Health Minister Lara Giddings have announced a series of key decisions made by Cabinet on the new Royal Hobart Hospital project.

The four main decisions are:

- the Government remains committed to a new Royal but construction will be deferred until economic conditions improve due to the impact of the global financial crisis on the State Budget;
- a new hospital on the railyards site has been ruled out due to the prohibitive up-front cost;
- planning will continue on a new approach, with the Royal to be redeveloped on its current site over an extended period and possibly supplemented by a new building on a nearby site to provide additional space; and
- in the meantime \$100 million is to be spent over the next five years to keep the current site up to standard and provide improved operational efficiency and functionality.

Mr Bartlett said delaying the start of redevelopment on the current site was a difficult decision but strong leadership and budgetary restraint were required.

“We remain committed to a new Royal, and once State finances improve it will be one of our first priorities,” Mr Bartlett said.

“The simple fact is that at the moment Tasmania cannot afford a massive investment of between \$1.5 and \$2 billion.

“I am determined to keep making the tough decisions that will enable Tasmania to emerge from the current difficult economic circumstances in the best possible shape,” Mr Bartlett said.

Ms Giddings said to make a new Royal affordable the cost needed to be spread over an extended period, which ruled out the upfront cost required for the railyards site.

“The Business Case, which looked at options for both the railyards and the current site, found that a new hospital on the railyards would be quicker and cheaper,” Ms Giddings said.

“But we cannot afford such a huge upfront cost and the railyards site has therefore been absolutely and finally ruled out.

“Cabinet also took into consideration the negative impact on businesses in the immediate CBD of moving the hospital, as well as the community’s concern about the impact on the waterfront.

“Instead we will move ahead with a new approach, including a long-term redevelopment of the current site that would allow us to spread the cost over a number of years, and we will be seeking funding from the Commonwealth to assist us with that process.

“The problem remains that the current site is too small and redeveloping on site would be disruptive for both staff and patients.

“As a result the Government has been looking at options to build an additional new building on a site close to the current RHH.

“That would allow us to increase the Royal’s overall size, and the extra space could also help us to minimise disruption while buildings on the current site were being redeveloped.

“Further planning will be required to develop and compare the available options and consider the potential challenges to operating the proposed new health facility.

“The \$100 million to be spent on maintaining the current RHH site will ensure essential services such as electrics, fire safety and plumbing remain safe until the site can be redeveloped. It will also improve the operational functionality and efficiency of the existing buildings, and increase the size of the ICU and HDU.

“We will also deliver on our commitment to build the LGH’s new Emergency Department and car park.

“But the State Government’s Hospital Infrastructure Fund will have no further funds left for any major additional works and that means that in light of the GFC, the funding the Liberals were relying on for their proposed redevelopment of the RHH no longer exists and they will also need to seriously reconsider their proposal,” Ms Giddings said.

\$100 Million to Deliver Much Needed RHH Improvements

The State Government’s \$100 million investment in the Royal Hobart Hospital will deliver major service improvements and ensure the Royal remains safe and reliable until a new hospital is built.

Health Minister Lara Giddings said the postponement of the New Royal project meant Tasmania was confronted with an immediate challenge to prolong the life of the existing hospital.

“Despite the tough economic times, action needs to be taken now. We can’t wait until we can afford a new hospital,” Ms Giddings said.

“\$100 million over five years will be made available to address the hospital’s ageing buildings and infrastructure and to improve and expand key services such as intensive care.”

Ms Giddings said a number of high priority works will be carried out focusing on safety, reliability, efficiency and increasing space and capacity.

“An upgrade and expansion of the Intensive Care Unit and High Dependency Unit will help improve surgical throughput in the main theatres, especially in the areas of neurosurgery and cardiothoracic surgery.

“It is anticipated that eight more beds will be added to the ICU and HDU, bringing the total number to 25.

“It is very important that we tackle areas that we know are causing frustration for clinical staff and improvements to these two areas will bring marked improvements.

“The funding will also create space to enable installation of the \$3.5 million public PET/CT scanner funded by the Federal Government.”

Ms Giddings said some of the other anticipated projects that will be included in the program of high priority works include;

- creation of a combined clinic area where out-patient functions can be consolidated in one location to improve efficiency and free up space in other parts of the hospital;
- relocation and expansion of the Ambulatory Care Unit and Oncology Unit;
- expansion of the recovery area in the Day Procedures Unit, including a 23 hour recovery unit to give clinical staff more flexibility in scheduling elective surgery;
- upgrading general wards to optimise bed capacity and improve storage, educational and bathroom facilities;
- upgrading and improving storage rooms, the loading dock and kitchen;
- upgrading information and communication services, electrical services, mechanical plant (air-conditioning), lift services and plumbing and fire safety; and

- redevelopment of Medical Imaging to improve efficiency and to accommodate the proposed PET/CT scanner.

Ms Giddings said the works would ensure the Royal remains up to standard while the global financial crisis takes its course.

"I want staff at the Royal to know that we have listened to their concerns about the current site and intend to address them as best we can.

"Action on the priority works outlined will make life that bit easier for staff at the Royal while our long term strategy is developed.

"Meetings will be held with staff to discuss the improvements in more detail soon and all staff are encouraged to contact the New Royal Project Team on 6233 4517 if they have any questions," Ms Giddings said.

Liberal's \$700m RHH Plan Unaffordable

Health Minister Lara Giddings has said currently Tasmania simply could not afford the \$700 million redevelopment of the Royal Hobart Hospital that the Liberals had committed to.

Ms Giddings said cost estimates in the New Royal Business Case showed the Liberals' claim that their plan would cost less than \$360 million were wrong.

"The expert advice we have received is that total project costs for an option almost identical to the Liberal plan could be expected to exceed \$700 million," Ms Giddings said.

"Brett Whiteley is already famous for his \$300 million Budget black hole and now he can add a \$375 million RHH black hole too.

"Mr Whiteley's plan has been exposed as a shoddy, amateurish con.

"He claims he could build a new building and refurbish Block A for less than \$360 million, leaving change for the LGH and the NWRH.

"Mr Whiteley is wrong, and his black hole consists of:

- a \$200m shortfall for a new 35 000m² building. The Liberals say they could construct it for around \$300m but the experts say to build and properly equip it would cost \$500m;
- a \$75m shortfall to refurbish Block A. The Liberals promised \$25m but expert advice is that the work required would cost up to \$100m; and
- a \$100m oversight of funding for vital maintenance on remaining buildings if the existing site is to be retained.

"Whatever the cost of the Liberal plan, in light of the GFC the funding the Liberals were relying on for their proposed redevelopment of the RHH no longer exists.

"Will Hodgman should show some spine and admit to Tasmanians that his plan is now unaffordable, as the Government has already done.

"Building one new building and refurbishing another is barely scratching the surface of the current site, which the Business Case shows would take between \$1.8 and \$2.1 billion to redevelop fully and properly.

"It is time the Liberals faced up to the fact that there is no quick and dirty way to build a new tertiary hospital.

“The pretty drawing of an empty building that they produced is no substitute for proper planning, and Tasmanians deserve honesty from the Liberals about how much it could cost.

“It is clear that Mr Whiteley only counted construction costs and has failed to allow for:

- medical equipment, furniture and fittings;
- decanting and demolition of existing buildings;
- design and documentation;
- environmentally sustainable design initiatives;
- appropriate allowances for contingencies for project risks;
- modern information and communications technology; and
- escalation and project management costs.

“Mr Whiteley’s bungling attempt to single-handedly design the biggest project in the State’s history should also embarrass his leader, Will Hodgman, and Shadow Treasurer Peter Gutwein, who went along with his plan.

“They should have known better, and their trust in Mr Whiteley’s sloppy work casts serious doubts on their own judgement,” Ms Giddings said

Tarkine Drive Information Sessions

The Department of Infrastructure Energy and Resources (DIER) will hold Community Information Sessions on the Tarkine Drive project at Wynyard and Smithton.

They will be on Thursday May 21, from 7.00pm to 8:30pm at the Waratah/Wynyard Council Chambers, Wynyard, and on Friday May 22, from 7.00pm to 8:30pm at the Smithton Christian Fellowship Centre, Nelson Street, Smithton.

The sessions will involve short presentations about the project followed by informal discussions..

They will provide an opportunity to ask questions and for DIER representatives to receive feedback from the community.

Mobile Phone Innovation To Help Weight Management

Deputy Premier Lara Giddings has celebrated the development of an innovative mobile phone project designed to help people manage their weight.

Ms Giddings said the new product, Weight Management Mentor, links into the CSIRO’s Total Wellbeing Diet and collects health management information and provides users with feedback and motivation.

“This is a great example of how modern technology can help to keep people healthy – in this case by making it easier for them to monitor and manage their weight,” Ms Giddings said.

“This project is addressing an area of research and national concern around epidemic levels of obesity across all age groups.

“By using mobile phone technology, it aims to increase the effectiveness of the weight management program in the target age group of under 30s.

“Created following a collaboration between the State Government, Verdant Tasmania and CSIRO’s Tasmanian ICT Centre, this is also an excellent example of a successful collaboration between government, business and researchers to commercialise innovative products.

