

TRANSCRIPT

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE 2026 COMMONWEALTH GAMES BID

Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid

Geelong – Tuesday 13 February 2024

MEMBERS

David Limbrick – Chair

Joe McCracken – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

David Davis

Jacinta Ermacora

Michael Galea

Sarah Mansfield

Tom McIntosh

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

WITNESSES

Robyn Seymour, Chief Executive Officer,

Cr Liz Pattison, Mayor, and

Matt Taylor, Manager, Economic Development, Surf Coast Shire Council.

The CHAIR: We now resume the committee's public hearings for the Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid.

All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, can you please state your name and the organisation that you are appearing on behalf of.

Liz PATTISON: Hello, I am Liz Pattison from the Surf Coast shire.

Robyn SEYMOUR: Robyn Seymour from the Surf Coast shire.

Matt TAYLOR: Matt Taylor from the Surf Coast shire.

The CHAIR: Pleased to meet you. I am David Limbrick, Member for South-Eastern Metro and Chair of the committee.

Michael GALEA: Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan.

Tom McINTOSH: Tom McIntosh, Eastern Victoria.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Jacinta Ermacora, Western Victoria Region.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Sarah Mansfield, Western Victoria Region.

Joe McCracken: Joe McCracken, Western Victoria Region, and David Davis will be here momentarily as well.

Melina BATH: Melina Bath, Eastern Victoria.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: And Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Member for Northern Victoria Region.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We would now welcome your opening comments and ask that they be kept to a maximum of around 10 minutes to provide time for questions.

Liz PATTISON: Thank you very much, and thank you for having us here. I would like to start by acknowledging that today's events are being held here on Wathaurong country and pay our respects to traditional owners, elders past and present and any Aboriginal elders or community members with us today.

Visual presentation.

Liz PATTISON: Surf Coast shire welcomes the opportunity to make a presentation to this inquiry, and as Surf Coast was not one of the four regional host cities, our presentation is limited to a smaller component of the terms of reference: parts (b), (e) and (f).

Could I have the next slide, please. Surf Coast is located in south-western Victoria. It is about an hour and a half from Melbourne and 20 minutes south of Geelong, and it comprises Torquay, Anglesea, Aireys Inlet,

Winchelsea and Lorne. It is the official start of the Great Ocean Road, and with our close proximity to Victoria's two largest cities and iconic attraction the Twelve Apostles, it is also a great outdoor recreational location with lots of amazing activities. As a result there are major events such as the Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race and the Rip Curl Pro and the like, which probably ring a bell for some of you. The natural environment is a major drawcard, so you can see here just the proximity and the sorts of trips that we get, the visitation.

We receive about 3 million visitors each year who spend more than \$500 million annually. Population growth in western Melbourne and Geelong has resulted in visitation becoming more and more daytrip-oriented, and in 2022 overnight visitation as a percentage of overall visitors reduced to 38 per cent; it used to be 43 per cent in 2018. So the attraction of major events is therefore a key strategy of the Surf Coast Shire Council to address the diminishing length of stay. We really aim to have slow and purposeful tourism. That is what is useful for our community.

Our role in the Commonwealth Games – understandably, as we just talked about wanting to have slow and purposeful tourism, council was excited about the prospect of the 2026 Commonwealth Games and the immediate and long-term tourism benefits that this would deliver. Having a major event in March is also beneficial as it connects the Christmas period with the Easter period; March is typically a bit of a lull.

In the context of actual events in the Surf Coast shire, Torquay was going to be host for the coastal rowing event, and that would be in Torquay. It was obviously in the ocean, which is GORCAPA, so we were not the land manager. But we considered that we would have opportunities with activation sites for visitors and to assist key trading and to bring visitors to the area. So we expected we would stage activation opportunities, and we anticipated we would have a role in logistics such as traffic management and parking.

Robyn SEYMOUR: In terms of the commitments that were made by the government in relation to Surf Coast, we were really excited about having a training venue, and as part of the decision of the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games there has been a commitment as part of the legacy for us to have that. I would have to say our hockey group in Torquay – at the moment they train at Stead Park in Corio. They are a really popular and quite a big group, and they are very excited about the possibility of this new venue that will be delivered as part of that legacy. We are really pleased about that, and we are working with SRV around the delivery of that piece of infrastructure.

In terms of looking forward, we understand the decision to cancel the games, and we appreciate the government's commitment to deliver the legacy facilities and the funding programs to help mitigate the impacts of the cancellation. In addition to the legacy infrastructure – the hockey pitch in our case – the funding programs, such as the council support package, are important opportunities, and we are intending to make applications for those to ensure that we get some local legacy benefits that we had originally anticipated. One of the really great things about the legacy and the funding opportunities is the really good ratio that is being delivered as part of that – a ratio of four to one – which for rural councils is really beneficial. Another positive impact is the capacity to apply for some of the planning funding. Often we get delivery-related funding, but actually the work that is needed to be taken to have investment-ready projects can be sometimes challenging for smaller rural councils.

