

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism and Events Sectors

Melbourne—Wednesday, 16 June 2021

(via videoconference)

MEMBERS

Mr Enver Erdogan—Chair

Mrs Bev McArthur

Mr Bernie Finn—Deputy Chair

Mr Tim Quilty

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Lee Tarlamis

Mr Mark Gepp

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Dr Matthew Bach

Mr Edward O'Donohue

Ms Melina Bath

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

Mr David Davis

Ms Harriet Shing

Mr David Limbrick

Ms Kaushaliya Vaghela

Ms Wendy Lovell

Ms Sheena Watt

Mr Andy Meddick

WITNESSES

Mr Michael Leaney, Proprietor, Walhalla's Star Hotel.

The CHAIR: The Economy and Infrastructure Committee public hearing for the Inquiry into the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism and Events Sectors continues. Please ensure that mobile phones are switched to silent and that any background noise is minimised.

I wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, and I pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

My name is Enver Erdogan and I am Chair of the committee. I would like to introduce my fellow committee members present here today: Melina Bath, Mr Mark Gepp, Mr Tim Quilty, Mr David Davis, Ms Wendy Lovell, Mr Lee Tarlamis and Mr Rod Barton.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. However, any comments repeated outside the hearing may not be protected. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Ultimately transcripts will be made available on the committee's website.

We welcome your opening comments but ask that they be kept to a maximum of 5 to 10 minutes to allow plenty of time for discussion and questions. Could you please begin by stating your name for the benefit of the Hansard team, and then start your presentation. Over to you, Michael.

Mr LEANEY: Thank you very much. My name is Michael Leaney and I am the proprietor of Walhalla's Star Hotel. Thank you very much for the opportunity of presenting today. I have a long background in the tourism industry. I was trained at William Angliss college some 35 years ago in the mid-1980s and have been unfortunately in this industry for a very long time. Some people would say it is a bit crazy to be in this for so long. I built the Walhalla's Star Hotel in 1998. It is a reconstruction of the original gold era hotel in Walhalla, and I have been the operator and proprietor of this building on a hands-on level since it opened.

Obviously the last few years have been very challenging in Gippsland especially. We had direct fires in Walhalla in early 2019. Then there were fires further east in Gippsland in late 2019. Then of course in early 2020 we had COVID come into being, and we were closed down at our business on 23 March and did not reopen until 1 December 2020. So for basically seven months we were closed. We took the decision at that stage to close for a longer period simply because the stop-start, stop-start environment is very, very challenging for anyone in the tourism and hospitality industry. I should point out that this hotel is not a pub. We are an accommodation hotel. I am actually in one of the hotel rooms now doing various different Zoom meetings because it is nice and quiet. So we are primarily based on accommodation, and we have a restaurant and bar as part of it.

So just to point out that pre-COVID 60 per cent of our market was Melbourne, about 20 per cent of our market was interstate, 15 per cent was interstate and then the following 5 per cent was intrastate, so regional Victoria—and most of those regional Victorians were actually coming from fairly close, from Latrobe Valley et cetera. Obviously with COVID we have had no international tourism whatsoever. That has gone down to zero. Our interstate market was only just beginning to rebuild in April and we were just getting a trickle of it, but of course that has now gone to zero as well. So now we are in the situation where 95 per cent of our market is Melbourne and 5 per cent is intrastate with regional Victoria. Of course the ongoing challenge we face, given that when this submission was put in this was pre the circuit-breaker that we have at the moment—circumstances have changed quite dramatically since that. Not only have we had the new circuit-breaker since this submission we made but we have also had flooding in Gippsland in the town that I am in. We actually had a tourism association meeting to go through some of the losses, and I think the key losses need to be that this town alone in this circuit-breaker is well and truly over \$200 000 to \$300 000 in losses just by this circuit-breaker.

So the impact on this region has been quite marked. From a council point of view we actually have data that shows that there has been a greater than 62 per cent reduction in revenue since 2018, so there has been a progressive decline in income—and of course we do not have the figures yet for this quarter, which I dare say will actually take those figures back. There was a little bit of an uptick in the first quarter of this year, but of course that will be greatly affected by the latest downturn.