“Tasmania is rich in ideas and innovation, but faces the challenges of proximity to global markets, retention of human resources and scalability of projects.

“Collaboration is therefore a vital part of survival and growth in this environment.

“Verdant Tasmania received a \$100 000 grant from the Intelligent Island’s Research Partnership Program, which also required the company and research organisation to co-invest at least \$100 000 each in the commercialisation process.

“This successful partnership has resulted in the development of an interactive weight management program delivered through mobile handheld technology.

“Mobile phone based solutions also enable access to health care to all socio-economic levels, breaking down the barriers of access to health information and services and support regardless of location, time or condition.

“This innovative project would not have been possible without funding from the Intelligent Island program, which is funded by the Australian Government and administered by the Tasmanian Government.

“The Tasmanian ICT Centre is also funded with \$15 million by the Intelligent Island program, which is matched by funding from CSIRO,” Ms Giddings said.

For more information on how the Research Partnerships Program can assist your business to commercialise a product, service and process, please call Business Point on 1800 440 026 or visit www.development.tas.gov.au

Guaranteed Revenue for Councils Under Water and Sewerage Reforms

The Treasurer, Michael Aird, has announced that the Government will offer a revenue guarantee to Councils as part of the water and sewerage reforms.

“Some councils are concerned about the returns they will receive from their water and sewerage corporation in the early years of operation,” Mr Aird said.

“Treasury have developed a transition support scheme to provide councils with certainty regarding the level and timing of cash flows over the next five years.

“Council costs of the water and sewerage concession will also be included in the Government’s guarantee.

“In return, the Government will receive all the financial returns that a Council will be eligible to receive from its regional water and sewerage corporation over the term of the agreement.

“I don’t expect all Councils will take up this offer, as it exchanges possible revenue upside from the Corporations in return for revenue certainty.

“Some Councils may instead prefer to smooth their revenue flows through time using their cash reserves.

“Council cash reserves were not transferred to the new corporations, even though a substantial proportion of their reserves would have been used for future water and sewerage works.

“Another option for Councils is to borrow to meet initial water and sewerage related revenue shortfalls and repay this in later years from the higher returns received from their water and sewerage corporation.

“I will approve Council borrowing through Tascorp for this purpose.

“Councils will need time to consider their options and I intend to leave the Government’s guarantee open until 30 September 2009.

“I will be writing to all councils to formalise this offer of support and provide further details.”

Liberals Must Produce Fully Costed Budget

The Treasurer, Michael Aird, has said that more than ever before it was imperative that this year the Liberal Opposition prepared a fully costed and fully funded Budget response.

Mr Aird said the fall of almost \$1 billion in Tasmania's estimated GST receipts over the next four years was unprecedented.

"The Government has already announced measures to address this challenging Budget position," Mr Aird said.

"The full details of the Government's response will be revealed in the Budget in just a few weeks time.

"The Liberal Opposition will then not have excuses for not providing a comprehensive Budget statement for the first time in a decade of being in Opposition.

"They must explain more than just how would they manage the \$1 billion reduction in GST receipts.

"For every Government decision which they oppose they will have to come up with a realistic alternative otherwise they will be returning to their old ways of spiralling debt."

Mr Aird said the Liberals must also explain how they would fund the:

- \$500 million budget blackhole caused by their flawed Future Fund.
- \$600 million blackhole in their under-costed Royal Hobart Hospital proposal; and
- \$2 billion commitment to a four lane Midland Highway.

"How would they do this and not plunge the state back into debt where they left Tasmania back in 1998?

"Would they again raid hospital trust funds?

"If they can't fund their increasing list of promises then they must be up front with the Tasmania community and tell them now.

"A weak Liberal Opposition can't just sit back and throw a few figures into the debate and then claim to have any financial management credibility.

"It's time Mr Hodgman and his colleagues became accountable to the community.

"The Liberal Opposition needs to do more than just be negative and provide the Tasmanian people with a fully costed and fully funded alternative Budget.

"Only this Government has a proven track record of effectively dealing with difficult financial and economic times."

Tune in Not Out!

The Minister for Work Place Relations, Lisa Singh has launched a new Tasmanian initiated program designed to help young people make safe and healthy decisions in their lives.

Ms Singh said that Tune In Not Out is an online program that will allow young people aged between 14 and 25 to produce their own podcast and listen to others produced by other young people.

"While the project has been launched in Tasmania, because it's online, the virtual production studio allows young people throughout Australia to create content from their own living room or class room," Ms Singh said.

"I have always believed in peer-to-peer education.

“The seven podcasts already online at the Tune In Tune Out not only address real issues for young people, but they address them in a real way.

“When young people help out young people, just as in any community, we strengthen the hopes and chances of youth communities.

“There are many issues affecting young people today, alcohol and drug use seems to be the most commonly talked about in the community.

“Dealing with things like binge drinking, hosting a party and using drugs safely, these podcasts give practical advice about some issues that actually affect young people.

The Tune In Not Out program is funded by the Australian Lions Drug Awareness Foundation Inc, the Drug Education Network Inc. and the Tasmanian Community Fund.

Groups or individuals outside of Tasmania interested in producing a podcast can do so by contacting the project officer at tino@den.org.au and for more information go to www.tuneinnotout.com

Public Urged To Report Whale Sightings As Annual Migration Begins

Members of the public are being reminded to report all whale sightings as the annual migration of southern right and humpback whales gets underway.

Department of Primary Industries and Water has said that several humpback whales had been reported near Eaglehawk Neck and that last weekend the first southern right whale for the season was reported near Bruny Island.

Each year many Tasmanians get the first glimpse of this amazing migration as humpbacks and southern rights leave their summer feeding grounds in the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic to breed in the warmer waters around mainland Australia.

As well as getting a glimpse of the migration, it also provides our staff with a valuable opportunity to gain information that feeds into national recovery efforts for both species.

Photographs obtained of southern right whales over recent years have enabled the development of a photographic database used to identify individual animals migrating in following years.

This helps us better understand the status of the populations, as well as identifying information on migratory routes and important areas for them during their migrations.

Similarly, information we have obtained from migrating humpback whales has helped increase our knowledge of the relationship of animals in various social structures, as well as providing better estimates of population dynamics and migratory routes.

Some interesting reports of humpbacks foraging near Eaglehawk Neck during this year’s northern migration have already been received.

All this information that people can provide to us, as well as observations made by our own staff, helps us in furthering our understanding of the species.

The main northern migration will be occurring over the next two months, with both species beginning to head south again from October onwards.

While people are on the water during these times we would encourage them to remain on the lookout for whales and report any information to our Whale Hotline on 0427 WHALES (0427 942 537).

It is also important for people, for their own safety as well as that of the migrating whales, to be aware of appropriate distances that should be maintained around whales.

For full details on approach distances people can visit the website at www.dpiw.tas.gov.au

New Peak Planning Body

The Minister for Planning, David Llewellyn, has introduced legislation into Parliament which will establish a new peak planning body to be known as the Tasmanian Planning Commission.

Mr Llewellyn said the establishment of a new State planning body arose out of the review into the State Planning System conducted last year.

“While the existing Tasmanian planning system is basically sound, the new Tasmanian Planning Commission is an important part of the Government’s ambitious program for creating a more contemporary planning system,” Mr Llewellyn said.

“These reforms recognise the need for a single authoritative voice on planning coupled with the need to achieve a critical mass of planning expertise and greater State Government representation at the strategic planning level.

“The report also made it very clear that independent decision-making functions are a fundamental element of the Tasmanian Planning System and should be retained.”

Mr Llewellyn said that the new Tasmanian Planning Commission retains all the independent decision-making functions previously carried out by the Resource Planning and Development Commission, while also providing advice to the Government on planning policy matters.

The Commission will be resourced by amalgamating the staff of the Resource Planning and Development Commission and the Land Use Planning Branch of the Department of Justice.

“Keeping abreast of development pressures so that our future growth areas can be co-ordinated with infrastructure requirements is essential to achieving sustainable outcomes; including of course the protection of our natural resources,” Mr Llewellyn said.

“The new planning legislation, in retaining the existing independent functions of the Resource Planning and Development Commission, explicitly ensures that there can be no political interference with the Tasmanian Planning Commission’s independent decision-making functions.”

Mr Llewellyn said that the new legislation allows the Tasmanian Planning Commission to provide policy advice to the Minister.

“The Bill has been specifically drafted to provide a very clear understanding of the separation between policy and decision-making roles.

“An important feature of the new Tasmanian Planning Commission is the addition of two new members on the Commission who have expertise in relation to infrastructure provision and strategic water and sewerage issues.

“To avoid any suggestion of these members having undue influence on the Commission, the legislation will not allow them to act as delegates for the Commission in any of its decision-making roles on planning schemes or individual projects.

“The new Commission is an important element in building a better planning system. There will be significant responsibility on the new Planning Commission to deliver a more co-ordinated and higher level approach to planning; but at the same time not to lose sight of the need to promote local planning schemes that are clear, user-friendly and consistent in content.”

