

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

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

Camperdown—Thursday, 13 May 2021

MEMBERS

Mr Enver Erdogan—Chair

Mr Bernie Finn—Deputy Chair

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Mark Gepp

Mrs Bev McArthur

Mr Tim Quilty

Mr Lee Tarlamis

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Dr Matthew Bach

Ms Melina Bath

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr David Davis

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

WITNESSES

Cr Ruth Gstrein, Mayor, and

Mr Andrew Mason, Chief Executive Officer, Corangamite Shire Council.

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

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

My name is Enver Erdogan. I am the Chair of the committee. I would like to introduce my fellow committee members present with us here today: Mr Rod Barton, Mr Lee Tarlamis, Mr Mark Gepp, Mrs Bev McArthur and Mr David Davis.

To witnesses appearing before the committee I will read a short statement. 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 comment 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. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

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

Cr GSTREIN: Ruth Gstrein, Mayor, Corangamite shire.

Mr MASON: Andrew Mason, CEO, Corangamite shire.

Cr GSTREIN: Thank you, Chair, and welcome to you and your committee members. Welcome to Camperdown but importantly to Corangamite shire. It is absolutely fantastic having you down here and importantly to have the opportunity to appear before you today.

Just a little bit of background—Corangamite shire is a north–south shire; it is a very long, linear shire. It runs from Skipton in the north through to the Great Ocean Road. Our boundaries go basically from Moonlight Head to Peterborough along the ocean road and north along the Hamilton and Glenelg highways, so it is approximately 4500 square kilometres. Our economy is dominated without a doubt by agriculture, but the tourism industry is certainly a growing industry, particularly along the Great Ocean Road, and now we are seeing a lot of visitors that are coming to Timboon and inland through to Camperdown in the north, which is absolutely fantastic. We have 12 townships within the Corangamite shire and a population of approximately 16 000 people, but what we are seeing at the moment is a bit of an exodus, as you would appreciate, from metro Melbourne—people coming and moving into rural and regional Victoria. So currently we are having a little bit of a population boom, which we are very pleased to have, but it brings with it some of its own problems. But we are looking forward to growing our shire in the future as well as the tourism industry. I am going to ask Andrew if he is going to run through some of the information we have on the impacts of COVID on our tourism.

Mr MASON: Yes, thank you. So in the submission we are giving today we are not going to go into a whole lot of stats and facts and figures. I understand that Liz Price from Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism probably did a really good job of that yesterday. I think we are keen to talk more about what we are seeing on the ground. I guess what we would say is that our tourism sector has been really disproportionately impacted by COVID, and that is a product of the fact that pre COVID, tourism at the Twelve Apostles and towns like Port Campbell and Princetown were dominated by international visitation. So the Twelve Apostles is nationally promoted as an international destination. You see it promoted in any of the Australian tourism ad campaigns

and in fact the Victorian tourism campaigns. It is an international icon and pre COVID attracted approximately 3 million visitors. The important factor around that 3 million visitors that was good for the tourism industry was that there was a good, even spread of visitors across the year and across weekdays and weekends. We certainly had peaks—and certainly Chinese New Year, Christmas, Easter were all big peaks; we knew that we were going to get big numbers—but the industry was based on the fact that they could have consistent numbers coming through during the year.

We do not have exact numbers on total visitation to the Twelve Apostles. Pre COVID, 3 million visitors or thereabouts visited the Twelve Apostles. What we just know is that the numbers have plummeted. For example, Boxing Day, which is typically the busiest day, in 2020 they had about 5800 people. That would compare to the previous year of around 15 000 people at the site, so nearly a two-thirds decline in visitor numbers at the Twelve Apostles.

What we are seeing is that the loss of international tourists is having an impact. I have attached some photos of Princetown that were taken over summer, and Princetown is effectively closed. The tavern in Princetown has been closed, the general store in Princetown has been closed, the backpackers has been closed. The caravan park has been seasonally opened. So what was quite a sort of vibrant, bustling little town that was an important stopping destination down the Great Ocean Road as people were going to the Twelve Apostles has effectively been closed and has been closed for over a year now.