The other part of the funding opportunity that we are really enthusiastic about relates to housing. Housing affordability and availability on the Surf Coast is a really significant challenge, especially in the coastal townships. The combination of really high housing prices and the shift away from long-term rentals to the short-term rental market is creating a real shortage of accommodation, particularly for our key workers. We have actually got two projects that we are looking at at the moment. One is in Anglesea, which is this one, which is a combination of a renewal of our community and health facilities in that precinct, and as part of that we are looking to embed some worker accommodation in that space. We also have a social and affordable accommodation project in Aireys Inlet. We are really enthusiastic about the housing funds that are available, so we are looking forward to, as part of our work in working up these projects, applying for some of those funds.

Obviously we were going to have the coastal rowing and the training facility in Torquay. One of the things, for many of you who might have been to Torquay, is our town centre is a bit tired, and there is, I think, some work that we need to do in terms of the potential revitalisation of that town centre. We will be applying for legacy funding around what we had intended to do in the walking and cycling space around connecting that precinct to

the areas of Torquay that we would have been looking to work to activate as part of the Commonwealth Games. In addition to that, both in terms of the Torquay town centre but also Surf City at Baines Crescent we are wanting to do some work around those broader precincts and the role they play. At Surf City – many of you may have been there – we get over a million visitors a year, which is great in terms of that start of the Great Ocean Road and the journey to support people down the Great Ocean Road. We also have the national surfing museum, with an internationally significant –

Matt TAYLOR: Surf museum.

Robyn SEYMOUR: surf museum – thank you – but it is pretty tired. So part of what we want to do and would look to do beyond the Commonwealth Games is how we can revitalise that precinct and join it into the Torquay town centre. They are really key priorities. On that note, Matt is going to talk about some work that we have got on our books.

Matt TAYLOR: As Robyn was saying, we saw that there were a lot of opportunities associated with the Commonwealth Games. One of those opportunities was the strong link between the games and cultural tourism. Surf Coast being recognised as one of regional Australia's most clustered and highly active creative areas, we saw this as a great opportunity to link our cultural ambitions to the benefits of the games. There are over a thousand jobs in the Surf Coast that are linked to the creative industry. Part of that opportunity was really about using that as a way to establish a major attraction at the start of the Great Ocean Road. The Surf Coast cultural centre would be located in Surf City, as Robyn mentioned, and that is actually right at the start of the Great Ocean Road. The components of that include the Australian National Surfing Museum, a library, headquarters for Surfing Victoria, arts groups, makers' spaces, theatres and the like. What we saw out of that was the ability to increase dwell time, increase the ability to pull people along the Great Ocean Road from the games or even beyond the games down along the Great Ocean Road. As Robyn mentioned, about 80 per cent of the inquiries we get from visitors in Torquay for their journey are for the broader Great Ocean Road, so we saw this as a great opportunity to capitalise on that. Notwithstanding that, we will still continue to pursue the Surf Coast cultural centre. What we do know is that while the games provided an excellent platform to link those cultural opportunities, we do not envisage its cancellation is going to have a significant impact on our cultural tourism opportunities or the growth of our cultural sector.

One of the things that we were really excited about with the games and also with Visit Victoria's strategy was our strategies had a lot of alignment. The Surf Coast strategy and the Visit Victoria tourism strategy both have a focus on wellness, both have a focus on events, both have a focus on culture, of food – those types of things. We saw a really great integration between the two, and the Commonwealth Games presented a great opportunity to really use our competitive strengths that we both have to deliver some really good outcomes. Tourism on the Surf Coast represents about 13.5 per cent of all employment outcomes in the Surf Coast, so really using those strategies and working with Visit Victoria to benefit our businesses and our communities would have helped strengthen our businesses and our communities in a big way.

The games would have created a great tourism brand. It would have been pitched to an international audience. It had specific regional Victorian focuses, something that we really encourage. We think that is an opportunity for councils and the state government to work on collaboratively together into the future, independent of the games, to really look at opportunities for regional Victoria. In that context is maximising length of stay outcomes for our businesses and broader communities. We believe that one of the limitations of the games was to encourage a focus of activity around the games hubs. We understand the objectives of doing that: you want vibrancy around your precincts and things like that. But we are also aware that it did have a bit of a limitation on the flow-on effects of potential tourism outcomes on a really regional scale. In that context we know that there were a lot of councils beyond the hubs really keen to get in on that leverage but that that ability was a bit limited.

We also know there was a shortage of beds in the region through the Commonwealth Games, and that would have presented some really major challenges had the games proceeded. A scenario with that is that we may have seen a situation where visitors would come and not be able to find accommodation, base themselves in Melbourne and then travel down to these hubs, travel down to coastal rowing in Torquay, and then have to go back to Melbourne. We sort of have that experience with the Twelve Apostles where 600,000 to 800,000 people jump on a bus, they go to the Twelve Apostles, they spend 18 cents each, I think is the statistic that goes around, and then they head back to Melbourne because they are on such a tight time schedule. So for

us, even if the games had eventuated, we feel that that potential scenario would have limited the economic benefit for a place such as the Surf Coast. Our discussions with businesses and the community on the cancellation have not revealed a high sense of anxiety as to the cancellation. We probably found it was higher with the inability of businesses who were further away to be more directly involved in that leveraging.