One of the things I would say that I would note is that one of the challenges would be that a lot of money has been thrown into marketing and getting people back, and that is great, but one of the biggest problems I actually feel we face is that the infrastructure that is surrounding us is in a very, very poor shape indeed. Lots of our government infrastructure, whether that be walking track, whether it be facilities provided by government, has not had any maintenance for over 20 years, or limited maintenance for 20 years, and is in a very poor condition. So as an operator we have found that post COVID and post people coming back domestically it has been very difficult to encourage people to get out and do the activities because a lot of them are just closed. We have found that some of the money that has been allocated over the years has often been put into projects that are potentially what I would describe as pet projects and actually have not delivered any real results on the ground. A good example of this which I had in my submission is the great outdoors program. Lots of money has been put into updating and allowing camping in remote DELWP sites, but in a town such as Walhalla that normally attracts 140 000 visitors a year our camp sites were not eligible for any form of upgrade, and as a consequence they are not fit for purpose and are actually being totally overrun at the moment with domestic markets when we are able to open.

I also express concern about the new rules coming in about people being able to camp in leasehold areas on river frontage in farmland. That actually works against the tourism industry because what that actually does is it means it takes people out of areas that are authorised and have permits et cetera, like caravan parks, and undermines their viability. So there is, I feel, a real problem in that we are focused on the marketing side of recovery from tourism but we actually have not looked at the supply side, and government has a key role in terms of supply-side issues through DELWP and Parks Victoria to actually give us the appropriate standards of facilities that the private sector can lean off. At the moment it is very much being driven by the private sector. The rest of it is really much in my submission. I presume you have all read that, so it is probably better for me to go to questions now. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Michael. Yes, I did read your submission. It was quite informative, your take on what is happening. What I might do is to hand over to Mr Gepp to ask the first question, and then I will go to Ms Lovell—in that order. Mr Gepp.

Mr GEPP: Great. Thank you. Thanks for joining us this morning, Michael. We appreciate the submission that you have put in and your opening remarks. Look, there are probably 1000 questions that we could all ask you, but can I touch on something that caught my eye in your submission, and that is the relationship with Visit Victoria and some of the tourism boards. You certainly identify that as an area of improvement that we ought to consider. I wonder if you might be able to unpack that a little bit for the committee, please.

Mr LEANEY: Yes, most certainly. Look, I found, having been in this game for a long time and dealing with organisations like Tourism Victoria before it became Visit Victoria, that certainly when the organisation was corporatised to become Visit Victoria it did become very corporate and they basically lost a lot of their, I suppose, face-to-face involvement with the industry. There was a real kind of pyramid developed that had the operators at the bottom, then everything had to be fed through regional tourism boards, and then that was then fed up to Visit Victoria. And there was a real loss of, I suppose, not control but I would say there was a real loss in terms of regional areas in terms of having input into what goes on at Visit Victoria. So there are so many filters in the way that for an operator like me to have any kind of direct input is almost impossible, and I have found that that has been very detrimental not only to my business but I think overall to many of the smaller parts or less popular parts of regional Victoria especially. If you are not one of the key icons of the state, it is very, very hard to get any form of traction, and the structure is actually set up in a way to ensure that that is how it stays. So funding always goes to the key icons, like Wilsons Promontory, for example, which—do not get me wrong—is a great product, but there are plenty of other places that need to be promoted and looked after as well.

And I think the corporatisation and how the structure was set up was very much so that there was not indirect involvement from operators, which was totally at odds with what happened in the mid-1990s, when there was a

realisation that unless we brought the operators along with us—as in Tourism Victoria—the whole system was going to fail. So I think what has happened since it was corporatised is that the pyramid has been turned upside down. Originally the whole concept in the 1990s was the pyramid was the operators were at the top and it funnelled down through operators and marketing boards to Tourism Victoria. Now it is the other way, and it means that from the operator you really have very little input and you are also totally told about what is going on simply through a newsletter and there is very, very little on-the-ground involvement. Now, not everyone wants that, but for an operator like me, as someone who is keenly involved, it is very difficult and very frustrating, because the structure is basically there to block you from being involved.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that and for sharing your experiences of that corporate structure. I might hand over to Ms Lovell to ask the next question.

