

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria

Shepparton – Wednesday 13 September 2023

#### MEMBERS

Sonja Terpstra – Chair

David Ettershank – Deputy Chair

Ryan Batchelor

Melina Bath

Gaelle Broad

Wendy Lovell

Samantha Ratnam

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Sheena Watt

#### PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

John Berger

Ann-Marie Hermans

Joe McCracken

Evan Mulholland

Rachel Payne

**WITNESSES**

Mark Lamb, Chief Executive Officer, and

Cr Geoff Dobson, Board Member, Murray Darling Association.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open the committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria. This public hearing is for the Environment and Planning Committee, an all-party committee of the Parliament looking into the October flood event. We will be providing a report to Parliament, which will include recommendations to the government. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands we are gathered on today, and pay my respect to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee. I welcome any members of the public in the gallery and remind those in the room to please be respectful of proceedings and to remain silent at all times.

For those of you who are giving evidence today, all evidence that is 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 hearings. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

I will take this opportunity to introduce myself, and then also committee members will introduce themselves to you. I am Sonja Terpstra, Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee.

**Melina BATH:** Melina Bath, Member for Eastern Victoria Region.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Hi, I am Gaelle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria.

**Sheena WATT:** Hi. Sheena Watt, Member for Northern Metropolitan.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Wendy Lovell, Member for Northern Victoria.

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

**Samantha RATNAM:** Hi. Samantha Ratnam, Member for Northern Metropolitan.

**The CHAIR:** And with that we will hand over to you. You have about 10 minutes to make your opening remarks, and if I could just also get you to state your name and the organisation for which you are appearing, just for the Hansard record. Over to you.

**Mark LAMB:** Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity. My name is Mark Lamb. I am the CEO of the Murray Darling Association. For those who are not familiar with the Murray Darling Association, it is a representative peak body which looks really right across the Murray–Darling Basin and is representative of about 175 local government areas from Queensland in the upper tributaries of the Darling River all the way through lower Queensland, through New South Wales, ACT, Victoria and of course South Australia.

We aim to represent local government, but we also have a range of other memberships such as individuals who are passionate about the water and the Murray–Darling Basin. We represent local government, but that really means community, so we do not see ourselves as necessarily beholden to local government but we are really trying to represent communities right across the basin and their interests. We are predominantly focused on water and water issues, but we are not just about water; it is about communities and things that are related. For example, if I can introduce Cr Geoff Dobson, who is a councillor here in the Shepparton region and shire, we

currently are doing work with Shepparton on things like the circular economy. So it is predominantly about the water, but it is not just about water; it is about communities and the best interests of communities and the local governments which represent them.

Obviously we are sympathetic to the impact of the floods. I am sure you have already heard a lot about the impact. Really, the impact is to the tune of \$5 billion. That was the best guesstimate of the economic impact in the early estimates. We are currently doing more analysis on that – and that is not just Victoria, that was across the Murray–Darling Basin. It is our estimate that the impact of the flood in terms of contributing to inflation is about 0.1 per cent of GDP, so it has an inflationary impact, and I think probably communities have already spoken to you about this this morning. It is felt throughout in terms of food, commodity prices; it is felt in terms of insurance – not just the cost of insurance but the ability to get insurance – so it has a pretty devastating impact.

But if I can bring things back to the macro-economic level, really what we see happening: obviously floods are inevitable, and more likely to occur in the future as we see the impact of climate change swinging from droughts to floods. Having said that, I guess the challenge we have in Australia is that we have continued to build in flood plains for the last 200-plus years, so this challenge is going to continue, and I think our job certainly as a peak body is to try and build resilient communities. How do we prepare communities not just for floods but the impact of economic and climate change? So whether it be bushfire, whether it be droughts, whether it be floods, we need to prepare communities better. I think Cr Geoff Dobson will talk more about that on a micro level in terms of the impact on the local community.