Tasmanians Invited to Have A Say in Plan to Tackle Alcohol Problems

The State Government is inviting Tasmanians to consider and comment on a five year Tasmanian Alcohol Action Plan aimed at tackling the problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption.

Health Minister Lara Giddings said the Government was developing a wide ranging approach to tackling the problems of alcohol misuse and abuse in the community.

“Alcohol consumption causes a great deal of preventable and unacceptable personal and social harm across the community,” Ms Giddings said.

“Alcohol is also major contributor to preventable illnesses, death, injuries, motor vehicle accidents, assaults and social problems that are of increasing concern for governments both locally and nationally.

“Our aim is for government agencies, local councils and the community sector to work more strategically and collaboratively towards the same goal.

“In Tasmania Together 2020, Tasmanians have said they want a safe community, better health and improved education outcomes.

“This Action Plan strives towards those aspirations.”

The Tasmanian Alcohol Action Plan is being developed by the Inter Agency Working Group on Drugs on behalf of Government, as part of the Tasmanian Drug Strategy.

The focus of the Action Plan is on public safety, public education and health promotion measures, enhanced professional training, and increased access to treatment services.

“I encourage everyone to take this opportunity to have their say and contribute to the development of this important plan that affects all Tasmanians,” Ms Giddings said.

Copies of the draft Tasmanian Alcohol Action Plan are available online, as well as comments and feedback form. These are available at www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/ads/taap.

Feedback can be made up to 26 June 2009.

Faster broadband delivered to Tasmania

Premier David Bartlett has welcomed the announcement by NetSpace of a new faster broadband service in Tasmania.

“This announcement means that Tasmanians now have a choice of major companies offering access to the same ADSL2+ fast internet speeds enjoyed on the mainland.

“This investment by NetSpace will help drive cost-competitiveness for fast broadband in Tasmania - enabling price and performance parity with interstate offerings,” Mr Bartlett said.

ADSL2+ download speeds are up to three times faster than that of regular ADSL broadband connections and 400 times faster than dial-up.

“High-speed broadband infrastructure will be the dams, poles and wires of the future and will underpin our economic strength, jobs growth and standard of living for decades to come.

“It is the Governments vision for the future that has enabled the development of competitive telecommunications infrastructure in Tasmania and laid the groundwork for significant investment by internet service providers.”

“This Government has made it a priority to improve the state of telecommunications in Tasmania.

“That is why the Tasmanian Government invested \$30 million in on-island optic fibre and through its strategic partner, Aurora Energy, has successfully negotiated an agreement to commercialise both the on-island optic fibre and the Basslink optic fibre cable.

“It is also why the State Government prepared such a strong submission to National Broadband Network request for proposal process.

“On the strength of Tasmanian’s submission the Australian Government has decided that Tasmania will be the first to commence the rollout of a comprehensive Fibre to the Premise network.

“None of this would have been possible if Liberal opposition had got its way and sold off the critical on-island optic fibre at a loss.

For households, the access to broadband download speeds of up to 20mbps will enable multiple telephone lines and multiple computer access from the same connection without affecting performance, as well as internet protocol TV.

Business will also benefit from faster broadband investments - enabling greater flexibility for home-based businesses, job-sharing, logistical savings for those working remotely and real-time video-conferencing.

“This is likely to be the first of many significant investments in Tasmania resulting from the Government’s commitment to broadband development, including the strategic alliance the Tasmanian Government struck with Aurora in November 2008,” Mr Bartlett said.

The faster broadband speeds will be available from today for Netspace customers in Launceston and Hobart with broader coverage expected to be rolled out in coming months.

Liberals Lack Basic Budget Knowledge

The Treasurer, Michael Aird, has said the Tasmanian Liberals don’t understand even the most basic aspects of the Australian Government’s recent budget.

Mr Aird said Peter Gutwein believes that if the national economy starts to grow again at more than four per cent per annum this would mean that GST receipts will increase markedly.

“Mr Gutwein fails to understand that the GST projections in the Australian Government’s budget papers are actually already based on the Australian Government’s economic projections.

“If these growth projections are achieved there won’t be any increase in GST receipts.

“We will get exactly what the Australian Government’s Budget papers estimate that we will get - a cut in GST receipts of almost one billion dollars over the next four years.

“If these growth projections aren’t achieved then our GST receipts could fall further.”

Mr Aird said the real question for the Tasmanian Liberals to answer was whether they shared the concerns of their Federal counterparts about the Australian Government’s growth projections.

“If they do then they will have to cut millions from their estimated future GST receipts,” he said.

“This will create yet another black hole in their budget that they will need to address in their budget response.

“The Liberals must say now whether they accept the Australian Government’s GST estimates or Malcolm Turnbull’s.

“If they don’t there will be very serious questions over their budget response.”

GMO Ban Bill Passed

Tasmania's ban on the release of genetically modified organisms to the environment will continue for at least another five years under a Bill passed by Parliament.

The Minister for Primary Industries and Water, David Llewellyn, said that the State's GMO-free status is a key factor in the Tasmanian Brand.

"Tasmania's GMO-free status is a vital factor for our primary producers, helping them realise their full potential in international and interstate markets," Mr Llewellyn said.

"The decision by some other Australian states to relax their GM bans has actually increased the value of Tasmania's GMO-free status.

"It provides us with opportunities for even better Tasmanian access to prime markets.

"The hard work done over recent years has ensured that Tasmania is well placed to take full advantage of its reputation as a reliable supplier of the best and safest food."

The commercial release of genetically modified food crops is now banned until November 2014. The ban prohibits the unauthorised importation of genetically modified organisms, but does not apply to the importation of non-viable materials, such as processed animal feeds and food.

Mr Llewellyn said that the opportunities for Tasmania's primary industries, operating under the Tasmanian Brand, are exciting.

"The prime markets are demanding, and are prepared to pay for, food that is clean, green and safe.

"Tasmania is already well-positioned to meet that demand, and our decision to extend the GMO ban makes the Tasmanian Brand even stronger."

Anti-AFL Greens Ignore Economic Benefits

The Minister for Tourism, Michelle O'Byrne, has said the Tasmania Greens should talk to tourism and business operators in Northern Tasmania before rushing to criticise Tasmania's sponsorship with Hawthorn.

Ms O'Byrne said the Greens were showing how little understanding they had of economic management and tourism marketing by talking down a sponsorship that was putting millions of dollars into the economy every year.

"Independent advice shows that for an investment of \$3 million last season, the total net benefit to the Tasmanian economy was \$15.136 million.

"This is a benefit more than five times the initial investment, and it beggars belief that even the Greens cannot understand such a positive result."

Ms O'Byrne said the anti-football, anti-fun Greens were abandoning people whose businesses benefited from having Hawthorn play games at Aurora Stadium, attracting an additional 24,000 tourists to Tasmania.

"The Greens have turned their backs on the local hotels and motels, the local restaurants and coffee shops, the airlines, TT-Line, taxi drivers – every single person and every single job that derives a benefit from having AFL played in Tasmania."

Tasmanian schools receive \$14.7 million for upgrades

Tasmanian schools will receive funding for a further 124 projects across the State under Round 2 of a key element of the Building the Education Revolution (BER) package.

This brings the combined total for Rounds 1 and 2 of National School Pride program to \$35.3 million – a total of 273 projects.

The \$370 million from the Rudd stimulus package for Tasmanian schools has provided an unprecedented opportunity for school communities to consider working together and create exciting new learning facilities and opportunities.

Though this massive injection of funds to stimulate the Australian economy and support local jobs, we are giving our schools the facilities they so richly deserve.

There are three programs under the BER initiative: Primary Schools for the 21st Century; National School Pride; and Science and Language Centres for 21st Century Secondary Schools.

The National School Pride program is specifically designed for minor capital works and refurbishment projects.

Successful schools include a \$200,000 upgrade of outdoor learning areas and play equipment at Port Dalrymple School at George Town; a \$200,000 conversion of existing space to create a multi-purpose area at Devonport High in the North-West; and a \$200,000 upgrade of school buildings and playground facilities at Huonville Primary south of Hobart.

Construction and refurbishment work will start as soon as possible, with many of the National School Pride projects planned to begin shortly.

The next few months will be exciting as the investment in our schools will flow down through to local businesses and others in the construction industry.

Round Two was the final round of National School Pride program and sees funding delivered to all eligible schools across the country.

The BER program continues with projects under two elements still to be announced – Primary Schools for the 21st Century Round 2 and 3, and Science and Language Centres for the 21st Century.

Seeing our local schools and our local community benefit from the Australian Government's \$14.7 billion investment in vital school infrastructure and local jobs is fantastic and I look forward to hearing about further successful schools under the remaining rounds of the BER package.

A full list of school is available on the national website www.buildingtheeducationrevolution.gov.au or by clicking on the link on the Department of Education front page.

More Laser Speed Detecting Devices for Tas Police

The Minister for Police and Emergency Management, Jim Cox, inspected new laser speed detecting devices being issued to Tasmania Police.

Mr Cox said the nine new handheld devices gave Tasmania Police even more resources in the continuing effort to improve road safety and reduce Tasmania's road toll.