So a key message that I would like to get across is that Victorian tourism is not fixed because Daylesford and Mansfield—and in fact Bright—are busy. I am concerned that there is sometimes this narrative, this sense that all is well in tourism because it is busy at Lorne. It is not busy everywhere, and the impacts have been disproportionate on those areas like the Twelve Apostles that had a reliance on the international tourism. So certainly Port Campbell was busy over summer. In January there were lots of people. At Easter there were lots of people in Port Campbell. The businesses there were busy, but what we are hearing is this concern from those businesses about what the winter is going to be like and this impact that they might get an uplift on the weekends but the weekday visitation is not there.

I guess some future concerns—we are still waiting to see what the impact of the loss of JobKeeper will be. We know that that has been important for the tourism sector. I understand that is a federal issue, but it will be interesting to see the impacts that that will have. International tourists will come back, and when they do we and the industry are certainly concerned about the hollowing out of the workforce. A lot of the hospitality workforce has exited those businesses. We are in a fortunate but unfortunate position that we have got a really low unemployment rate. Our unemployment rate is about 2.6 per cent. That has meant that that labour can either leave the area or in fact get jobs elsewhere, particularly in the agriculture sector. So restarting in the tourism sector in the shire when internationals come back could be more difficult by virtue of the fact that there is not labour around.

So what we need or what we would like to see is more focused marketing on the Great Ocean Road and sites such as the Twelve Apostles to try to get an uplift in domestic visitation there. We are really keen on seeing construction sector stimulus. We would argue for bringing forward road jobs—and we had Mr Meddick down. The roads in south-west Victoria are, on Regional Roads Victoria's own stats, the worst in the state. We would say bring forward expenditure on roads and create a construction sector stimulus while it is quiet and fund things. Council has got plans in for and is asking for grants from both state and federal governments for Port Campbell urban centre renewal. That is \$15.6 million. If we could get funding for that matched with our own funding, that would create a stimulus in that township at a time that it needs it.

One of the other things, as the mayor touched on, is housing and land shortages. We would like to see the Victorian government streamline the planning scheme amendment processes. There has been lots of talk about fast-tracking planning permits. Our planning permit turnaround times in Corangamite shire are under two weeks. The issue is that the planning scheme amendment process needs to be streamlined to bring on land for residential development, and we argue that that will be necessary to create houses for the hospitality workforce when international tourists come back.

Finally, the other one is delivering the city deal. There is a big bucket of money from the state and federal governments to upgrade facilities at the Twelve Apostles and in Port Campbell National Park. Delivery of that has been slow, and we would like to see that brought forward to create, again, that construction sector stimulus.

Cr GSTREIN: Thanks, Andrew, and can I just add to that. I think one important thing is that with the projects that the city deal has identified along the Great Ocean Road—the Twelve Apostles, Glenample and the like, as well as the urban activation project at Port Campbell—we are really mindful of the fact that at the moment things are very quiet. We are just concerned that the borders are going to reopen and we are going to start having international tourists once again and things are going to get really busy and then we are going to start ripping up the main street and just the impact that is going to have on local businesses. So I know we seem like we are in a hurry, but we are in a hurry for a good reason.

I just want to talk briefly to you about the impact of events and festivals. Obviously without a doubt last year there were no events or festivals—I think the Queen concert was the last thing I went to the weekend that it all closed down—and that has had a major impact not only on our economy but obviously on our lifestyle and the mental health of our people, which we are very aware of. We have some large events here in Corangamite shire. One of them is the Inner Varnika festival, which Mrs McArthur might be well aware of; it is just across the road from her house. I am not really sure how you would describe it—I think it is a bit of a rave—but it goes all weekend and brings thousands of people and a lot of doof doof.

Mr BARTON: Mrs Mac is known for that sort of behaviour.

Mrs McARTHUR: I'm into doof doof music.

Mr GEPP: I hope you don't complain about the noise.

Mrs McARTHUR: No, I like it. I love activity.