Ms LOVELL: Thanks very much, Enver. And thanks, Michael, for your presentation. Can I just say how devastated I was to hear of the damage that has been done in Walhalla over the last week. I remember very well my visit to Walhalla when I was in the tourism portfolio, and you personally showed me through the mine. I really appreciated that and have always thought very fondly of Walhalla ever since.

Michael, I am interested in exploring the tourism vouchers that were offered by the government over the January and autumn period and whether you benefited from those and whether you think that they can be better designed in the future. We have heard from a lot of operators that because it was a busy period it was a little bit like having a happy hour at 7 o'clock on a Saturday night and perhaps they can be better targeted to lower peak times, midweek or winter periods. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr LEANEY: Yes, certainly I would agree—I mean, obviously the vouchers were not actually presented to us as accommodation providers, but people did mention the fact that they were using them. So we do know that we had people that were actually utilising the vouchers who stayed with us. The downside of the vouchers was simply that they were staying on a Saturday night, when we were full anyway, so really my first suggestion would have been, 'Well, if you're going to make the vouchers available, they should be available for midweek and not weekends or school holiday periods'. So to give you a good example, in the current circumstance where 95 per cent of our market is coming from Melbourne, we are being absolutely overrun on weekends to the point that people just cannot cope—cafes are overrun et cetera, et cetera—but on the Monday you go to nothing. So a good example is our cafe around the corner. On a Sunday they took over \$1500, and on the Monday they took \$38. There is a dramatic difference between the two. So the vouchers could be better utilised by saying, 'Well, yes, you can use them, but they're only for midweek if they are for accommodation'.

The other thing I would suggest to you that would be good would be to have them so there is a combination of making sure that they incorporate some form of tour or some kind of activity. Because I think one of the biggest challenges you can find with these vouchers is that they can be used—I am an accommodation provider, so they are great, they are going to come stay with me—but what is the incentive for that person then to go out and to ride the train or do a mine tour or something like that? There is nothing in there at the moment. So I would suggest there needs to be a way to combine it. When international tourists were coming, the big change between internationals and domestic is that if you look, like here, the internationals would actually do all the tours, would do all the things because that was their first visit, but for a lot of people that we may have, especially in regional Victoria from Melbourne, it might be their second or third visit—they are return visitors—and so therefore there is no incentive for them to go and do a paddle-steamer ride in Echuca or, you know, go to the penguin parade, because they have done it before.

So I think the vouchers should have some element of not only accommodation, so your \$200 has to include some accommodation, but it also has to include some kind of activity like a tour. And that would certainly help the tour industry, which has quite often been really forgotten about in this whole thing.

Ms LOVELL: Thank you very much.

Mr LEANEY: And midweek.

Ms LOVELL: Yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Michael and Ms Lovell. I might pass over to Mr Quilty, then Ms Bath.

Mr QUILTY: Thanks. I read your submission, and it certainly resonated with me in a lot of areas. I think you are identifying a problem that is spread through a number of areas of the Victorian government sector. There is a lack of desire to engage and even what could be described as a lack of competence in some areas—

Mr LEANEY: That will get me into trouble, I have no doubt.

Mr QUILTY: especially in DELWP and the way they are managing land and the parks.

Mr LEANEY: Yes.

Mr QUILTY: But not to get too political about it, what would be simple steps, do you think, that could be taken to fix it with DELWP and also with Tourism Victoria?

Mr LEANEY: Well, DELWP is a hard one, but I think one of the challenges with DELWP I see—and I have said this in my submission—is there is an air of mediocrity that has set in and basically it is about being safe as opposed to developing product or developing things that might be a bit risky. There is a safe way to do things, but that does not actually develop anything in terms of tourism product. So I said in my submission—and I am a strong believer of this—that quite often committees of management are set up not to fail but they are also not set up to succeed. And we should be aiming for having targets, and those committees should have targets and they should have an element of KPIs that they have to achieve that are actually looked at. And then there should be KPIs for the officers, because I will be straight up: over 20 years I have seen no movement of the dial in terms of key assets, for instance, in Walhalla that should be really firing. So if you look at a product like the long tunnel extended goldmine, which is a state-owned asset, there has been no investment in that over many years, and it is left to a group of people who are well-meaning volunteers with no tourism skills to run it, and yet they are given no advice and very little support from DELWP as to what they are going to do in the DELWP offices.