"Motorists who speed are on notice that never before have Tasmania Police had more speed detecting devices available to them to catch people who break the law and put all road users at risk.

"These hand-held laser devices are the latest in speed detecting technology, and will augment Tasmania Police's existing speed detecting resources."

Mr Cox said the State Government was committed to ensuring Tasmania Police were properly equipped to maintain the exceptional level of public safety and law and order they have achieved.

“Tasmania Police is the best performing police force in the nation, and it is crucial that their efforts to crackdown on road criminals is supported.

“Lowering the road toll and improving road safety is a key aim of the State Government, and these new devices will assist police to keep our roads as safe as possible,” Mr Cox said.

Auditor General’s Follow-up Report on Elective Surgery

Health Minister Lara Giddings has welcomed confirmation by the Auditor General of a sharp increase in elective surgery in Tasmania’s hospitals.

Ms Giddings said the Auditor General’s Special Report to Parliament showed the number of admissions from the elective surgery waiting list had been growing for more than 18 months, with a ‘sharp upward spike’ since June last year.

“I acknowledge the concerns expressed in the report about the information available for the financial year ending in June last year, and welcome the recognition by the Auditor General of the very strong progress that has been made in increasing our elective surgery output since then,” Ms Giddings said.

“The report notes that the rate of elective surgery in Tasmania is higher than the national average – 28.8 admissions per 1,000 population compared to a national rate of 26.7.

“The Auditor General’s report provides independent endorsement of the substantial improvement in elective surgery performance across all of the State’s hospitals as a result of State and Federal Government initiatives.

“Tasmania’s Elective Surgery Improvement Plan and the Australian Government’s Elective Surgery Waiting List Improvement Plan are working and Tasmanians needing surgery are enjoying the benefits.

“The Tasmanian Government is contributing \$8.4 million and the Commonwealth \$8.1 million to finance many hundreds of additional operations.”

Ms Giddings said the results speak for themselves.

“In the nine months to the end of March the Royal Hobart Hospital recorded a 12.7% increase in elective surgery admissions and a 1.9% decrease in the waiting list compared to the previous corresponding period to March last year.

“In the same period at the Launceston General Hospital elective surgery admissions rose 22.9% and the waiting list fell 1.2%.

“At the North West Regional Hospital the elective surgery improvement was 30.6% and the fall in the waiting list 21.2%.

“And while direct comparisons are not available at the Mersey Community Hospital, elective surgery admissions have risen dramatically since the successful Commonwealth-State partnership agreement took effect,” Ms Giddings said.

State Wide Renal Plan Underway

Health Minister Lara Giddings has urged Tasmanians to help keep their kidneys healthy as the State embarks on development of a Statewide Renal Plan to address significantly increasing rates of kidney disease.

Ms Giddings said the plan would provide the direction for the safe, efficient and effective management of kidney disease in the State - from prevention to management of the end-stage of the disease.

“The increasing rate of kidney disease is a major issue – for individuals, families and carers, health professionals, the entire health system and the community generally,” Ms Giddings said.

“Tasmania has a high prevalence of the condition, with an estimated 18,400 people diagnosed, and more than 2,000 with severe, chronic forms of the disease.

“At the same time, we are also experiencing huge increases in the incidence of other chronic conditions – like obesity and diabetes – and these in turn are some of the major drivers of kidney disease.”

Ms Giddings said another major risk factor for kidney disease was untreated high blood pressure, which accounted for a third of all new diagnoses of the disease.

“That’s why the theme of Kidney Health Week this year is ‘Take the pressure down’ - emphasising the importance of people knowing and controlling their blood pressure.

“Controlling high blood pressure has become the most important factor in treating all forms of chronic kidney disease.

“You can help prevent kidney disease by keeping your blood pressure below 130/80; having it checked on a regular basis, eating healthily; getting involved in regular physical activity and taking the medications your doctor prescribes.

“Anyone can get kidney disease, so it’s important that people recognise the common determining factors so they know if they are higher risk candidates.

“Chronic kidney disease is preventable and treatable if detected, and the earlier the better.

“That’s why everyone at high risk of the disease should ask their doctor for a simple blood pressure and kidney function test on a regular basis.”

Ms Giddings said that as part of the Tasmanian Health Plan, the State Government has recognised the need to support people with, or at risk of developing, chronic kidney disease.

“That’s why we have commenced consultations with both internal and external stakeholders aimed at developing a comprehensive Statewide Renal Plan.

“The parties involved include Department executive staff; hospital CEOs; renal clinicians from medical, nursing and allied health disciplines, and consumers and community groups, including Kidney Health Australia locally.

“It’s vital that we all work cooperatively to formulate a plan to tackle burgeoning rates of this disease,” Ms Giddings said.

Adult Australians are at increased risk if they:

- Have high blood pressure, or hypertension;
- Have diabetes;
- Smoke;
- Are obese;
- Have a family history of the condition;
- Are over 50 years of age, and
- Are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

Transport Hub Operator Sought

The Tasmanian Government is advertising nationally for expressions of interest in operating the \$79 million Brighton Transport Hub in Southern Tasmania.

The Hub – expected to be operational by September 2011 - will provide a modern road-rail interchange and freight distribution centre to improve the efficiency of freight movement into and out of southern Tasmania, especially to the northern ports.

The Government is also seeking expressions of interest in the development of land located at the new Hub which it is proposed to set aside for industrial development.

Companies or consortia with the necessary expertise are being invited to submit responses for either or both opportunities.

The Government's preference is to appoint a single entity for both functions, but if suitable submissions are not received the functions may be split between two entities.

Although there is currently a 48-hour turnaround time for rail freight between Hobart and the northern ports, it has been estimated that the relocation of freight operations to Brighton would result in an overall time saving of 4 hours 40 minutes per return trip.

Analysis shows that a significant proportion of current road freight could switch to rail if the cost and reliability of rail were enhanced, especially given the anticipated substantial increase in Tasmanian freight requirements.

The objectives of this project include achieving lower transport costs for Tasmanian businesses and consumers, reducing road congestion in the Greater Hobart area and developing the Hub as a catalyst for the economic development of the Brighton area with positive employment outcomes.

The project also underscores the Tasmanian Government's determination to ensure that rail remains a viable alternative to road for freight transport.

Advertisements calling for expressions of interest will appear in Tasmanian and national newspapers tomorrow (Saturday 23 May) with a deadline for lodging submissions of 24 June.

Whistleblowers Urged Not to Stay Silent

Attorney General Lara Giddings has released a directions paper as part of a planned strategy to assure greater protection for public sector whistleblowers.

Ms Giddings said the paper forms the basis of planned amendments to the Public Interest Disclosures Act in Tasmania.

"The Government's agenda to strengthen trust in democracy includes a review of the Act with a view to encouraging disclosure of improper conduct by public officers and organisations," Ms Giddings said.

"Public interest disclosures, or whistleblowing, are critical sources of information for organisations.

"Even with the best intentions, every public body faces a risk that something it or an officer does will go seriously wrong, or that conduct occurs within the organisation that does not meet appropriate standards.

"Rather than fear leaked information, organisations need to recognise the potential value in its disclosure, allowing the body to stop the conduct, rectify any damage, and remove further risk."

“While we already have whistleblower legislation in Tasmania the directions paper found it is rarely used for a range of reasons, including a possible lack of awareness or understanding of the Act and the high benchmark set for what constitutes ‘improper conduct’.

“The paper makes a number of recommendations to address those issues, such as broadening the scope of the Act and improving procedures and protections for whistleblowers who come forward.

Ms Giddings said that in most cases the first people to become aware of improper conduct in an organisation such as a public agency, would be the people who work within the agency.

“To encourage and facilitate these disclosures it is therefore important to foster a culture where it is clear that it’s acceptable and safe to raise a genuine concern about wrongdoing, that the concern will be handled and investigated appropriately, and that action will be taken.

“The Government’s review of the Public Interest Disclosures Act addresses these important areas.

“The review team has already consulted with government agencies, the office of the Ombudsman and Len Armsby, Director of Legislation Development and Review within the Department of Justice, to develop the framework presented in this paper for wider consultation,” Ms Giddings said.

Ms Giddings invited community feedback on the directions paper which includes recommendations to amend the current Act to: e

- * establish principles within the Act to guide the operations of the Act;
- * broaden the types of disclosures that would be covered by the Act;
- * enhance the handling and investigation of public interest disclosures; and
- * expand the functions of the oversight agency.

The Directions paper is available on the Department of Justice website, and advertisements inviting feedback will be placed in all three Tasmanian daily newspapers on Saturday 23 May 2009.

More Mental Health Nurses Bring Peace of Mind

Minister for Health Lara Giddings has said that a dramatic increase in mental health nurse graduates ensured a positive future for Tasmanian mental health services.

“In Tasmania, we are committed to providing quality support and treatment services for people with mental illness to help promote their recovery or manage their illness,” Ms Giddings said.

“To do this we need a highly qualified, committed and understanding mental health workforce.”

Ms Giddings said that up until 2005, the number of nurses completing postgraduate Diploma of Advanced Nursing (Mental Health/Psychiatric Nursing) averaged eight graduates a year. This had markedly improved over the last three years.