Mr MEDDICK: You have a set of glow sticks in the cupboard.

Mrs McARTHUR: I had to dress up to go in, though.

Cr GSTREIN: Horse racing: there is a race meeting in Camperdown; there is also trotting at Terang that was impacted; there are two horse trial events which occur every year, both of those were cancelled. The Robert Burns Scottish Festival was cancelled, as were the rockabilly festival, hot rod events and our local agricultural show. Particularly we have a show here in Camperdown, one at Simpson and a large show at Noorat, which all closed down.

Of course the day-to-day things are just as important to local people. So here we are at the 5-star function centre at the Leura Oval, and nothing happened last year. I think we had one game of junior football and I think it got 2 hours into the day and the whole lot was cancelled and shut down for the year. So in that respect having football and netball back is absolutely fantastic.

Other smaller events which also were impacted were the Cobden Spring Festival and orchid show. They are events that bring small communities together, which is really important, just to have that opportunity. The Crayfest festival was planned for Port Campbell last year. It went ahead in February—I think February and March. It was an absolute success; they got a beautiful day and thousands of people into Port Campbell. We ran night markets. Council were involved with the Port Campbell community, and we had night markets over four Friday nights across January, which were very successful. Last Saturday afternoon we had the Tracks festival in Timboon, which we had cancelled previously, a couple of months earlier, because of poor weather. In spite of it being a drizzly day and a bit chilly we had 350 people attend it. So I think that just highlights that people just want to get out and do things that are normal.

It will be interesting to see how things do pan out over the next 12–18 months, two years. I know that the Robert Burns Scottish Festival is going ahead on 2 and 3 July. If anybody is around, please drop in.

Mrs McARTHUR: They will all be back.

Cr GSTREIN: I am sure they will. So things are starting to kick off again, but it will be interesting to see what the impact has been on festivals, whether it is lacking momentum or volunteers just feeling they are not able to get back into it. I think time will tell the longer term impact of the COVID shutdown.

What we are suggesting is needed is—as council we already provide funding for festivals, mainly startup dollars to get them going; we really encourage them to stand on their own two feet rather than relying on

recurrent funding—some sort of funding stream that could perhaps complement council's grants or grants for startups or new events. People have got great ideas, but they just need those few dollars to make it happen. And importantly, I think, going forward, with COVID restrictions and regulations, contact tracing, everything needs to be made as simple and easy as possible, because basically we are dealing with volunteers and if things become too complicated it is just so easy to throw your hands up in the air and walk away—just through regulations. So that would be our message going forward.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Andrew, and thank you, Ruth, for that pretty comprehensive review and updating us on the events calendar. There is normally a lot happening out here. I might start the speaking list. I might start with Bev, then Mr Gepp, then Andy, and then we will go around and give everyone an opportunity to ask a question. If we could limit your questions to one, because there is such a great attendance—everyone is here in full flight. So Bev, over to you.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Ruth and Andrew. It is great to be here in Camperdown. I know my colleagues could not wait to get here and they are certainly coming back. But what we also need to know I think is: what are the key things that perhaps we could do differently into the future? And if we are going to have cases, should we lock down the whole state or should we do it by isolated areas? As you say, with the contact tracing, using, I would have thought, one app for the entire state would be terribly helpful. I know Stewart could not even get to the funeral yesterday because he could not complete the bureaucracy. But those sorts of things have affected us greatly, I think—the fact that we have never had a case basically across this whole area and yet we were so heavily impacted. As you pointed out, it is all those local groups, including school groups that run fundraising events that keep their schools going, that were stopped from doing anything. Is that necessary into the future?

Cr GSTREIN: I think that is a really difficult question to answer, because I can appreciate the reason for the short lockdown—the quick, short, sharp lockdown of a few days. I think if it goes any longer than that then you really do need to look at trying to isolate rural and regional Victoria if the outbreak is confined to Melbourne, and I know that there was a lot of angst here. I guess we were very lucky that we did not have the lockdown conditions that the Melbourne metro had and that we had a lot more freedom, really, than they did. But I think the concern is, if it was any longer than a few days and you did not have the ring of steel, you would see bleed out into the regions—people trying to get out of the city—and we have seen right around the world how quickly this virus can spread. So I think that is a concern.

