

## Inquiry into the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and event sectors

Public Hearing 16 June 2021

### Questions on Notice – Latrobe City Council

MS BATH (page 30): [On the Morwell rose garden festival] have you got a quantum? ... the difference, the loss of that from one year to the next. And you spoke in your submission about that. Is there anything specific? What was the drop, I guess, but also what were the specifics, if you had any, for the rose show and those sorts of events to continue?

The onsite 2019 International Rose Garden Festival Morwell ran over two days over a weekend. The festival included the light installation for the first time and attracted 8,000 attendees with economic benefit estimated at \$1.7 million.

In 2020, Council was still able to install the light installation, however there was no other onsite activity. 1,500 mainly local community participants were able to attend over the display period. At that stage, Victoria was in various stages of COVID-19 restrictions and visitors from outside of the region were not permitted. Restrictions on businesses also resulted in very limited opportunities for attendees to spend money at local businesses and economic benefit was minimal.

A virtual event component was delivered and attracted almost 500 unique viewers and registrations which included rose enthusiasts from across the globe. This element meant the event was able to attract a wider reach and certainly enhanced the profile of the festival and potential to attract higher profile experts and visitors from further afield in future years. It did not, however, contribute to direct economic benefit to the region. In addition, the event budget, which was approximately half of the previous year, was predominantly allocated to the virtual component. Traditionally, the majority of the budget is spent with local suppliers.

In summary, the impact on the event especially in providing economic benefit to the region was significant. Plans are in place to continue building the event by expanding the festival to a larger footprint extending into the main part of town and to increase the duration in 2021 to cover two weekends.

MS BATH (page 32): Are there any initiatives that you would like state government to come to you with that you could partner with?

1. Many tourism, accommodation and hospitality businesses across the region are experiencing major challenges with securing and retaining staff. There are two key areas where the State Government can provide support in this area:
  - a. Support for training of potential tourism, accommodation and hospitality staff through subsidised programs that encourage people to take up the opportunity. This can be facilitated through existing educational pathways including local Registered Training Organisations such as TAFE Gippsland in the region.
  - b. Support for businesses to take on staff. Many businesses are struggling to find and retain qualified staff such as wait staff, baristas, chefs, front of house, cleaning and visitor information staff. Support to subsidise business

in sharing the risk to take on workers would be welcomed. Partnerships opportunities would be with local chambers of commerce, local business groups and Council's economic development and tourism departments.

2. Ongoing incentives for regional travel from intrastate and consider incentives provided to interstate visitors to travel to Victoria. The \$200 State Government incentive to travel was well received and generated good outcomes for business. There are partnership opportunities with Visit Victoria, Regional Tourism Boards such as Destination Gippsland and local government to collaborate in promoting offerings.
3. Support with the creation of a Latrobe City discount card – This could take the form of a program where a discount can be obtained by both local residents and visitors on a range of products and services across Latrobe City including retail, attractions, leisure services, hospitality, accommodation, transport and fuel. This initiative would provide the dual benefits of attraction of visitors to our region encouraging them to stay longer and spend more as well as giving local community direct support from state government.