“This year there are 32 participants enrolled in graduate mental health studies with UTAS. Of these, 24 are registered nurses based in Tasmania,” Ms Giddings said.

“This is a remarkable achievement and one that will help us build our future mental health nursing workforce in Tasmania.”

Ms Giddings said enrolments had risen sharply since the Department of Health and Human Services, in conjunction with the University of Tasmania, had offered registered nurses undertaking postgraduate nursing studies full fee scholarships since 2005.

She said the course had also been revised to include online learning, which had proved attractive to many participants.

“Mental Health Services in Tasmania welcome graduates who are passionate about life-long learning, who appreciate the science and art of mental health nursing and who seek greater responsibility.

“We also appreciate graduates who embrace the crucial role played by consumers and families in a recovery-oriented mental health service,” Ms Giddings said.

About one in five Australians experience a mental illness in their lifetime. Treated appropriately and early, many people recover fully and have no further episodes while others may need ongoing treatment to manage their mental illness.

Greens Attempt to Hijack Approval Process

Labor Member for Braddon Bryan Green has accused the Greens of trying to hijack the approval process for the Tarkine Drive tourist project.

“The Greens blind opposition to this major tourism initiative is only surpassed by their total ignorance of the approval process,” Mr Green said.

Mr Green said an expert independent assessment of the project was being undertaken and would be referred to the Commonwealth.

“It is wrong for the Greens to attempt to pre-empt that report before it is even considered by the Federal Environment Minister.”

Mr Green said he expected the report to be completed by the end of next month.

“This is an open and comprehensive process and the project must meet all of the criteria.”

“It is not for the Greens to decide whether it proceeds or not.”

Mr Green said the Government did not believe the road would adversely affect the Tasmanian Devil and remained strongly committed to ensuring the devils’ survival.

Tarkine the Next Big Thing on Tourism Horizon

Member for Braddon Bryan Green says the Tarkine Drive could help stop Tasmania’s slide down the national rankings of nature-based tourist destinations.

Mr Green said Tasmania had slipped to third behind the Northern Territory and Queensland and that the Tarkine had the potential to lift the State back to number one.

“It is the biggest thing on the tourism horizon since the introduction of the Spirits of Tasmania and has the potential to reinvigorate our tourist industry,” Mr Green said.

Mr Green said there is now clear evidence the relentless talking down of Tasmania’s wilderness brand was damaging the State’s tourist industry.

“Tasmania has a proud record of protecting and promoting its natural advantages and wilderness attractions but it is being undermined by those who continually portray a negative image of our State.”

“Politicians, community leaders and interest groups need to work together in a united effort to promote Tasmania’s tourism industry in a positive way.”

He called for an end to the misinformation campaign and greater scrutiny of opponents to tourism plans for the Tarkine.

“For example, to suggest the tourist road will somehow destroy the Tarkine is absolutely ridiculous.”

“There will only be 5.4 km of new road on the fringe of the Tarkine and the remainder of the tourist drive is made up of existing roads and tracks that will be sealed. The majority of the road will be limited to tourist traffic with speed restrictions and a 15 tonne limit”

Mr Green said the Government did not believe the road would adversely affect the Tasmanian Devil and remained strongly committed to ensuring the devils’ survival.

“There is a very rigorous process underway to ensure that the road meets all the criteria for approvals required by all levels of government

Mr Green said Tasmania could ill afford to lose the opportunity of establishing the Tarkine as an iconic tourist destination.

“The Tarkine has enormous tourism potential but that won’t be realised if people can’t get there to experience it.”

Mr Green said with Circular Head tourist numbers declining by over 10 per cent over the past four years, the region desperately needed a major drawcard.

“This would be a huge boost not only for the North-West region but Tasmania as a whole.

Mr Green also called for an end to the political division over the Tarkine Drive and urged the State Liberals and Greens to stop their blind opposition to the tourist road.

“I am surprised not one of them took the opportunity to attend public information sessions this week to discuss in detail tourism options for the Tarkine.”

“How can they be so opposed to the tourist drive when they have no idea of the huge benefits it offers for Tasmania?”

Mr Green said independent consultants had found the full loop road would attract over 200,000 new visitors a year to the Tarkine.

“The Government is committed to this project because it wants to create a world class tourist destination.”

“The experts tell us the loop road will ultimately lead to 1600 new jobs and \$70 million year to the local economy,” Mr Green said.

Premier Rules Out Any Deal With Liberals

The Premier, David Bartlett, has said media reports implying that he would seek to form minority government with the Liberal Party were completely incorrect.

“Let me be absolutely clear – I can categorically rule out any deal with the Liberals or the Greens.

“I have previously publicly, and very clearly, ruled this out in The Examiner on May 20.”

“The Labor Party is the only party in Tasmania that intends to form a majority government, and I will not be seeking minority government deals with either opposition party.

“The present-day Liberals have shown me that they don’t have the grit, the determination or the capacity to do the hard work that is necessary to lead the State.

“Their approach to issues is superficial and marked by complaining and carping.

“That is not what is needed to get Tasmania through these tough times and build for a sound future,” Mr Bartlett said.

Tasmania's Future Health... Diagnosis Looks Much Brighter

Health Minister Lara Giddings celebrated the many achievements of Tasmania's Health Plan on its second anniversary.

Ms Giddings said the two year milestone gave cause to reflect on the progress and impact of Tasmania's Health Plan.

"When we launched Tasmania's Health Plan in May 2007 we had one clear objective: to deliver a high quality, sustainable, responsive and integrated health system to meet the future needs of the Tasmanian community," Ms Giddings said.

Ms Giddings said it was clear from the outset that confronting difficult decisions would pose a necessary but challenging task. She said despite these challenges she and her department had fronted up to the community on every occasion.

"Back at the launch of the Health Plan, I said that for almost 50 years governments of all stripes had tried to grasp healthcare reform in this State but that, despite their best intentions, they had found it almost impossible to tackle the big issues.

"There were plenty of visions and even more reports, but little effective action. By 2007, we had simply run out of time.

"Two years on, we are now well into the implementation stage of the most significant health reform the State has ever undertaken and the benefits are already apparent.

"Tasmania's public hospitals have turned the corner and now have a strong and clear direction to move forward under. There is more funding for our acute hospitals, new equipment and more beds.

"We have employed more doctors and nurses and have updated and expanded ambulance services. Information technology is now playing a far bigger role today than two years ago and is helping to overcome some clinical shortages."

"Reforming our health system is not a simple process and it is not one that yields quick results, but those results are starting to show.

"For example;

- * thanks to extra Commonwealth and State funding our hospitals have provided around 20% more elective surgery than last year and waiting lists have started to fall – highlighted by a 21% fall at the LGH;
- * significant planning progress has been made on Integrated Care Centres for Launceston and Clarence, with both due for completion in 2010;
- * primary health across the State has been boosted by initiatives such as TeleHealth and a renewed focus on issues such as reducing smoking and diabetes.

Ms Giddings said that during this time, the Department of Health and Human Services had undergone a major reorganisation to further increase its focus on patients and clients.

She said the central agency now focused primarily on policy, strategy, performance and governance, and accounted for less than 3% of the health budget.

Ms Giddings said management of health services was moving out of DHHS head office and closer to the communities they serve.

"I am particularly pleased that the acute hospital and primary health functions are being brought together to break down the barriers between our hospital and community health services."

Ms Giddings said that perhaps the Health Plan's most fundamental change was an increased focus on disease prevention, health promotion and community-based care.

"This focus reserves acute hospital care for patients that community services cannot manage.

"Planning helped us lift our heads to the horizon to see what was coming our way. Two years ago that revealed an alarming vision. It still does; but we are now in a much stronger position to cope with it," Ms Giddings said.

The Health Plan's achievements to date are charted in Tasmania's Health Plan in Progress available at www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/thp

Tasmania secures funding for e-learning projects

Tasmania has secured funding from the Australian Flexible Learning Framework to deliver innovative e-learning solutions in the State during 2009, Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier, Heather Butler has announced.

Ms Butler said that e-learning was an integral part of the national training system.

"It promotes the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the flexible delivery of education and training to respond to the training needs of Tasmanian businesses and learners," she said.

Ms Butler said that a total of \$288,800 has been awarded to develop and manage 13 e-learning innovation programs specifically tailored to Tasmania's vocational education and training (VET) priorities outlined in the Tasmanian Skills Strategy.

"Six of these successful projects are from the Tasmanian Polytechnic, three from the Tasmanian Skills Institute and four are from private registered training organisations," Ms Butler said.

"The Tasmanian Skills Institute and the Tasmanian Polytechnic have once again really excelled with their vision around e-learning from both the learners and business partners.

"For example, the Polytechnic's Electro-flex project partnering up with Workplace Standards will give electricians a flexible choice around completing the electrical contractors course, and the Skill Institute's Prove It project is developing online accredited courses with the Department of Treasury and Finance (Liquor and Gaming Branch) around the responsible serving of alcohol and gaming in Tasmania."