So I think perhaps what needs to happen is that instead you have your land managers—right?—but within DELWP you have a unit that is created as tourism land managers. Because in the state there are probably 20 clearly identifiable locations that are very strong in tourism that might have tours running on them already, they might have a product that is not just scenery and is not just like a park area that could be taken to the next level by actually having a tourism bent to them as opposed to just land management. Quite often the land management within DELWP is actually there to stop development on sites, yet if you look at the mine, if you look at some of our key products in Victoria which are DELWP operated—a good example is the Phillip Island Nature Parks, that has really grown and really gone gangbusters. Why? It is because not only does it have a good board but it also has the support to make that happen. But I think that within DELWP, you know, the Walhalla board of management that runs five separate tourism products is being run from the Traralgon office, and no-one sees that at the Traralgon office these are just guys that—and I know one of the officers down there—are looking after 300-plus reserves, football reserves, little parks, halls et cetera, and ‘Hey, a great tourism product you just chucked in among them’. And so therefore it never actually develops because they take a steady-as-she-goes attitude. And so I think that would be a way to do it—to actually have a tourism unit within DELWP looking after their tourism sites. That would be a start.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Bath.

Ms BATH: Thanks, Chair. And thank you—good to see you again, Michael. I am probably coming out your way on Friday.

Mr LEANEY: Okay.

Ms BATH: So that it is just a flag on that one. That region is absolutely magnificent. Walhalla is a time capsule, but we do not want it to become a degraded time capsule. You have put a lot of effort into the Star Hotel and others with their assets. You raise a really good point, and I guess my other comment I would like you to respond to is about establishing the personnel to look after those public assets but tourism assets and also asking them to work in them—because it is one thing to sit back and look after them, it is another to understand the market and what drives people and what is needed in that area. That is one thing I would like you to comment on. The other thing is I have just had emails from the Goldfields Railway, and they have been smashed by the floods as well as had to shut down during COVID for extended periods. Volunteers run a lot and support a lot of our regional tourism industry. What are some steps the state government needs to hear

about supporting volunteers to do their work, access grants and be more professional? Could you unpack that, please?

Mr LEANEY: Yes, sure. Look, from the Walhalla example I think one of the biggest challenges we face is that our success is actually our failure. We have a very strong community of interest within the township—a very strong group of people that support the township—and we have a great volunteer group. But that actually works against us in many ways because it means that people see things happening, like pre COVID this town was attracting about 140 000 visitors per annum. That was really great, but it meant that it was an easy out to not actually put any investment in. If you look at the railway as an example, there needs to be some professional support there, and I think one thing that does need to happen is there needs to be assistance provided to these volunteer groups to develop their governance and develop their operating procedures. Well-meaning volunteers are great, but the railway is also under a DELWP committee of management. They do not receive any kind of assistance from DELWP with how they manage themselves. So governance is important.

A key thing for these organisations is we should really seriously be looking at how they are insured. VMIA, for instance, does not insure and cover these organisations. For instance, the railway alone has to pay out about \$24 000 a year to their own insurance. They are not insured by DELWP even though it is a DELWP asset. So the bridges that have been damaged, for instance, with this flood are state assets. As state taxpayers we own them, but they are not insured by the state and therefore it is up to a volunteer organisation to pick up the tab. I think that is an area that needs to be looked at as well and given that support.

I think one of the things we need to recognise with all of these organisations is quite often they start off really small, but as they expand out we need to understand that their professionalism needs to grow with them. And that is why I think we need that tourism body within DELWP. Visit Victoria, for instance, should be taking a keen interest in what happens with these bodies. Quite often they are just downplayed. The fact that the Walhalla Goldfields Railway carries over 35 000 passengers and is the second-biggest tourism heritage railway in the state, after Puffing Billy, is quite often lost just because it happens—our volunteers come and make that happen. But is that sustainable in the long term, and we need to have the governance in place and some funding in place to actually take them to that next level, whether that means extending the railway or providing them with the appropriate facilities to be able to expand. I think that is really important. I know that the railway has been trying to get grant funding et cetera, but it actually stretches already stretched volunteers who are just trying to run a business, and it means that there is no growth. That is where I think we need to be concentrating in order to get the growth, because the growth needs to come through in the next few years given the situation we are going to be in post COVID.