We have talked about this a bit, but events for the Surf Coast are quite significant, and for us they provide a platform for visitors to extend their stay. We understand their importance to the economy, and we understand the benefits they can provide to the host communities. You can see here on the slide we have over 250 community and major events. Those events have quite significant global reach: 100 million people view them around the world and they draw about 240,000 to 250,000 participants and spectators a year, and they deliver about \$100 million into our businesses, which is quite significant for us.

The Commonwealth Games would have been a unique opportunity in that they were exclusively to be staged in the regions, and we see value in pursuing this concept for other events such as sporting, food and cultural events. They would have provided an opportunity to showcase the capability of regional Victoria to hold major events even in locations such as Torquay, which is really, really important. And although it is a lost opportunity, we have not experienced a reduction of interest from major events wanting to come to the Surf Coast. There still is that demand from events saying, 'We want to come to the Surf Coast. We see your infrastructure. We see your product and we want to be there because we know it is good for our event.' We have a great working relationship with Visit Victoria, and we encourage a continuance of the approach to work with councils to secure events into regional Victoria. As part of that, timing is really important. Off-peak events are of course the most beneficial for us. It makes for a better visitor experience. It makes for better amenity for residents, reduces overcrowding and helps sustain our businesses year-round.

There are events such as the Surf Coast Century, which is an ultramarathon. It is coming up in September if you want to have a go at it. It is a 100-k course around the Surf Coast shire. We raise that because it is an event that is held in the off peak, but what it does is because running 100 k takes a bit of effort people come and train on the Surf Coast in the lead-up. And so hundreds of people literally come down, some from Melbourne, some from interstate, to experience the course, get their fitness up. And so the event impact actually stretches out for a couple of months before the event itself. They are the types of events that we feel that there is an opportunity for councils and the state government to really target, and although the Commonwealth Games is a lost opportunity, there are opportunities to fill that void and many others with those types of events.

We have got a couple of case studies here. I am mindful of time, so we will riffle through this for you. You would be aware of the Rip Curl Pro. The Rip Curl Pro is at Bells Beach. It is an event that pulls a significant amount of interstate and international visitors to our region for an extended period of time. It attracts about 35,000 spectators on average, sometimes into the 40s, and it has a 10-day window, which is interesting and important, which we will come to in a sec. But it contributes about \$8 million to the regional economy – the Surf Coast but even broader than the Surf Coast. It does not run every day because there are some days where the surfing is – we are not going to say 'poor', because we are the Surf Coast; we are going to say 'slightly less than world-class standard'. These days are actually perfect days because while the event is not running we can encourage visitors to explore the Surf Coast, the Great Ocean Road region. And we know they do that, because through our four visitor information centres and the inquiries we get we get an uptick of people saying 'What can I do? The event isn't on.' And they extend their stay. They go to places along the Great Ocean Road and into the Bellarine.

The other example that we have here is the 2025 UCI Gran Fondo World Championships, which has not been staged yet, but it goes to the opportunity of event attraction. We estimate it will deliver about \$10 million in benefit and it has a high participation rate, so there is a significant opportunity for dispersal around the region. Because it is an international event and fondos are held around the world and you have to qualify for them, that is your ticket to come and ride in the one that will be staged in Lorne. We think there will be about 3500 international riders coming to that, but all up there will be 7000 to 8000 riders. We are working with AusCycling to create itineraries for those people so that when they are here they disperse. That event will fill accommodation from Torquay to down beyond Apollo Bay. Both of those events have really large broadcasting audiences, so there is the immediate onsite economic benefit but there is also the tourism campaign that happens when people see our natural environment and say they want to come to the Surf Coast or the Great Ocean Road.

We are raising these because the important aspect of both of these events is that they deliver a boost to our businesses. They can be staged in the off-peak, such as the fondo, and they are recurrent, so they happen year after year after year. And because they happen year after year after year, the community gets right behind them and adopts them. I think if you said you want to move the Rip Curl Pro from Torquay, the community would be quite upset, because they really love it and it is a part of their identity. So on that front, we encourage the Victorian government to continue to work with councils like the Surf Coast to secure but also maintain our events, in the wake of no games being held, because of the benefits they deliver.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for that presentation. I would like to start. We heard this morning from Geelong about some of the money that they spent in preparation for the games. Has the Surf Coast shire done those calculations and figured out how much was spent in preparation for all of that?

Robyn SEYMOUR: For us, having only one event, which required no infrastructure, we had done very little work in that space. Our main focus had been around the hockey pitch. Given we are getting that as part of our legacy, actually the benefit of that is likely to be better than what it would have been otherwise, because instead of having a games venue and then a legacy, we are just getting the legacy, which means there is capacity to actually design the pitch and the accompanying infrastructure to support a community venue and a training venue. So for us there was not a lot. We were waiting to see what the opportunity was. We would have anticipated that through activations, and as we got closer to the event there probably would have been a significant amount of resources put into supporting the events and the training in Torquay, but given when it was cancelled, there were not a lot of resources put in by council.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you. I will pass to the Deputy Chair Mr McCracken.

Joe McCracken: Thanks very much. Thank you. So you guys would have hosted coastal rowing and had a hockey facility as well. When did you find out that you were hosting the coastal rowing? Was it before or after the games were announced?