Certainly it is our observation that we need to do a better job of managing the river systems. I work very closely with Minister Plibersek and I work very closely with the Murray–Darling Basin Authority as the statutory authority, and we talk about how the river system is managed. One thing we talk about is the fact that we need to make science-based decisions. One of the challenges is that sometimes the river system is not managed based on science, it is managed based on historical references. For example, I think one of the challenges that we faced in the floods last year was the fact that as a society we somewhat ignored the inevitable signs in front of us. The Bureau of Meteorology was predicting a third round of La Niña, and yet we did not take real, severe action.

The river system by and large is managed on the basis of: store the water throughout the year, hold it back and let it out during the summer when it is needed for communities, for irrigators and for farmers et cetera. Ostensibly they hold back as much as possible until a particular inflection point, where the water is released. Now, the problem with that is that if there is a wet season – and we had of course that experience of a wet season in spring, which really occurred from September through to about November, but the bureau was predicting that. It was well known, yet I think we sometimes ignore the science. So when that wet season occurred there was no airspace. In other words, the dams were already at capacity. If we look at Dartmouth Dam or Hume Dam, or if we look at most of the dams, including Eildon et cetera, they were already almost at capacity.

It has been said that the floods would have been damaging regardless simply because of rainfall, but when you consider how many gigalitres were being let out of the various dams, of course that contributes to flooding. I think we can do a better job in the future, and we are currently working very closely with the Murray–Darling Basin Authority with a view to managing and taking into account the science, whether that be a predicted drought, a predicted flood or La Niña, El Niño or whatever. I think there are some lessons to be learned. I will hand over now to Cr Dobson, who will talk more about the local issues.

**Geoff DOBSON:** Thanks, Mark. And thanks, everybody, for being here and listening to our local stories. I am here representing the Murray Darling Association, but I am a councillor of Greater Shepparton. You will have heard, or will hear, from the council in due course today. There are two practical issues that I want to bring up which I would like to have on record that we can do better, and they are around levees. We have got a couple of districts out to our north-west – Wendy would know them pretty well – at a place called Undera. Out at Undera there is a whole length of levee bank that has been there for many years. Who put it there? Governments of years ago. Who takes responsibility? Nobody really wants to. It is there. From a council point of view, we have had some community consultation out there, and of course council, the catchment management authority and Goulburn–Murray Water have all taken the heat about the levee banks. What has happened out at Undera is that the levee banks have been there for so long that they have been worn down

et cetera, and they breached. What happened then is there were a number of farms out in the Undera area that were inundated – houses and what have you. It is the angst that that caused. We as the council have gone out there to try and placate and try and get answers. Can we do anything about levee banks? No, it is not in our remit to do that sort of stuff. What is happening is the local communities are doing it themselves. They are either illegally restoring levee banks to a higher capacity or reviewing the banks that have been damaged.

My question to everybody is: who will take responsibility for doing the levee banks completely? Or I put another proposition to you that we have been talking about lately: is it time that we did away with levee banks altogether and for governments to buy the land that is surrounding the inundation points, the levee banks, taking control of that but leasing it back to farmers on a no-liability basis? That could be far-reaching and it could be expensive, but it is a proposition that I put to this inquiry as something that should be considered. Is it practical? I do not know, but it is an idea that I think we should be looking at. So the government takes control of the levee banks, takes away the levee banks, buys the land surrounding the levee banks and leases it back on an annual basis, or a 25-year basis or whatever, to the farmers on a no-liability basis. They are the two issues. Either retain the levee banks – and who at long last will take responsibility –

**The CHAIR:** You have 2 minutes.

**Geoff DOBSON:** Thank you. Who will take responsibility?

The second one is that at the north end of Shepparton – of course those around Shepp know Loch Garry. Loch Garry was put out there many years ago. It is a low area; it has got a bank surrounding it and the release gates on it are old bars – they are timber bars. When a big flood comes and once the flood level comes to 9 metres something – Wendy would be aware of it. Once it gets to a level –

**Wendy LOVELL:** 10.36.

**Geoff DOBSON:** the bars are released. But they have got to release them on a personal basis – somebody has got to get in there and physically bring the bars out. My contention and our contention would be that that has got to be removed – not Loch Garry, but the way in which it is controlled has got to be removed. Do we rely on outstanding or old-fashioned levels? The other one is – and we can do it in Shepparton – the Victorian government spent \$2 billion renovating the irrigation system. We need to renovate Loch Garry in order that the problems out there do not exist again. The levee banks around Loch Garry also breached, and the local farmers there had inundation on houses and on properties. They are a couple of specifics that I think should be involved in the conversation. I do not have the answers, but I am glad to have the situation here today to tell you.