Ms Butler said that the latest statistics showed that 71 per cent of VET enrolments involve e-learning in Tasmania, compared to a national rate of 35 per cent.

"This shows that Tasmanians have embraced e-learning at more than twice the rate of other Australians," Ms Butler said.

"Tasmania's great results show that we as a State are responding well to provide the opportunity for training providers to offer flexible learning options for employers and students."

Tasmania's E-learning Innovations Projects for 2009:

Federal Group E-Orientation – interactive online training and assessment for all new Federal Group employees (Federal Group and GlobalNet ICT Pty Ltd)

Pilat-e – e-learning options relating to pilates instructor qualifications (Island Health College and Australian Pilates Method Association)

E-furn – training and assessment on a range of units from the Furniture Industry Training Package (Tasmanian Skills Institute)

Electro-flex – a more flexible alternative to completing the Electrical Contractors Certificate IV qualification (Tasmanian Skills Institute and Workplace Standards)

Prove it! – online accredited courses to train people working in the hospitality industry in relation to the responsible serving of alcohol and gaming (Tasmanian Skills Institute and the Department of Treasury and Finance - Liquor and Gaming Branch)

Aurora Energy – induction, up-skilling and ongoing training and assessment of Aurora new supply centre employees (Aurora Energy)

E-portfolios are 'living' evidence – trial of an e-portfolio strategy for the Tasmanian Polytechnic using the community services and health and well-being workforce sectors (Tasmanian Polytechnic)

Information Literacy Skills – the Web 2.0 way – will use information industry business clients from the State Library of Tasmania and the University of Tasmania to target appropriate web 2.0 technologies (Tasmanian Polytechnic, State Library of Tasmania and University of Tasmania Morris Miller Library)

Meintassie wiki – a supportive, open-access online environment for learners in the Tasmanian Polytechnic Migrant Education Program in Hobart using Wikispaces (Tasmanian Polytechnic)

Skills in Nursing – an opportunity to learn nursing skills using multimedia (Tasmanian Polytechnic)

Micro-business e-learning strategy – will develop, implement and evaluate an online course for Certificate III in Micro Business (Tasmanian Polytechnic)

E-tag learning table in the health care environment – will help learners explore e-learning with training and assessment in the clinical simulation area for nursing and health studies (Tasmanian Polytechnic)

Skillsbook – will empower learners and teachers through social learning approaches to e-learning adoption (Recognise-IT and Rosny College)

Liberals PET Claims a Joke

Health Minister Lara Giddings has dismissed as a joke Opposition claims that some public patients were still being sent to Melbourne for PET scans for 'ideological' reasons.

Ms Giddings said decisions about where public patients should receive their scans were quite rightly made by the Royal Hobart Hospital, not by politicians.

"The claim that the Royal has made decisions about where to send patients for ideological reasons is insulting and offensive and Mr Whiteley should apologise," Ms Giddings said.

"In fact, 61 public patients have accessed the private scanner when available since November last year, which would hardly have happened if an 'ideological' decision had been taken to boycott it.

"But at the same time 96 RHH patients have had to be referred for travel to Melbourne for their scan for a range of clinical and availability reasons.

"The simple fact is that the private PET scanner has not been able to meet the needs of all public patients due to its limited hours of operation and significant cost.

"The clinical advice I have received from the Royal is that to date the private PET has not provided services on a daily basis, which is crucial in the running of a tertiary oncology unit.

"In the past, PET services were provided free of charge to Tasmanian public patients from centres on the mainland, while the Government subsidised the patient's travel costs.

"But the private scanner is unable to provide this service free of charge for all public patients so the Government has been meeting the cost to ensure it is not passed on to public patients.

"For the first six months of the private machine's operation that cost was \$51 850.

Ms Giddings said the Government was delivering on a recommendation made in Tasmania's Health Plan to deliver a comprehensive cancer service for the entire State, thanks to \$3.5 million in funding from the Commonwealth announced in the recent Federal Budget

“Better access to a public scanner will also be an invaluable boost to the Menzies Research Centre, enabling an increase in cutting edge cancer research and treatment.

“There had been considerable improvements in the speed and efficiency of PET/CT scanners in the past 18 months and I look forward to all public patients benefitting from the new machine at the RHH,” Ms Giddings said.

North-South Rail Line Repairs Underway

The Minister for Infrastructure, Graeme Sturges, has said the State Government and Pacific National had agreed to a program of works required to re-open the North-South rail line.

Mr Sturges said as part of the co-operative effort between the State Government and PN, representatives of his Department and the company had undertaken a track inspection resulting in an agreed program of works to repair the track to enable train operations to re-commence.

“It is expected that the works program will take between 3-5 weeks subject to factors such as weather.

“The magnitude of this task should not be under-estimated. The works program will include the relaying of over 1000 lengths of rail and significant re-sleepering.

“Additional crews, materials and equipment have been brought to Tasmania to undertake the task to ensure the track is open as a matter of urgency. In excess of 60 personnel will be involved in the work from four companies.

“Regular updates are being provided to key stakeholders.”

Mr Sturges said that much of this work would bring forward the Queensland Rail works program, a \$21 million project to replace 20 kilometres of rail and 160,000 sleepers.

“This contract is already ahead of schedule, with 90,000 sleepers already replaced,” he said.

“A project to upgrade 67 level crossings across the Tasmanian rail network began in March at a total cost of \$4.4 million, with 20 crossings completed to date.”

Mr Sturges said that work completed to date on the rail network had included:

- \$7.49 million (State Government funds) spent on rail maintenance activities undertaken by Pacific National across the whole rail network.
- The installation of 20,000 steel railway sleepers across the network completed in August 2008.
- Bridge works completed on the Leven River Bridge (\$300,000) and Emu River Bridge (\$120,000).
- The replacement of the Jordan River Bridge (\$1.5 million) completed.

A tender is currently open for the design and construction of seven bridges on the Tasmanian rail network, including superstructure replacement of both timber and steel bridges and rehabilitation and re-use of existing steel beams with new decks on two bridges. This tender is due to close on 27 May.

Progressive Labor versus Liberals \$3 billion black hole

Premier David Bartlett has reflected on his first year as Premier saying it had been a great privilege to lead a Government that has a well articulated economic strategy, and is achieving results in those areas.

“Despite the significant financial challenges we face this Government has continued to made progress in key areas, articulating an economic blueprint based on:

Education

- Early year's numeracy and literacy outcomes are up.
- Performance against national test data has improved (from being near the bottom to mid range overall).
- Post year 10 enrolments are up.

Innovation

The development of Tasmania's first ever Innovation Strategy which includes unlocking Tasmania's potential as the food bowl of the nation, clean energy, initiatives to harness the full potential of broadband infrastructure, building innovation in traditional industries and the development of creative precincts.

Infrastructure

Investments in optic fibre are paying off – Tasmania will be the first in Australia to benefit from the National Broadband Network, work has begun on irrigations schemes throughout the state and investments are being made in low emissions transport.

Social Blueprint

The Government is committed to addressing the causes not just the symptoms of poverty. This is being achieved by integrating services into communities where they are needed most. The Government has announced up to 30 Family and Child Centres and 5 Learning Information Network Centres as part of this process. Connecting up Government services is the second theme and includes the establishment of Integrated Care Centres (Health). The third theme is Connecting up communities through initiatives like the Community Transport Trust.

Progressive Reform agenda

Tasmania Tomorrow – the reforms we have implemented are the key to lifting out post year 10 retention rates from the worst in Australia, to among the best.

Planning reform – the most significant and progressive planning reforms in Tasmania's history. Includes the creation of the Tasmanian Planning Commission and creation of a new category of development 'Projects of Regional Significance'

Health – Tasmania's Health Plan has resulted in more doctors and nurses, red tape has been cut and information technology is playing a far greater role. The Health Plan is also backed by a significant infrastructure program.

Ten Point Plan on Strengthening Trust in Democracy- This includes a review of the FoI Act, Protection for Whistleblowers, A register of Lobbyists and a whole range of other initiatives to ensure accountability and the best possible decision making processes.

Parliamentary reform – Upper House Ministers are for the first time appearing in Question Time in the House of Assembly to answer questions. There are also more sitting days, more question times and more time for Opposition parties to propose policies and scrutinise Government policies.

Water and sewerage reform- the provision of water and sewerage on a commercial basis will ensure the sustainability of the sector in the long term and allow the required \$1 billion in investment to improve environmental and public health outcomes.

"These initiatives show we are putting runs on the board.

"This Government is also demonstrating an ability to stand up and make the tough decisions required, given we are facing a \$1 billion reduction in GST revenue.

"This is in deep contract to a lazy Liberal Opposition. Leadership is not about taking pot shots or glossy TV ads," Mr Bartlett said.

“While the Govt is making sensible efficiencies the Liberals are spending with reckless abandon.

“Will Hodgman needs to explain how he plans to fund his party’s \$3.2 billion black hole.

- \$500 million budget black hole caused by their flawed Future Fund.

- \$600 million shortfall in funding for their under-costed Royal Hobart Hospital proposal.

- \$100 million to rehabilitate the waterfront railyards site; and

- \$2 billion commitment to a four lane Midland Highway.