Robyn SEYMOUR: After.

Joe McCracken: Okay. I mean, I would have thought that if you were going to host coastal rowing, you would get a bit of lead time into that. The government did not correspond with you in any way to say, 'Hey, look, we've got a good idea. Would you like to host some rowing?'

Robyn SEYMOUR: No. I guess because there was not any infrastructure required to deliver – like, we did not have to build anything or do anything. It was the sort of thing that –

Joe McCracken: It is just a courtesy, I am guessing.

Robyn SEYMOUR: I would have to say we were not concerned about that at all. Because we were not part of the hub, in a sense we felt positive about the fact that we were actually getting an event. Particularly because of the gap with our hockey club, where they have to travel to train and to play and they have no venue, the Commonwealth Games and now the legacy actually really benefit us from that sporting perspective around a club who is so enthusiastic. One of the things that was great about that was that the national association and the Victorian association of hockey plus the City of Greater Geelong were really supportive about the training venue being in Torquay. It is really great to support such a thriving club.

Joe McCracken: Were you guys asked to make a contribution towards the cost of any of the games stuff by the government at all?

Robyn SEYMOUR: No, not at this point.

Joe McCracken: At any point?

Robyn SEYMOUR: No.

Joe McCracken: Okay.

Robyn SEYMOUR: The funding is being provided for the legacy for hockey, and there was no infrastructure required for –

Joe McCracken: How much?

Robyn Seymour: I do not think that has been finalised yet, that figure.

Joe McCracken: Did you have any briefings or anything with the government after the games were announced to talk about any of the arrangements with regard to coastal rowing and hockey at all?

Robyn Seymour: We met with the coastal rowing –

Matt Taylor: Yes, coastal rowing, as Robyn said, is far less infrastructure intensive, so once the games are not happening there is no need to unwind a facility. So not much on that front – once rowing is not happening, it is not happening. We do not need to unwind a contract.

Joe McCracken: Are you able to just provide the committee with the times and dates that you did meet with government officials, department heads or whoever it might have been? I guess names, dates, times, perhaps even a bit of a summary about what was discussed, any relevant documents, emails and that sort of thing – are you happy to provide that?

Robyn Seymour: That is fine. There were not a lot of them, so we should be able to.

Joe McCracken: That is fine. It is good for us to know to help in our inquiry.

Robyn Seymour: A lot of the connections we had were really around the business case relating to the hockey field. We were working on an MOU.

Joe McCracken: Did you guys do the business case?

Robyn Seymour: We already had a business case, which I think is also part of why we were able to attract the training venue. We had a shovel-ready opportunity, we had an enthusiastic club and we had a lot of –

Joe McCracken: You should have done the main one as well. I have got another question: when did you find out about the cancellation of the games, or how did you find out?

Robyn Seymour: We found out when we heard there was going to be a stand-up by the Premier around that, and then within an hour or so of the media stand-up I had a phone call from Regional Development Victoria to talk to me about the decision.

Joe McCracken: Wait, you found out after the media conference?

Robyn Seymour: Yes.

Joe McCracken: How did you feel about that?

Robyn Seymour: Again, I had no issues with that. Part of the announcement was the legacy hockey pitch, so for us, not being given a heads-up was not an issue. Actually there is an ongoing benefit to our community in the commitment of the hockey pitch.

Joe McCracken: From my point of view, I would have found it pretty disrespectful if someone had made all these commitments and then I found out on the news. I mean, if you are trying to build relationships and partnerships with people, don't you think that is a little bit odd at least?

Robyn Seymour: I did not, for Surf Coast. We were a very small partner in the process, so I did not think it was. I thought it was fine. I really appreciated the phone call I got from Regional Development Victoria to talk to me, soon after the announcement, about the decision.

Joe McCracken: After the fact.

Robyn Seymour: Yes, an hour or so after the fact.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr McCracken. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thanks, all, for joining us today. Ms Seymour, you mentioned earlier, I believe in response to Mr Limbrick, the hockey pitch. And from where Mr McCracken left off as well, you said that the hockey pitch project would now be better because you get to design a single project rather than having to have two aspects – the delivery and then the legacy. Can you talk me through what you mean by that? What sorts of improvements can you make to this project that you would not have been able to otherwise?

Robyn SEYMOUR: As part of designing what will be the end hockey pitch, it means that we do not have to accommodate things like the temporary infrastructure that would be required for it to be a training pitch for the Commonwealth Games. We can look at a community facility and what sorts of things we would need to support a community facility. So that has been the focus of the work we have been doing with Sport and Rec Victoria – what is needed from a community facility perspective. In addition to that, though, the benefit of the conversations we are having at the moment is that we still get a world-class pitch but in the context of a community facility. It means that for future events that might be held at Stead Park, Torquay can still have a role in terms of a training pitch for those kinds of really important international or national events, but it will serve our community really well now and into the future. It was the gap in our sports precinct there, so we are really excited about that opportunity.

Michael GALEA: Terrific – world-class capabilities, but more importantly, what the community actually needs in the nearer term as well.

Robyn SEYMOUR: Yes, that is right.