I think one thing that was a little bit alarming was the negativity—not negativity, but the concern of country people about Melbourne people coming back into the regions, you know, 'We don't have the virus. We don't want you to come in'. It almost made Victoria turn into a state of two states, there were the regions and the metros, and that is not what we are about. We want people to come out and visit us, and we want to do it in the safest possible way. So if it means wearing masks when you come to the regions, that is not a problem, I would not think so.

Mr MASON: I think confidence and certainty is really important for businesses or in fact volunteers. My sense is that the last three-day shutdown caused a fair loss of confidence and a fair bit of annoyance because it was seen as small numbers in discrete geographic locations, and I guess the comparison was New South Wales managed to shut down areas and not shut down the whole state. Certainly my sense was that being able to have a flexible approach, having different settings in rural and metro areas, makes a lot of sense. It would also mean that it gives people more confidence to put on an agricultural show or something if there could be those different settings. So confidence is really important and some level of certainty around what the settings might be is important if you are trying to run a business or put on an agricultural show, for example.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Andrew. I might pass over to Mr Gepp to ask a question.

Mr GEPP: Thank you. Thanks for coming to see us today. I will just make the point on that last point that you made, Andrew, there was a difference of course. We did have the ring of steel, so there was a different set of settings that applied to different parts of the state. Obviously you are talking about the February lockdown of four to five days. I recall at the time the chief health officer talking about there were people from regional Victoria or parts of regional Victoria who had been down to the identified hotspots. So that was the reason, whether it was right or wrong. But I understand the point you are making around certainty.

Andrew, you touched on in your presentation the issue of, when things open up, the availability of labour. We heard from a number of witnesses yesterday that this issue is a recurring theme for them, and we discussed with a number of people a couple of aspects of the labour market in the tourism and events sector—the insecure nature of the work, the low levels of wages that typically get paid in the sector. I put the question to a couple of people yesterday: let us imagine that we do everything else but we do not transform the employment sector within the industry to make it an industry of choice for people to come and work in. I am just wondering what your thoughts are about that. I mean, you would have seen lots of examples of the insecure nature of the work and the wages, and of course we have had flatline wages for about five years now. How do we turn this sector into an industry of choice for employment?

Mr MASON: My view would be that that is based on three pillars. So some of that is about training and making sure that we have got well-trained people and training available, so growing your own. My view would be that South West TAFE should be kind of a bastion for people to go and get trained in hospitality. So training and making sure that it is highly skilled and highly trained will attract bigger jobs and greater certainty and more prestige. I think that is part of it. Recognising that some seasonal workforce and casual workforce is in fact desirable and is always going to be there. I have got teenage children. They are not going to be able to work, and in fact they are not going to be in demand, all year round, but that is being able to a workforce that can flex. Migration has to be part of this project. I guess again this is a federal government issue, but we have a frustration with some of the visa settings in that the backpacker visas, for example, do not allow a pathway for people to come in and live and contribute and settle permanently. And I understand that that is not your issue, but what I would say is that we have known for a long time that to get population growth and to fill employment you are not always going to be able to source that labour from local populations. Our unemployment rate is around 2.6, so migration is going to have to be part of that.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Cr GSTREIN: I was just going to add—and I know it is outside your remit—it is also an issue in the agricultural sector, trying to get people working through there. And council, from a training point of view, just a very, very low level, as part of the COVID recovery we have been running workshops trying to encourage people to get those basic certificates, so their first-aid certificate, barista training, RSA—responsible service of alcohol—just that very low level of training to get kids trained up, foot in the door, hopefully go on and do further training through TAFE or—

Mrs McARTHUR: Can we just add, last night the pub owner said the year 12 students came in for Christmas dinner, and he said, ‘Okay, you 25 people, do you want a job?’.