Ms BATH: Thanks, Chair. Can I have one more, Chair?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr LEANEY: I hope that answered the question. That was a bit of a ramble; I am sorry.

Ms BATH: No. Michael, I think you have really hit the nail on the head. You are speaking about Walhalla and this area, but I am sure residents over the rest of the state in regional Victoria and in many other places are experiencing similar issues in relation to that. I guess the other thing is that this is in relation to the COVID pandemic, this inquiry. You were shut down for months and months and months, the Walhalla hotel, but the local cafe and the pub would open for a weekend—and that is unsustainable, again, as a business model when you have these peaks and troughs. So as a message to us as an inquiry, what is some of your messaging around working and surviving in regional Victoria, in Baw Baw shire, in Walhalla, in COVID force going forward? What do you want to see happen?

Mr LEANEY: Look, the real thing is we need to have a strong level of surety. This last circuit-breaker is extremely challenging, partly because we do not have JobKeeper or any kind of funding behind us. I think I have applied for \$7000 as a regional accommodation provider, but my losses are teetering on \$50 000 at the moment, so I am about \$43 000 shy of what the funding gets. I will be the first to admit I did build up a bit of a war chest post the last things, so I have got a bit of a war chest of money. Look, it is really challenging from a staffing point of view. We are struggling to hold on to staff because we got new people on board once we reopened but we have now been closed down again. I would not be at all surprised if those people are out looking for jobs right now, whether that be a job with Coles or whether it be a job with a healthcare provider or

something. Part of the reason why we are struggling to get staff to work in the hospitality and tourism industry is that if you were offered three jobs—packing shelves at Woolies, driving a truck or being a barista—which one would you take? You certainly would not take the barista job, because it is the only one on that list that could be closed down tomorrow. And as a consequence of that lack of surety, even if it is a full-time paid job, people will not take it on because it is just stop-start, stop-start.

Ms BATH: Michael, just a quick one on that: when you talk about a war chest, I do not want you to paint the picture that you are rolling in it. That war chest might have been used to upgrade your sewerage system or something like that, so it is taking money away from something else.

Mr LEANEY: Absolutely not. I have been extremely concerned about what was going to happen later in this year, heading into winter, because winter is traditionally our quietest time of the year anyway, so we normally put money aside anyway to get through winter, but the reality is that I was really concerned that something would happen and that we would have to cover it, and it has. I am actually spending the grant money we had got previously; I just had not gone out and spent it. I have been very, very conservative with how I have run our business. But I will be the first to say—and I will use inverted commas—I am in a ‘lucky’ position, because I have been here for 23 years and I own the business, so I do not have a landlord breathing down my neck, I do not have a lot of the expenses that other people do. Had this pandemic happened in 2000 or 2001, had we just been open for three years, I will be straight up: we would be totally stuffed. I can look down at this, a bit like a helicopter view as to what is going on, because we are relatively safe, but it also should be pointed out that we have no staff left. We are running this hotel on three people at the moment, and that is limiting our capacity to reopen.

We have not reopened our cafe next door. Why? It is because we just do not have the staff, and I am really reluctant to go and employ more people because I employ them, put them on and then a few weeks later I have got to put them off. The mental health on this one just does your head in. I have become very professional at pressing that cancel button on the computer when it comes to reservations. We used to take prepayments and we used to take deposits; we do not do any of that anymore. Why? Because it just does your head in when you take that money and you have got to pay it back, and just the processing time, that extra work you have got to go to, is very, very challenging.