Michael GALEA: I note – I just had a quick look – Stead Park is a fair drive from Torquay, about 30 or 40 minutes without traffic, so that is a big thing to have, especially if you do have a growing population. I did want to talk quickly on that as well, and you did mention housing and accommodation in your opening statements as well. I will address it to you, Ms Seymour, but please direct as appropriate. What sort of experiences, and I gleaned a bit from the presentation, has the Surf Coast had from the boom in short-term accommodation rentals such as Airbnb? What impact has that had on places like Torquay but other towns on your coast as well, and what strategies, if any, has the shire done to address that to ensure there is still an availability of long-term housing as well?

Robyn SEYMOUR: Council declared an accommodation crisis a couple of years ago now really because there is such a shortage of rental accommodation and affordable accommodation to support our workers. A lot of our coastal communities like Anglesea, Aireys and Lorne are really struggling to be able to find accommodation for some of our teachers and health providers, let alone any of the workers who would work in our restaurants and cafes. Council has been looking for creative ways to try and look at how we can contribute to creating those accommodation opportunities. One of those is – we think it is pretty innovative – looking at the precinct in McMillan Street in Anglesea, where we are really looking at the opportunity to revitalise what is a really ageing precinct with ageing community facilities and as part of that bring the health and community facilities, integrate them a lot more, get some efficiency, create some lovely spaces for community. You can see some of that build capacity for things like long day care, where we have got a real shortage at the moment and a really big waiting list and the community house cannot meet the needs at the moment. But also, and really importantly, as part of that we are looking to see if we can incorporate accommodation which would be affordable rental accommodation that would be on Crown land. That would be managed through a provider which would then look to try and support the worker needs within the Anglesea community and also some of those coastal areas, potentially Lorne.

That was one of the projects we have been looking at. We are also in the process of a project in Aireys Inlet, looking at developing some social and affordable accommodation on some land we have there. Then, in addition to that, we are currently starting a pilot for tiny houses on wheels to try and look to see if that can help contribute to some of the challenges we have got. But it is a wicked problem. It is a really wicked problem, trying to support a tourism region and balance that against vibrant communities that can meet their needs and ensure that they have the workers to support them. We have also been advocating for a range of policy opportunities in that space as well. The funding that is available around housing at the moment is such a great way to test new and innovative models to start to create some change and test some opportunities to try and tackle this really wicked problem.

Michael GALEA: It is very exciting. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Galea. Mr Davis.

David DAVIS: Thank you, Cr Pattison, Ms Seymour and Mr Taylor. I want to start with Ms Seymour if I can. I just want to understand the role of council in the 2025 Beach Volleyball World Championships in Torquay prior to its cancellation. What role did you have in that?

Robyn SEYMOUR: Matt actually was the one who managed those relationships, so he is probably better placed to talk about that.

David DAVIS: Just succinctly.

Matt TAYLOR: Yes. In terms of the 2025 volleyball world championships, that was certainly an ambition. We had the volleyball event last year, or a year ago, and that was a test to see how well it would go. Look, we had a one-in-100-year weather event and those types of things, and the site had some constraint issues. On the back of that the event moved into Geelong last year, and then of course in 2025 obviously is not proceeding. From our point of view there were some initial conversations on it. There was not anything ever signed with us for the 2025 volleyball world championships.

David DAVIS: Have you done any assessment of that whole process and an examination of what worked and did not and what ultimately went wrong?

Matt TAYLOR: Yes. For sure. What worked was – you know, volleyball is a unique event, and it provided a new drawcard to our events calendar. That was fantastic. It was at a time of year where it was just about to come into our peak time, so at the end of November, start of December. What probably could have been improved was the initial event was put together pretty rapidly, and when that happens your ability to market out the event and inform the local community is a bit diminished.

David DAVIS: And was that with the state government's involvement or not?

Matt TAYLOR: That was mainly our discussions. We worked pretty intensively with the team from Volleyball Australia, and we also worked with Visit Victoria. But we had direct connection to Volleyball Australia and worked with that team on how we could best inform the community, how we could best get business buy-in, because where it was was on a foreshore precinct just alongside the Esplanade in Torquay, and there are cafes and businesses along there.

David DAVIS: So that is all gone now. It is not coming back.

Matt TAYLOR: No. That event has gone somewhere else.

David DAVIS: That is all right. Now, the second set of questions I had was around housing. If I can just draw a clear distinction, Ms Seymour has talked a lot about key worker housing and related matters and then issues for staff and so forth. But in terms of the government's proposed housing spend, it seems to me most of that is not directed at that, it is directed at public and affordable housing in a different mode, and I am interested to know what is planned there.

Tom McINTOSH: The \$150 million worker accommodation fund is open –

Robyn SEYMOUR: Yes.

David DAVIS: But it is more than that, isn't it?

Tom McINTOSH: Yes. We are doing a billion-dollar regional housing program.

Robyn SEYMOUR: The \$150 million is relevant to this precinct. The other social housing is Aireys Inlet. We are looking at that project, which will be a mixture of social and affordable.

David DAVIS: And how many would be there?

Robyn SEYMOUR: We are still working through that. It is a co-design process with the community. It is about –

David DAVIS: Single numbers, dozens, hundreds?