The CHAIR: And about four or five people straightaway jumped on board.

Mrs McARTHUR: And they are still there two years later.

The CHAIR: Yes. So that was great. I might pass over to Andy, then Rod, then Mr Davis. Mr Meddick.

Mr MEDDICK: Thanks, Chair. And I apologise for my tardiness. It is good to see you again, both of you. I just want to comment quickly on something you were bringing up before about international travel, when it opens up and what that includes—so migration, whether that is for temporary workforce or for permanent workforce or even just for tourism. And there are various schools of thought about whether that is going to be towards the end of this year or even mid next year. This morning on Radio National there were people stating that there is a school of thought that if we can get the vaccines up, then it could be as early as Christmas this year. However, that being said, I think there is a role to play for the state government here in terms of whenever that would be—six months, 12 months, no matter what—to be prepared for when that influx does come, to have systems in place so that we can feed all these travellers through the regions to get you the workforce that you need, to boost the tourism numbers, to get all that sort of thing going. We need to have a system in play now. We need to start that planning so six months out we know what is going to happen, we are ready to roll.

You are talking about funding for different bits and pieces, like, you know, for the different festivals and that sort of stuff and I also think there is a role to play there for government to look at that in this state budget and what sort of help they can give to festivals to get these things up and running again, but I want to ask you about the travel voucher scenario. Now, that was taken up and snapped up pretty quickly. I think there have been two tranches of that, is that correct? So a third one, would that assist? And would you like to see regular releases of

those over the next, say, six to 12 months as well to encourage Melbourne metro people to come out into the regions to go to these festivals but it gives them some sort of financial incentive to do so? And the restaurant voucher as well I think coupled with that, would that work? We see the recent release of the one in Melbourne, for instance, in metro—go out, go to these restaurants, we will give you these vouchers. If you are going to travel, if you have signed up for a voucher to regional Victoria, then you would automatically be perhaps given a restaurant voucher as well to encourage extra spending. Is that something that you think would work?

Mr MASON: I think that the travel vouchers were certainly well received, and local businesses thought they were good. I feel like I am looking a gift horse in the mouth. I think that they were badly timed. I think the first tranche being released over January, most of coastal Victoria anyway would have been busy over that time. That being said, I do think that they have been certainly well received by businesses in this area. And I think another round targeted at low season visitation—so winter season for coastal areas—and certainly a combination food and beverage offering would be well received and I think would really put some confidence back into at least our businesses for what will be for a lot of them a long, cold winter.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr Barton, do you have a question?

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Chair. Taking on board Mr Meddick's latest information hot off the press this morning and what the feds have actually said about they do not believe that we will have international travel before mid-2022, we have millions of Australians who have pockets full of holiday money and they are travelling within Australia. How do we get those people to come down here? We can offer vouchers and all that sort of stuff, but we want people from New South Wales and Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia to come here. What can we do to encourage that enormous amount of people who can travel?

Mr MASON: I think it is again a couple of different strategies. So what we would say is there is probably not much point in giving council marketing dollars. Marketing dollars should be directed back through Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism. It makes sense to market on a regional scale for tourism, not a council scale. But we would certainly welcome investment into an organisation like Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism to do more marketing and more promotion. The reality is that people do not consume their marketing or plan their marketing based on Corangamite shire. They base it on, 'I might go down to the coast and go down the Great Ocean Road'. That is what we are trying to stimulate.

I think marketing at a state level directed through regional tourism bodies is important. I think Victorian marketing effort back into other states is important, and we have not seen a lot of evidence of that. In some ways that is a bit about re-establishing confidence and desirability in the Victorian product in other states, which is important. I think there is also a role for Australian tourism to make sure that we are still on the radar at a global level. The mayor and I are planning to go and meet with Tourism Australia in Canberra coming up in June, because we had that concern. Again, that is not your issue.

Finally, we have just got to make sure that this 12 to 18 months is a time when we are actually making sure that the assets and the product are good, and that is roads, that is the Twelve Apostles visitor centre. It is making sure that the private sector offer—

The CHAIR: Better accommodation.