“Is Mr Hodgman planning to take Tasmania back to the dark old days of crippling debt?

“As Premier I can assure Tasmanians I will not duck the hard decisions and I can rule out take this state back into debt. That is what responsible Government is all about.”

Attacks on Hydro Tasmania Unwarranted

The Minister for Energy, David Llewellyn, has informed the House that Hydro Tasmania had been completely vindicated after unwarranted attacks.

“Members will recall the sustained attack that was perpetrated on Hydro Tasmania concerning its Basslink hedging arrangements throughout 2006 and 2007,” the Minister said.

“Week after week, one screaming front-page headline after another alleged that Hydro’s financial management of Basslink was grossly inappropriate and that the corporation had incurred massive hedging losses.

“While Hydro Tasmania provided a compelling denial of these malicious and bizarre assertions at successive GBE scrutiny hearings, it came as no surprise to me to learn that a person who presumably had some connection to this smear campaign took the same allegations to the Ombudsman.

“I say ‘a person’ because this individual lacked the courage or the character to identify themselves in their complaint.

“Last Thursday, the Auditor-General provided his report on these allegations.

“In that report, the Auditor-General concluded that: ‘Hydro Tasmania’s risk management practices were appropriate, a sound commercial decision was made at the time and that it complied with the Treasurer’s Instruction.’

“The Ombudsman concluded: ‘The [Auditor-General’s] report represents a very careful and considered appraisal of the matter of referral, and leaves me in no doubt that the decision to hedge was appropriately taken and managed.’

“There could be no clearer vindication of Hydro Tasmania’s behaviour in this regard.

“Likewise, there could be no clearer example of the political equation that ignorance plus malice equals nonsense.

“In the current political climate, Tasmanians would do well to remember that just because something is written in a newspaper does not mean that it is true.”

McKim Should Support Greener V8 Supercars

The Minister for Tourism, Michelle O’Byrne, called on the Tasmanian Greens to drop their constant opposition to the V8 Supercar event at Symmons Plains.

Ms O'Byrne said the Greens needed to recognise the V8 Supercars had taken measures to produce an increasingly environmentally friendly motorsport event, and should also embrace the huge tourism benefits the weekend brought to Tasmania.

Having a more environmentally friendly event is a credit to the race organisers, and means the Greens should be supportive of these efforts, instead of being typically negative and anti-sport.

The fuel being used by the V8s this year is a blend of 85 per cent ethanol and 15 per cent unleaded petrol which a study peer-reviewed by the CSIRO found had about half the carbon dioxide emissions of petrol when measured on a full life-cycle basis.

In addition, they are also running the CSR V8 Racing Green Program, where carbon emissions from the racing, practice laps, and the transport to and from all Australian events are offset by the planting of more than 15,000 trees.

Mr McKim has previously labelled the 60,000 fans that attend Tasmania's biggest sporting event as the George Bush NASCAR demographic.

Indeed the Greens have also gone so far as to say that they don't even consider V8 Supercar racing as a sport. Mr McKim's ideological opposition to major sporting events means he fails to understand the benefits that V8 Supercars has for this State.

It gives a major international motorsport event broadcast to millions around the world, and as many as 3000 interstate visitors. Research shows that visitors and racing crews directly inject about \$3 million into the local economy.

It would concern many Tasmanians that if the Greens were ever allowed to form government with the Liberals, these major sporting events, and the many millions of dollars they generate, would be lost from our shores simply because Mr McKim doesn't like car racing.

Unlike the negative Greens and the weak Liberals, the State Government's determination to manage the economy properly meant it was committed to supporting major events that generate income for the State.

Last year, the State Government, through Events Tasmania, supported the staging of over 140 events in this State, attracting 45,000 visitors who injected \$45 million into our economy.

Unlike the opposition parties, the State Government is working to a plan to grow our tourism industry.

It is a plan that recognises the valuable role of event tourism and one that has delivered a vastly improved economy and lifestyle for Tasmanians in the past 10 years.

TT-Line Customer Service Survey

The Minister for Infrastructure, Graeme Sturges, has announced that TT Line's January 2009 customer service survey showed that more than 90 per cent of people who travel to Tasmania on Spirit of Tasmania spend at least a week in the State.

The survey also found that:

- 35 per cent of passengers stayed between six to 10 nights.
- 28 per cent stayed between 11 and 15 nights.
- 11 per cent of passengers said they stayed between 16 to 20 nights.
- 9 per cent stayed 21 to 25 nights.
- 10 per cent longer than 26 nights.

These figures are not only good news for our tourism industry, but good news for the broader Tasmanian economy. According to the Tasmanian Visitor Survey, last calendar year visitors to Tasmania each spent on average \$204 per night.

This shows the investment TT Line passengers make in Tasmania's economy is significant.

The survey also showed the spend was statewide, with more than half of respondents indicating that they stayed in several locations, including cabins, camping, hotels and motels or caravan parks.

The survey also found that Spirit of Tasmania advertising impact was high, as was the performance of the vessels.

Ninety three per cent of passengers surveyed described their overall satisfaction of travelling on Spirit of Tasmania as either excellent or good.

The same percentage of passengers said their expectations were either exceeded or met, while a record 95 per cent of day passengers and 94 per cent of night passengers said they would travel on Spirit of Tasmania again. Overall these results reflect the travelling public's high levels of overall satisfaction with the Spirit of Tasmania service.

This success is a direct result of this Government's progressive, positive and responsible agenda for Tasmania.

All Tasmanians saw from the weak, wishy-washy Liberal opposition was on again, off again, on again, off again support for the ferries.

The Greens of course saw the ships as vehicles for hanging banners off trying to damage our reputation interstate.

With the policy-free Liberals inability to make a decision and the Greens' desire to use ferries to drag our name through the mud it is clear that only a majority Labor Government could have delivered this successful ferry service.

The Tasmanian Sustainable Water Yields Project

The Minister for Primary Industries and Water, David Llewellyn, advised Parliament of progress on the Tasmanian Sustainable Yields Project.

On 26 March 2008, the Council of Australian Governments agreed to expand the CSIRO assessments of sustainable water yields so that, for the first time, Australia would have a comprehensive scientific assessment of water yield in all major water systems across the country.

The Tasmanian Sustainable Yields project will provide an assessment of the current and future sustainable water yields for each of the developed catchments in the State.

The Project will provide the imprimatur for ensuring that the major irrigation infrastructure projects are long-term sustainable in terms of water supply.

This in turn provides the security needed to underpin ongoing investment in agricultural development in a future of changing climate and water demand.

Together with allied projects for South-West Western Australia and Northern Australia, it provides a nation-wide expansion of the initial assessments undertaken in the Murray Darling Basin.

Making the best use of our valuable water resources requires us to carefully balance the socio-economic needs of the Tasmanian community and the critical need for environmental water to maintain the aquatic values of our streams, lakes, wetlands and estuaries."

Over thirty of the nation's experts in climate change modelling and water science from the CSIRO, Bureau of Meteorology, Department of Primary Industries and Water, Hydro Tasmania, Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre and private consulting firms recently met in Hobart to review the results of the project work to date.

The project is funded by the Australian Government and managed through the Commonwealth Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, in conjunction with the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries and Water.

The 18-month project, which concludes in December this year, will develop transparent, consistent and robust methodologies for determining the extent of available water resources in Tasmanian catchments and groundwater aquifers.

It will then apply these methodologies to estimate water availability and demand to the year 2030 in the light of the best available climate change modelling and the expected level of development of plantation forestry, groundwater and irrigation over the next 20 years.

This will include an assessment of the current water availability for the major projects being progressed by the Irrigation Development Board and model how this water availability can be expected to change in the future.

“The Government is committed to ensuring that we continue to have access to high-quality water information to support informed decision-making regarding the sustainable management and development of our water resources.

“This commitment is clearly demonstrated by the significant investment we have made in water resource assessment and monitoring over the last seven years through the Water Development Plan and the SMART Farming initiative”, said Mr Llewellyn.

Sex Industry Laws Review

Attorney General Lara Giddings said she expected a recently completed review of Tasmania’s sex industry laws to generate considerable debate among those who have strong views on the issue, including sex workers themselves.

The Government tabled the review of the Sex Industry Offences Act in State Parliament. Conducted by the Department of Justice, the review was a requirement of the legislation which commenced in January 2006.

The review was required to consider the effectiveness of the Act, rather than any wider issues about how best to regulate the sex industry.

As a result, the questions it considered were:

- whether the Act had restricted or prevented commercial sexual services businesses;
- whether it had protected children and sex workers from exploitation in the sex industry; and
- whether it had safeguarded the health of sex workers and the public.

Ms Giddings said the Sex Industry Offences Act 2005 stipulates that while it’s not illegal to be a sex worker and provide sexual services, it is illegal for a person to employ or otherwise control or profit from the work of individual sex workers.

“There were 12 submissions to the process, and the review provides a constructive insight into some aspects of the regulation of Tasmania’s sex industry.

“The review found there were no easy answers when dealing with the sex industry, with both sides of the debate criticising the Act as it was seen as a ‘half-way option’ that neither legalised nor totally banned the sex industry.