Robyn SEYMOUR: No, no. It is a small precinct. We do not have a lot of Crown land available. It is more like, it is in that sort of nine – we will get you the proper numbers.

David DAVIS: That would be lovely – a split-up of the different types. I am sort of breaking it down into types just to try and understand it a bit better. Has the state government given any commitments for money to do these projects, or is it –

Robyn SEYMOUR: With this precinct we were given money to actually do the planning part of that –

David DAVIS: To actually build or –

Robyn SEYMOUR: Not to build – to do the planning and the precinct work and work with the community. We were given \$200,000 to actually start to work on what the opportunities are in that precinct.

David DAVIS: I am just trying to get to where the matters are now. So there is not actually any money as you understand it on the table specifically at the moment for projects in your area?

Robyn SEYMOUR: Not delivery at the moment, but –

David DAVIS: Right. Is there any idea of when that might actually happen? Is there –

Robyn SEYMOUR: One of the things that we are looking to do with this precinct is put in an expression of interest for the worker accommodation fund for – see that area where number 2 is? That would kind of –

David DAVIS: How many would that be?

Robyn SEYMOUR: At the moment it is 39 beds, but we have still got work to do to actually see where that lands. We are about to start a co-design process to really look at what that could be.

David DAVIS: And in broader numbers, there is no great number planned other than Aireys Inlet is all you are saying.

Robyn SEYMOUR: This is a challenging – this is a really –

David DAVIS: I am just trying to understand what is there.

Robyn SEYMOUR: Yes. It is small. It is all small, which is part of why things like the opportunities around the second dwelling planning decisions – at the moment those second dwellings can potentially be used for Airbnb. In the context of what can actually help to shift that dial, policy changes to limit that would be –

David DAVIS: I am just following through the state government funding, that is all.

Robyn SEYMOUR: Sure, sure.

David DAVIS: And the answer is there is none committed –

Robyn SEYMOUR: Not at this point.

David DAVIS: and none immediately in contemplation.

Robyn SEYMOUR: Well, we will be applying for funding.

David DAVIS: Right. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Davis. Dr Mansfield.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you for appearing today. I guess just further on that housing thing, do you have any modelling or work that the shire has done on the need for public housing in your area?

Robyn SEYMOUR: Yes. The social housing register has the number of the gap. We can get the number for you. It is quite a significant number.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Have you had any discussions as part of the legacy funding that might be available with the state government or Homes Victoria about how much might be available to start to address that public housing need in your area?

Robyn SEYMOUR: We have a relationship with Homes Victoria, and we are working with them. They are supporting us and working with us on the Aireys Inlet project in particular that we are looking at. So yes, they have visibility of the work that we are doing across the shire.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Do you feel that work will be enough to meet the need?

Robyn SEYMOUR: No. It will be a start. Again, part of the work I think we need to do in this space is also to test new models to actually see what works in the local context, particularly in environments like ours, which are really constrained. You cannot extend the town boundaries. They are some of the highest risk locations in the world from a fire perspective. So the sites and how we do that – we have to be really creative and look for those opportunities, which are things like policies around second dwellings, looking at how we trial the tiny houses on wheels and what impact that has, and the cumulative impact that these various projects have in terms of really shifting and starting to get the balance right around supporting social housing and also our affordable worker accommodation.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Prior to the games being cancelled we heard some advocacy from different housing groups, including the Council to Homeless Persons, regarding the impact that hosting the games might have on regional cities with an increase in demand for housing and potential inflation of housing prices. Given the existing challenging market in the Surf Coast shire in terms of rental availability and affordability, was any discussion had with you during the Commonwealth Games planning process about additional support – because we would have expected there might be an increase in demand around that area for housing during that time – or measures that could be put in place to deal with that excess demand?

Robyn SEYMOUR: We were asked for the potential opportunities of where housing could go within proximity of Geelong, given that is where everyone would be housed. But it was really clear that housing athletes, volunteers and workers was a huge challenge, let alone visitors, and from an economic perspective actually getting visitors to stay and then continue down the Great Ocean Road to support all of the communities and visit the amazing places we have along the South-West Coast of Victoria was actually part of what would have been really beneficial. In a sense, there is an opportunity for the state government to focus its investment to actually look at addressing some of these wicked problems that are beyond Geelong and further afield. When I speak to my colleagues further down the coast, they are faced with a lot of the same challenges in Apollo Bay and further down the coast that we have in Surf Coast.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Another thing related to that is transport and the capacity for transport to get people to and from the events that were potentially going to be hosted at Surf Coast. Again, were there any discussions or were you approached at all by the state government or any other games organising entity regarding transport?

Robyn SEYMOUR: I was aware that there was some planning happening in relation to transport, but no, there was not any engagement with us – I guess because we were such a small part, really. The focus was on Geelong and how to get people to the key venues in Geelong. The focus was very much in that space as opposed to Torquay or the broader kind of Surf Coast region.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Okay.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Mansfield. Ms Ermacora.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Thank you, Chair. Thanks for being here today. It is absolutely fantastic to hear from a regional, or an almost outer regional, council. I have been amazed at some of the creative work that councils have been doing. I have learned some interesting perspectives today from just listening to different people, not least of which was that the games were possibly not worth delivering at any cost of delivery – this was from a previous presenter – and the delivery might have been harmful for us. But I really appreciate your

feedback around how the cancellation is almost enabling a renewed focus on the priority needs of your communities – that is what I am hearing you say –

Robyn SEYMOUR: Yes.