**The CHAIR:** Great. Thank very much. All right, we will open up for questions now. Ms Tyrrell.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Okay. Thank you, Chair. You were just talking about land buybacks around where the levee banks are and all that. How much land are you proposing?

**Geoff DOBSON:** Look, you would have to do a study on that. Undera is a pretty big area, and you would have to look at those farms that were directly inundated. As we all know, floods do different things in different years – sometimes it is that much and sometimes it goes there – and I think a full study should be done. It is an idea that has got no further than an idea at the moment. So, no, I cannot give you that information.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Dr Ratnam.

**Samantha RATNAM:** Thank you so much for the work you do in the community. That was really good of you – some of the work and the insights you have had since this event. That is really useful for us to know. Your submission covers a couple of areas, and obviously you are representing some of the feedback that you have gleaned from the councils as well. I was interested in some of the lessons for the future and how our systems can hopefully prevent but then also respond to more disasters that we are likely to face. You recommend dedicated recovery working groups. I think that was one of the councils actually; I think that was Mildura council in their report. I am interested to know from the groups you represent and work with, and your insights and reflections from the community, how their experience has been of the post-event recovery phase.

Do you feel like they feel well supported? Is it mostly well supported with some gaps? Are these, kind of, the final bits that could make the response even more supportive to communities? I am interested in your thoughts.

**Mark LAMB:** Cr Dobson.

**Geoff DOBSON:** One of the good things, if there are good things to come out of the flood, is that the collaboration between the catchment management, Goulburn–Murray Water, Greater Shepparton council, the SES and the police – all the first responders – has been nothing short of enormous. Combined with that we are in Mooroopna, where one of the greatest shows of community involvement happened when the local footy club got together and had 100 people or whatever go out to help with the clean-up. I think we do that very well. Mark alluded to the fact that the old way of declaring when a flood is imminent was the river heights and all that. We could improve on that. As part of the council, I was pretty impressed with the way that we all worked as a team. Anything else I would leave to the experts.

**Samantha RATNAM:** Yes, that is reflected by others as well. Thank you.

**Mark LAMB:** Dr Ratnam, if I may just also summarise, I think overall the support has been very, very good. Not just in Victoria but across the states, councils – especially, for example, down the Murray River – have experienced significant asset damage, and yet there has been great collaboration between the state governments and local government to try and address that. Obviously it is inevitable we are going to have floods, but I think overall the communities feel well supported.

**Samantha RATNAM:** Okay. That is good. Thank you.

**Geoff DOBSON:** One of the aspects that does trouble me is the insurance aspect, and that is that we just had a renewal in Shepparton of our insurance premium. Not only have the premiums risen dramatically but the sums insured have dropped dramatically. So is there room somewhere along the line for some other authority to come in and top them up? We are talking on behalf of ratepayers and taxpayers all through the flood areas, and councils can only accommodate a certain amount of cost. One of the things I think we should be looking at in the after-effects – and you asked that question of what could be done – is the insurance and liability for floods should be looked at in isolation.

**Samantha RATNAM:** Thank you very much. I am happy to come back if there is time.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Lovell.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Thanks. The floodwater, as we know, is not considered an environmental flow, so it does not take any water out of the storages. We heard from Peter Harriott this morning that the flood has caused a lot of damage to the riverbanks with scouring et cetera and that there is a lot of need for rehabilitation of the riverbanks themselves. Do you think that further environmental flows, on top of the floods and the damage to the river that has already been done, will cause further damage to the rivers? And should the flood be considered an environmental flow?