“The Government will consider the recommendations of the review.

“This review does not look at whether the Tasmanian model is the best model when compared with others around Australia or around the world and I would welcome further debate in the community about the right model for Tasmania.

“But given the strength of views on either side of the debate we have to be realistic about whether consensus can ever be reached on how the sex industry is regulated in Tasmania,” Ms Giddings said.

Government Committed To Fox Eradication Effort

The State Government remains committed to eradicating foxes from Tasmania, with the Fox Eradication Program heading the conservation effort.

The Minister for Primary Industries and Water, David Llewellyn, said that the Government has made a major investment in the effort over the last eight years to eradicate foxes from Tasmania, and remains focussed on achieving that aim.

"I am pleased to see the recognition for the importance of making our State free of foxes," Mr Llewellyn said.

"For us to be successful in our efforts requires a major co-operative effort from all levels of Government as well as the wider community."

Mr Llewellyn said there were some changes occurring within the program simply because some of the fixed-term positions had reached the end of their two-year contracts.

"The positions have to be refilled through an appropriate recruitment process, consistent with the requirements of the State Service.

"The positions, in the first instance, will be subject to the Government's vacancy referral process, which allows for suitably qualified permanent public servants to apply for the positions.

"If, after this process, they remain unfilled, the positions will be advertised generally."

King Island Abattoir

The Minister for Economic Development, Michael Aird, said that the State Government had extended the grant deed with JBS Swift, the owners of the King Island abattoir, for up to a month.

"The Government and the company are still in negotiations about the long term sustainability and future of the King Island abattoir," Mr Aird said.

"It is expected that the reimbursements to be made to JBS Swift under the Deed will be within that budgeted by the Government.

"The Government wants to ensure that abattoir workers keep their jobs while the negotiations come to a conclusion."

Rural Women Give Drought The Boot

Tasmanian rural women have revealed how the drought is affecting their well-being by painting their old work boots, as part of the Boot the Drought project.

The Minister for Primary Industries and Water, David Llewellyn, said that this innovative project had already held two successful sessions at Swansea and Oatlands with 23 rural women participating.

The Boot the Drought sessions were considered so successful by the participants that another session will now be held in Bothwell on July 1. Women are encouraged to attend.

"There is a need to reduce isolation and also to understand the impacts of drought on the well-being of farming families," Mr Llewellyn said.

"The aim of the project was to hold targeted focus groups with a fun element to reduce social barriers."

Maggie Fletcher, a local Fingal artist, worked with the women at both sessions to help them express their thoughts artistically through the painting of their old work boots.

The boots will be on display at the Campbell Town Show this Friday and Saturday, May 29-30, to highlight the importance of improving well-being in rural areas.

Each participant received a new pair of Blundstone boots, funded through Tasmanian Women in Agriculture (TWiA), hygiene pamper packs funded by Aussie Helpers, and emotional support materials from Relationships Australia.

At the conclusion of the project, a report on the major issues affecting well-being will be completed. The report will include rural women's thoughts on isolation; details of phone services; training recognition facilities; and coping with stress, loss of local employment and lack of education from consumers. The report will be presented by TWiA to the Drought Task Force.

The project was initiated when Tasmanian Women in Agriculture, in partnership with DPIW, successfully applied for a grant from the Women Tasmania Development Small Grants Program to engage women in rural communities affected by drought.

For further details contact Rebecca Williams on 03 6336 5197 or 0417 520 666.



DHHS Progress Chart

An increase in admissions from the State's elective surgery waiting lists and a decrease in wait times for disability services are both highlighted in the latest edition of the DHHS Progress Chart.

Health Minister Lara Giddings and Human Services Minister Lin Thorp released the Your Health and Human Services Progress Chart for May.

Ms Giddings said the Progress Chart was more evidence the Government's concerted effort to target long-wait elective surgery patients was paying off.

"Admissions from the elective surgery waiting lists increased by 12.7% at the Royal Hobart Hospital, 22.9% at the Launceston General Hospital and by 30.6% at the North West Regional Hospital," Ms Giddings said.

"There were 1141 admissions from the elective surgery waiting list at the Mersey since the State Government resumed management last September.

"This means more people are being treated and as a consequence the waiting list at the RHH fell by 1.9%, by 1.2% at the LGH, and by 21.2% at the NWRH.

"Waiting lists are notoriously volatile and not always a reliable indicator of hospital activity, but nevertheless it is pleasing to see some improvement.

"Under the Commonwealth Elective Surgery initiative we are required to target patients who have been waiting longest for their surgery and that has been reflected in our median waiting times which have increased."

Ms Giddings said access to dental care had also improved, with more Tasmanians receiving care and the waiting list for general care falling.

Ms Thorp said the chart highlighted the improvements and challenges experienced across the entire DHHS in the nine months to the end of March.

"I am particularly pleased with the results in the area of disability services, with waiting times for supported accommodation and day options both dropping.

"We have put considerable effort and resources into increasing options for our clients with disabilities and the benefits are now showing.

“The supported accommodation waiting list reduced by just over 23% and the waiting list for day options decreased by 35 people.”

Ms Thorp said the figures clearly showed the need for more affordable housing in Tasmania to ease the pressure on the public housing system.

“It is clear that the rising value of property has shut many Tasmanians out of the housing market and that is coming through in the statistics released today.

“Thankfully, a huge capital investment program, funded by the State and Commonwealth Governments, is being rolled out as we speak and we are confident of positive change over the coming year,” Ms Thorp said.

Both Ministers agreed that increased demand and Tasmania’s ageing population continued to present significant challenges for service delivery.

Morris’ Ignorance on Show Once Again

The Minister for Infrastructure, Graeme Sturges, said Tim Morris’ total ignorance of federal infrastructure funding was on display once again.

Mr Sturges said the State Government has secured record funding for Tasmanian infrastructure funding from a range of Federal programs and funds, of which the \$22 billion Infrastructure Australia fund was just one.

“I will not be resigning just because Tim Morris is too lazy and ignorant to understand the Commonwealth’s infrastructure funding process,” Mr Sturges said.

“This is a complex issue and I have explained it to Mr Morris countless times but he still deliberately chooses to misunderstand and misrepresent it.

“Contrary to the claims made today, it is no great revelation that we did not seek funding through the Infrastructure Australia process.

“The projects Tasmania submitted to Infrastructure Australia have been publicly listed on the DIER website since December 2008.

“While we did list in the State audit projects such as Rhyndaston rail improvements and rail upgrades for the Melba, Main and Western lines, those projects were not pursued through the Infrastructure Australia process as rail did not meet the Infrastructure Australia criteria.

“It was a rigorous process based on cost benefit analysis of projects aimed at improving Australia's export performance.

“Rail in Tasmania did not meet the criteria, however the Bell Bay Port expansion did.

“But through other completely separate Commonwealth funding process we have secured some \$210 in funding for rail in addition to the \$44 million committed by the State Government in the Rail Rescue Package.

“More than \$65 million of this joint package has been spent or committed to projects that have been completed or are currently underway.

“These funds are part of a wider package of more than \$800 million in Federal funding for infrastructure in Tasmania that I signed off on a few weeks ago.

“But instead of celebrating this massive investment for Tasmania the Greens continue to spread misinformation and mischief.

“Mr Morris should familiarise himself with the Federal Government's funding processes, admit he is aware of them and chooses to ignore them for cheap political purposes, or resign as transport spokesperson,” Mr Sturges said.

TOUGHER SEATBELT PENALTIES ON THE WAY

The State Government will introduce tougher penalties for motorists and passengers who fail to wear seatbelts.

Following a recent review by the Tasmanian Road Safety Council, the Government's peak road safety policy advisory body, the Minister for Infrastructure, Graeme Sturges, has approved tougher penalties which are expected to take effect from late October this year.

The new penalties will be:

- Driver without a seatbelt – an increase from \$110 to \$300;
- Passenger over 16 without seatbelt (passenger fined) – increase from \$110 to \$300;
- Passenger under 16 (driver fined) – increase from \$110 to \$350.

Mr Sturges said that this last penalty would be slightly higher to reflect the increased responsibility of drivers to ensure that children are appropriately restrained.

"The Council recommended that the current, three-point demerit point penalty should be retained, as it is in line with most other states," Mr Sturges.

"35 percent of people who were involved in fatality crashes in 2008 were not wearing their seatbelts, this is an alarming statistic.

"Unlike the Liberals' knee-jerk reactions every time the Government announces a new road safety initiative, our policies are based on sound evidence and analysis of the causes of crashes.

"These new penalties will make the community think twice about driving without a seatbelt and will help reinforce the message that seatbelts significantly reduce the risk of death and injury in the event of a crash."

Its members include representatives from Tasmania Police, the Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources, the RACT, the Tasmanian Motorcycle Council, the Coroners' Court, the Monash University Accident Research Centre and a community representative.

The Council review was in response to recent statistics showing that the number of people involved in fatal crashes who were not wearing a seat belt had increased significantly.

The new penalties will bring Tasmania roughly in line with the average of penalties applied in other Australian States and Territories.