Jacinta ERMACORA: rather than a temporary distraction, perhaps financially and resource-wise, for the games. I am also aware that, say, Moyne Shire Council are doing quite an innovative key worker project in caravan parks, where they are putting cabins in. There is no planning required, the infrastructure is there and the council usually manages the park. I think this is another innovative project, and I am very impressed that councils are getting on with solving problems. Have you got any of those kinds of thoughts around key worker housing?

Robyn SEYMOUR: Surf Coast does not manage any caravan parks, so that is not relevant to us, but the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority certainly have been looking at those potential opportunities, and there have been considerations in places like Lorne, where there are really significant challenges, in looking at whether or not there are opportunities for those kinds of solutions in communities like that.

Jacinta ERMACORA: I know this is a really complex question for your community, just like it is in Port Fairy, Peterborough, Port Campbell and Apollo Bay, but what is your housing vacancy rate and the demand for homes?

Robyn SEYMOUR: We have over 2000 Airbnb short-term accommodation rentals just between Anglesea and Lorne. That does not include the whole of the Surf Coast, and when you look at our vacancy rates under the census –

Matt TAYLOR: At times it has gotten down to 0.1 or 0.0, so a flat zero –

Jacinta ERMACORA: Wow.

Matt TAYLOR: and what that has resulted in is some long-term residents even needing to leave because the owner wants to do something with the house and then they cannot find something else. That is a challenge. But it has gotten to a flat zero at times for us.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Then presumably employers would then be struggling to get staff, even cleaners for those 2000 Airbnbs would be difficult to get. I know that is a challenge in Forrest actually.

Robyn SEYMOUR: Yes. The businesses in Lorne are doing some quite creative things to find accommodation for workers. They are using the Pacific hotel and purchasing houses and using those to house their workers, because there is just not the availability. That tends to be more in relation to things like the hotels and restaurants, but that does not then support the healthcare workers in a place like Lorne, the teachers that go into the schools, our kindergarten teachers and some of those other community members that really bring the vibrancy.

In Lorne there is an ageing population. Younger people cannot afford to live in Lorne, so they do not have the volunteers for CFA or SES. That is starting to pose some issues in an environment where you really need those kinds of volunteers to really support a community. What we hear from that community is that they are concerned about it being a dying community because there is a lack of a young refresh of the community coming into that space, let alone from a worker perspective.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes. That is fantastic.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Ermacora. Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thank you. Thank you very much for appearing today. Just out of interest, we heard from Mr Johnston and Mr Crawford from Committee for Geelong and the chamber of commerce that there was a housing forum in October 2023. Minister Shing was on that housing forum. It was a digital forum. Was that something that you were invited to?

Robyn SEYMOUR: Yes.

Melina BATH: And you were on that?

Robyn SEYMOUR: Yes.

Melina BATH: It seemed to me to be fairly high level. Was there any sort of commitment to your Surf Coast in terms of funding or any sort of quantity of money?

Robyn SEYMOUR: No. It was really an overview of the government programs and funding potential as opposed to getting to specific locations or anything like that.

Melina BATH: So promotion rather than fine-grain detail at that point in time. Did you take any notes?

Robyn SEYMOUR: I am not sure.

Melina BATH: Okay. Could you have a look and see if there were any notes taken, and if there were, supply them to us? That would be handy.

Robyn SEYMOUR: Sure.

Melina BATH: Did you want to make another comment on that?

Robyn SEYMOUR: No.

Melina BATH: Okay. Thank you. Just walk us through the hockey centre. I see in about 2021 you had, I think, costed around \$3.12 million for that hockey centre and there would be a contribution from council and you were looking for one from government. Is that still the current cost or has that gone up?

Robyn SEYMOUR: No. It is higher than that now given what we have seen.

Melina BATH: Sure. Do you have a current cost estimate?

Robyn SEYMOUR: I would have to check with the team. I would have to confirm that; I would not want to give you the wrong information.

Melina BATH: Thank you. That would be marvellous if you could. I know that the government is talking about a \$60 million regional commitment in terms of sport infrastructure and that is a bucket of money that people are clawing at from all sorts of places, in particular from those areas that are now missing out – you know, Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton and Gippsland. I just want to drill down. You have said that you appreciate the government's commitment to deliver its funding commitments, but what have you got that is concrete? I just want to understand. We are about to advocate on your behalf for your slice of the pie. What have you got that we can take and say to the minister, 'Firm up that commitment'?

Robyn SEYMOUR: In terms of that legacy, under the fund there is a number of things that we are looking to contribute. Under the council support package, we are looking to put in an application around some cycling and walking connections, because that is what we would have looked to implement as part of the Commonwealth Games. In the regional community sports and development fund we are looking to put in an application in relation to Spring Creek – the football and cricket club pavilion there – to do some upgrade works that are needed in that space. Obviously in the planned games infrastructure we have got the hockey facility. Under the regional tourism and events fund we are looking at a project to do the planning work for mountain bike trails in Anglesea.