**Geoff DOBSON:** No, the floods are not an environmental flow in my mind; they are a situation that occurs. But there has been untold damage, and you would have heard that this morning, in the urban areas, around the rivers themselves. If this keeps on happening combined with the surge flows that we have got to have to put water down the river to go to South Australia and wherever, combining those two things – I think of our river system, especially the Goulburn; let us talk about the Goulburn, let us talk about the Broken – the damage will be irreparable. I think we have just got to have a really new look on how we deal with this sort of stuff. The flood itself – it happens. And although the environment was knocked around – especially around the lower Goulburn it will take many years – I do not see it as part of the environmental problem.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Okay. You talked about the dams being almost at capacity, and we all know that that has caused a lot of anxiety in the community, particularly in the Rochester community this year – that the dams were even higher this year than they were last year, prior to the floods. The legislation requires Goulburn–Murray Water to have the dams as close to 100 per cent by 1 October, I think it is. That legislation was set when the storages were storing just irrigation water. Water was used probably twice as quickly as it is now, because we had 100 per cent of allocation and 100 per cent of sales in most years, which took the storages down before next year's inflows came in. Now that we are not just storing irrigation water, now that we are not

doing those additional sales waters on top and we are also having carryover water and environmental water in the dam, do you think that the legislation needs to be reviewed around the storage of water and the capacity in the dams?

**Mark LAMB:** I think the simple answer is yes. I think we need to consider the needs of the future, and one of the biggest concerns, not necessarily around the lower basin but around the upper basin, is water security. So we need to think about the future, especially given climate change, of how we are going to address the water needs of all of these communities. We have seen water being trucked into communities, and what cost do you put on that? We work very closely with our partners at CSIRO. They are predicting up to 30 per cent less water by the year 2050. If you think about that and you think about the increasing demands, my economic background tells me that it is about unlimited needs and wants versus trying to deliver with limited resources. For example, I am currently talking to the chair of the Almond Board of Australia. They currently have over 62,000 hectares of almonds under plantation. As those almond plantations become mature – and that is going to happen in the next five years – the demand on the water is going to be huge. I mean, we have replaced certain crops with other crops, so we have gone from citrus to grapes, and now we are switching to almonds. The system is kind of designed to chase the highest yield, and almonds are very high yield, but also each almond takes roughly about 10 litres of water to grow. So the demands on the river system are absolutely enormous.

Coming back to your question, yes, I think we need to consider it, and that is why we are talking to the various statutory authorities to say we need to rethink how we manage it. But also we need to have more intelligent storage. By intelligent storage I do not necessarily mean putting dams everywhere. For example, we have been taking water out of the ground the last 200 years. There is a thing called managed aquifer recharge, which is about putting the water back. For example, when we have floods, if we are able to intelligently divert the water and actually put it back into those underground aquifers, that is a very intelligent way of storing water. It is being done overseas. For example, in the US they use it widely in places like Nevada. It has been piloted or trialled in South Australia. It is an intelligent way to store water. If you think about it, one of the biggest challenges with storage facilities is that of evaporation. Dartmouth Dam, as an example, in Victoria – the largest dam in Victoria – is intelligent in that it does not have high evaporation, less than 1 per cent, because it is an alpine dam. Whereas if you think of Menindee Lakes – massive evaporation. That is why South Australia has moved towards instead of open channels there, basically all pipes. If we start to think about more intelligent uses of storing water, then this is part of the equation of water futures and how we guarantee water security for communities.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Sorry, it sounds like you are making the case for keeping the dams at as close to 100 per cent full as possible, which is what is causing the anxiety amongst these communities at the moment.

**Mark LAMB:** I am advocating that we actually use the science to guide us. So for example, if the science says we have got La Niña, then we should not have full dams because we are going to get caught, whereas if we know there is a drought, sure. I mean, obviously the bureau is not an exact science. Meteorology is not totally exact, but it is pretty accurate. We kind of know when there is a La Niña event or an El Niño event, so we kind of know if there is a drought coming or a flood. But it is not about just keeping dams at 100 per cent – that is rather simplistic; it is about looking at intelligent storage methodologies.