I would suggest to you this fourth lockdown, the circuit-breaker, is actually the worst, and it is actually the worst from a financial point of view because there is very little financial support to keep you going. But just from a mental health point of view, it has just done everyone, and a lot of people in the tourism and hospitality industry frankly are just done. They have had enough. I have been speaking to the pub owner down the road—and of course she has had flood on top of it, which has not helped—and she was saying that, no, she is about to throw in the towel because enough is enough. People are just really tired. We are tired and then when we get visitors coming, we have to be up and happy, happy, joy, joy and stuff. They do not want to see us being stressed. So you have got this real balancing act between being happy and encouraging people, because our customers are humans, they understand. If they are cattle, the cattle go to market or the cows get milked regardless. The wheat grows regardless. The builder builds. But we are dealing with humans, and we have to be up all the time, and it is very, very draining. And that is probably the worst thing about this fourth lockdown; it is the drain emotionally. I have really felt it this time around too I must admit, and then having floods on top of it has not helped.

The CHAIR: No. Thank you, Michael, for sharing your personal perspective. I might go to Mr Barton to ask a final question.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Michael. You have touched on very wide-ranging topics and thoughts and everything. But if you want to give us a message—if you want to go to talk to the Premier tomorrow—what do you need tomorrow?

Mr LEANEY: Well, certainly tomorrow there needs to be more support than the \$7000 that has been given for this breaker, because it is just simply not enough. I am the one that has built up a war chest because I am in a unique position without having a landlord et cetera, but I am in a lucky position. And if I am finding it difficult, there will be many other businesses that will be totally stuffed. So the \$7000 that we are entitled to, and I think that was more than a lot, is simply not enough. Remember, this latest circuit-breaker I think started as a week, then it went to two weeks. Well, effectively we are up to four. And while we can open for regional

Victorians, we have got to remember that regional Victorians represent 5 per cent of our market, especially in key tourist areas. It will be different in major towns like Ballarat, Bendigo et cetera where they have got a home market. But I can tell you for towns like Walhalla, Halls Gap, Bright, those places that are very much reliant on a tourism market, the amount of money this time around just does not help.

The other thing I think, one thing we do need to do is to have some form of way to assist with reopening that is not just marketing. To give you an example—and I do not want to highlight Walhalla; this is just an example—in Walhalla the challenge is that on some days cafes will do quite well and the next day they will not. So one day you might take \$35. Well, if you are employing staff, you are paying out over \$100 alone just in wages to have someone on for 3 or 4 hours, so you are \$75, \$80 down before you even start on food costs, heat, light and power et cetera. The suggestion we have made locally is that rather than the dollars going into marketing, because people are coming anyway, what we are finding is that people are coming midweek and businesses are not opening because they do not have a surety that they are going to have enough business to warrant them opening. So it would be good to have some kind of fund that would be available to actually pay some of those base costs—to say, ‘Look, we’re going to pay you’, a business, ‘\$100 a day, that wage subsidy on that day, so you open, so that when you get customers in’—and set minimum hours, that you open from 11 to 2—‘you have got some base load covered in terms of your wage cost’. Because at the moment with the lack of surety about the trade, especially midweek—weekends, not a problem; thousands of people travelling on weekends—we do not want to be in a position where towns are effectively ghost towns Monday to Friday but Saturday and Sunday they are closed.

One of the ways to get out of that would be to have some kind of fund that is available to subsidise wage costs midweek so that businesses can actually afford to open, because it is a high-risk strategy, especially for cafes, to open at the moment. It is bad enough the risk is you are going to chuck that food in the bin at the end of the day, but at the moment just covering your wage costs is quite high risk, especially in some of the very remote tourism kind of towns where there is no local market. Walhalla only has 20 residents, for example, so there are only so many coffees we can buy in a day to make it valid, you know? And I think that is a key thing that needs to be kept in mind. So I think some kind of subsidy like that for perhaps over winter is something that would need to be looked at.

Mr BARTON: It would help if the feds extended JobKeeper, obviously.

Mr LEANEY: Exactly, exactly. I mean, the biggest problem we have at the moment is that we have staff—I am paying their wages at the moment, but my pot is only so deep and we are going to start running out of money.

Mr BARTON: Good on you, Michael. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Barton, for that inquisitive question, and also, Michael, for your answer. On that point, Michael, on behalf of the committee, I wish to thank you for your submission and contribution today. It was great to get your perspective, and I hope for the Walhalla’s Star Hotel all success in the future. I am sure under your guidance it will get back to how it was performing before the most recent lockdown. So thank you again.

Mr LEANEY: Thank you very much for your time. It is much appreciated.

Witness withdrew.