Melina BATH: So these are all reasonably well costed? You have done your homework on that?

Robyn SEYMOUR: Yes.

Melina BATH: It might just be useful for us to see, if you provide them, those costings and information. Just returning to the hockey centre, at what fine-grain point are you at? You have got the nice visual on PowerPoint. You have got an approximate updated cost from \$3.12 million. It could even be double – \$6 million or the like.

Robyn SEYMOUR: My estimate is that it is in that \$5 million to \$6 million, because it is not just the pitch –

Melina BATH: It is the car parking and facilities around that.

Robyn SEYMOUR: Exactly. Yes.

Melina BATH: Anything that you can provide to us that would actually help us advocate for you would be beneficial. Once upon a time 2026 was an actual deadline so that you knew your infrastructure, whatever it be, was going to be delivered. Now we are not going to necessarily. In effect each council is begging – requesting – this funding. You say you have got a reasonable amount of confidence, but you actually do not in effect. You have not got that commitment as yet.

Robyn SEYMOUR: We have received a commitment from the state government for the hockey pitch. It was part of the media announcement, and we have correspondence that confirms that that will be part of the legacy.

Melina BATH: And the time frame? How much and the time frame? Is that in the correspondence?

Robyn SEYMOUR: No, not at this point. That is the detail, because part of that is working out exactly what is included, particularly around the infrastructure around the hockey pitch.

David DAVIS: So commitment in principle is really all you have got. You have not got a commitment to a specific project of a specific scope and a specific size and a specific type at a specific price.

Robyn SEYMOUR: No, we are still working through that. We are working through that with Sport and Recreation Victoria.

Melina BATH: But it has been there from 2021. That is when you had that initially, so it is now three years on.

Robyn SEYMOUR: It was only as part of the announcement of the Commonwealth Games when working through that. I will have to check the date around when actually we first –

Melina BATH: Okay. That is all right. I have just looked up online –

Robyn SEYMOUR: It was not 2021.

Melina BATH: I see some things around 2021 – that there were \$3.21 million costings on it.

Robyn SEYMOUR: We had put in a funding application which was not associated with the Commonwealth Games.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Bath. Mr McIntosh.

Tom McINTOSH: You will have to forgive our coalition colleagues. They are not okay about the idea of application processes and merit and that sort of thing sometimes – sports rorts. But we will not go there. That was their federal counterparts, not them.

Just looking at the \$2 billion regional fund, we have not even touched yet on Tiny Towns, food and fibre and those things that go down throughout the – I was going to say electorate – council area. I suppose if you could just give us a bit of a breakdown of what feeds your economy. I think you touched on some stats before around the tourism economy, but also it would be interesting to hear about regional produce, food and fibre, and how those two come together, the way you see those working together.

Matt TAYLOR: I will wrap food and fibre into agriculture. It is a growing sector, but the way the Surf Coast economy is constructed it is a smaller sector for us. It is around 4 or 5 per cent of the \$2.7 billion economy. Our major sector is construction. That is our key sector. Tourism is of course another significant sector, and health, retail – those types of things. Notwithstanding that it is a smaller sector, it is a really important one for us in terms of the food and fibre, because we have stated goals to grow the contribution and significance of agritourism in the council to help support our hinterland area, which is an incredibly important area for the Surf Coast shire. We want to work with the businesses to grow what they do but also create new

jobs in the hinterland as well and in doing that in an agritourism context help pull people off the coast and into the hinterland and disperse visitation around the region.

Tom McINTOSH: With the workers accommodation, I mean, you have touched before on, say, on health services and kinder and these sorts of things. Would that be your priority, say, opposed to the priority – a higher priority than, say, construction where workers can come in and move a little bit more fluidly as per jobs, but for those sorts of essential services, ensuring the workers for those needs?

Matt TAYLOR: Would –

Tom McINTOSH: For around services like health and education, when you look at workers.

Matt TAYLOR: Would it be a higher priority?

Tom McINTOSH: Yes, just for yourselves with workers accommodation. It may vary for different towns or areas along there.

Matt TAYLOR: They are obviously very different industries. Construction, those types of jobs, will be dispersed around the entire hinterland. We find that there is more of a challenge in key worker accommodation for health sector workers than, say, construction workers. From that aspect, as Robyn was saying, one of the things that we want to do is provide accommodation for some of those in knowledge-based essential health – those sorts of things. That is not to say construction is not essential, it is just that that seems to be an area where more people, more workers, struggle to find accommodation. Doctors might struggle to find accommodation in Lorne and be within close proximity. Tradespeople can work further because they will tend to not have a single point of home destination, so where they are based does not necessarily need to be as close to their ultimate workplace because it changes a lot.

Tom McINTOSH: I did have other questions, but I have noticed we are just about out of time. Are we, Chair?

The CHAIR: Yes, very close to time.

Tom McINTOSH: Okay.

The CHAIR: No worries. Thank you, Mr McIntosh. Thanks, everyone, for appearing today and giving your evidence. You will receive a copy of the transcript for review in about a week, and after that it will be published on the website. The committee will now take a break momentarily to reset for the next witnesses.

Witnesses withdrew.