**The CHAIR:** We are going to have to move on.

**Geoff DOBSON:** That is the interesting thing about storage of water. I mean, regional Victoria, as we all know, is growing, and our needs are really growing, and the intense agriculture that we need to feed our population is growing all the time. So now we have got irrigation, and now we have got 2100 gigs of water to be stored within the Murray–Darling Basin for the environment. There is no problem with that, but if you are going to have to store it in Eildon weir or you are going to have to store it in the Hume weir and we do get a flood event like we got in October of 2022, how do we handle it? So I agree that more storage facility has got to be looked at, or another way of storing it, rather than keeping all our eggs in the one basket. I mean, at the moment we have got that 2100 gigs of water within the Murray–Darling Basin, but we have not got the capability at the moment of putting that water out into the flood plains or into the wetland areas that we need to. So it is not ideal, storing the water, if we cannot put the water into the required areas in flood times. So it is a mixture of both storage facilities and getting the infrastructure and the programs done first before we go buying any more water for the environment or we have got to shoot it down the river. It is so complex – and we all know that; I am not telling you anything. And that is what people like us – we are part of the whole

organisation trying to work out a solution. When you have got six jurisdictions in the whole of the area, it is a difficult problem.

**Melina BATH:** It is a busy day.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, thank you. Ms Broad with a question.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Thank you. I totally agree water is a complex topic, there is no doubt about it. But look, you have mentioned levee banks, and I guess we have seen how they do protect regions and assets from significant costs and can help protect properties. But there seems to be a lot of confusion, I guess, with it being built and then who maintains it.

**Geoff DOBSON:** That is it.

**Gaelle BROAD:** I have heard it suggested dividing it between a third local, a third state and a third federal. What are your thoughts on levee banks? Your submission talks about Mildura council looking at doing a study of levee banks, so if you could just talk to the value of that and how you could see it working.

**Geoff DOBSON:** Yes. Having a third, a third, a third – who takes control of what, who is responsible for what? I think there has got to be one authority that has control over the levee banks. I think that authority would firstly need to go and talk to the communities out in your Underas of the world, because they are the people on the ground. They are the ones that have suffered the loss. They are the ones that will not make it up for years because they cannot get insurance – all that sort of stuff. But at the moment I am not advocating for who, I am just suggesting that the confusion is there at the moment when it comes to laying the blame, as always happens in one of these events, when you find that the yabby holes have got through and put a hole through the levee bank and then the water surges through and opens it up. We have got to get rid of all that. So perhaps the state government and the federal government – I mean, we have got to get together and resolve as to who has the ultimate control over these so that the channels of power can be harnessed correctly. Look, we have all got an idea of who it should be, but I think a proper committee looking at levee banks in isolation should be made, with the help of the catchment management authority, who are the experts in all this area. They really are; they know what is going on. But they are like everybody else – they are taking the heat as much as we are. One authority, one control, take it then down through the systems and have community representation within sort of subgroups and all that – that is how you would do it. But believe me, we cannot keep on doing what we have been doing for the last 200 years with levee banks. It is just not working. And the same with Loch Garry – we have got to look at Loch Garry as a super important thing. Somebody is going to get killed out there one day trying to take bars out of Loch Garry when the floods are on. It nearly happened this year.

**The CHAIR:** We have 10 minutes left for this session. I know there are plenty of other people who have questions, so I will go to Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** Thanks, Chair. And thank you, gentlemen, for being here today and for your passion and understanding around water. I just want to pick up from Gaelle's point. I note that in the *Victorian Floodplain Management Strategy* of 2016 – Minister Neville at the time signed off on it – there was a recommendation 17d. That is what I have been looking on my phone for – not trying to be rude. It talks about the maintenance and the permits around that maintenance for levee banks but that it should be that a local beneficiary can apply to maintain and pay for that maintenance. We have heard from up in the Campaspe and Gannawarra that they are quite concerned about that recommendation. Do you hold that same view?

**Geoff DOBSON:** Yes, certainly. When a levee bank breaks, the water goes everywhere. It does not discriminate; it goes everywhere. So if we are going to consider levee banks as a state or a national asset, which they should be for the protection of taxpayers, therefore they must be controlled not by poor farmers out there having to find the funds because they cannot get insured, getting them to do it all – so who then controls whether it is up to standard? What type of soil is it? Is it the proper soil? All those sorts of issues. So it should be one authority. In my opinion, it would not be a community responsibility – it has got to be better than that.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. And as you say, they can then become illegal, but they have actually sought the permit and tried to maintain their own asset downstream of that levee, or upstream of it.

**Geoff DOBSON:** Can I say this: when a flood is about to approach you, and you are a farmer out at Undera, you do not care about the rules and regulations; all you care about is your cows and your pigs and your sheep and your crop that you have put in and how best you can protect them. That is what it is. It is a here and now. It is not a legislation thing, it is not rules and regulations; it is survival. So we have got to take that angst away from the community, and there is only one group that can do it, and that is the government.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Last one before I move on to Sheena, because we have not got much time left.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. You speak in your submission around Mildura quite a bit, and this is actually from my colleague Jade Benham, the Member for Mildura. Also I see my colleague the Shadow Minister for Water Tim McCurdy is in the audience, but this one comes from Jade Benham and relates to Lower Murray Water and irrigators in that space. Apparently during the floods, or just prior to the floods, the Lower Murray Water advisory committee was not reimbursed for building the levee – so a bit of the conversation that we have just had – and protecting that precious infrastructure on the river. I am just wondering if you know anything about that. Is that something you can take on notice and share with us? Have you had conversations with them? Who has been responsible? They seem like they are wearing the burden and not being reimbursed for that.

**Mark LAMB:** I would like to take that question on notice, please, because I would seek the counsel of our local board member there, Cr Jason Modica. He has been very involved in that. But I would need to get further advice about that.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Watt with a question.

**Sheena WATT:** Thank you both very much for being here. I did have some questions to the Mildura rural council, so I appreciate that they may be again some for taking on notice. The submission talked a little bit about the dedicated flood information page that was set up, and I just wanted to know: how did that work, and was that sort of interactive or were community members able to contribute information? Do you have any sort of sense about the take-up and use of that as a page and what sort of community engagement worked to support rural –

**Mark LAMB:** In principle, I know a little bit about that. I am not an expert on it, but I know they really wanted to excel in communication. Communication was their primary concern – to get information out as soon as possible. I think it is a great example of community collaboration. I know Shepparton does it. I know most regional councils, especially when they are faced with a crisis, really try and get the comms out as quickly as possible. So I think they built a kind of comms station with a view to making sure that people are aware of what support they can get, whether it be local government, SES, state government or federal government grants or anything. It was really about making the community aware of what was happening. I am not an expert in that field, but I know that they prided themselves on the comms.

**Sheena WATT:** Okay, lovely. I am interested to understand what events and tourism strategies have been successful in the community recovery and if you have any examples from their membership across the Murray Darling Association of some good things to get people back to the community.

**Mark LAMB:** There have been a lot of great examples of councils that are trying to, I guess, rehabilitate their assets and trying to get back on a positive note. I think of one council in particular. We are about to have our 79th annual conference, and that happens to be in Murray Bridge, which is obviously on the Murray. That happens in two weeks time, so we will have, you know, a lot of people from the water family – everyone from Minister Plibersek to state water ministers et cetera. That is a great example where Murray Bridge are really trying to lead forward. The South Australian government is trying to encourage people to get out of Adelaide, go to the Riverland district, spend money and engage in tourism, because the tourism industry was hit particularly hard. During the floods of course it shut down the entire tourism industry. I mean, COVID had already occurred, so they had already had years of this, and all of a sudden houseboats could not move and people could not even cross the river because the punts or the ferries were shut down. So the South Australian government is trying to take the initiative to get people out there and start spending money in the region. Murray Bridge Council are doing exactly that, encouraging people. They are encouraging us to hold our

conference there, so we have got people from all over Australia in Murray Bridge in two weeks time. As a result of our conference there is more. The One Basin Cooperative Research Centre – I talked to the CEO yesterday – are taking their team over there. So I think this is kind of gathering momentum as towns see the opportunity. Some are obviously doing a better job than others, but I think it is a great example of how communities get back on their feet and they put money back into the community.

**Sheena WATT:** I appreciate that, thank you.

**Melina BATH:** Next year, Mildura, or Echuca. Or Yarrawonga or Shepparton. Well, I am thinking on the Murray.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Well, thank you very much for giving your presentation and your evidence today. I do not have any questions; it was a very comprehensive submission. So I would just like to thank you again for coming along today.

**Witnesses withdrew.**