Mr MASON: accommodation and so forth. It is making sure that we are using this 12 months or 18 months of quietness to make sure that we are ready to come back bigger and better and stronger, and that means that we have got to have good roads, good visitor facilities and good private sector offerings.

Cr GSTREIN: And that is a real concern because we have got a world-class destination in the Twelve Apostles, but when you go down to the Twelve Apostles it really can be an underwhelming experience—not the views, the views are absolutely spectacular, but the actual experience. It is not good.

Mr GEPP: Yet Victoria was, by and large, overlooked by the federal government's half-price flight scheme.

The CHAIR: I might pass over to Mr Davis and then Mr Tarlamis, if he has a question. I have got a feeling that we have all got a few more questions. I will put them on notice if that is okay. We will email them through to you, Andrew, or to Ruth. Mr Davis.

Mr DAVIS: Just to summarise, I think what you have got is a very good set of points. You are saying all of that infrastructure work, including public infrastructure work, ought to be brought forward as quickly as possible so that it can be done now so that the impact is less—I am just paraphrasing and tell me if I am wrong—and that some of the private infrastructure also ought to be facilitated coming forward so it can be done now rather than when people come back. But you will still have a hiatus where you need people coming in, and you are arguing Mr Meddick's point and others that vouchers have got a role there through the regional marketing efforts. Some of these vouchers, it seems to me—tell me if I am wrong—could be more targeted at regions rather than just a broad slather. You could have a voucher for this region, and I do not know that people are quite talking about that, but I think that that is one thing that could be done. I am watching the nods there, so that is a good point.

But just to the issue of festivals and events, some of those are highly regional but some of them could be done in your shire here. If you had a bucket of money to foster and move events forward, could you do that sort of thing to fill in this gap?

Cr GSTREIN: I think it is important—I could say yes, we will always say yes to a bucket of money, without a doubt.

Mr DAVIS: But really targeted money to support events.

Cr GSTREIN: Targeted for new festivals. It is interesting. Anecdotally, I had a phone call from a gentleman—actually it was the mayor at Harvey Bay in Queensland, who has a connection with this area, and a fellow who runs a circus festival elsewhere, to our east, was not getting a lot of support. They have now moved into Corangamite shire because of the support we are able to give them, and not support in dollars, just support in getting things going and getting—

Mr DAVIS: Logistics.

Cr GSTREIN: Logistics.

Mr DAVIS: And process.

Cr GSTREIN: Networks, putting people in touch with other people. From that respect I think that is really important. But I think that having some sort of incentive for people to bring festivals down into this area—Port Fairy do it very well. There is basically something on at Port Fairy on every second weekend. Apart from obviously the big folk festival, they do festivals very well and they bring in a lot of people to their towns.

Mr MASON: And I think the other thing that could be done with a bucket of money is address the certainty issue.

Mr DAVIS: I was going to come to that.

Mr MASON: So communities, the private sector—I would be nervous, if I was the Crayfest in Port Campbell, about, 'What happens if we spend all of this money? We spend all of our money that we've got in the bank. We've got all of these community people running around doing things and the weekend of the—

Mr DAVIS: It gets zapped.

Mr MASON: it gets zapped'. So some funding that means that those groups go ahead with some confidence that even if it gets zapped, to use your words—

Mr DAVIS: But there are some costs—

Mr MASON: That some costs could be covered.

Mr DAVIS: that could be recovered. So it is almost like—

Mr MASON: Like an insurance.

Mr DAVIS: some sort of semi-insurance arrangement.

Mr MASON: Yes.

Mr DAVIS: So the chief health officer comes in with a five-day zap, your festival is in the middle of it, you have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars, brought people in and equipment and you are gone.

Mr MASON: Yes.

Mr DAVIS: Now, you are not going to get off your feet again, are you?

Mr MASON: No. Exactly.

Cr GSTREIN: No. And even small groups. Last year the Burns Scottish festival got cancelled, and I think they had already shelled out about \$3500, which does not seem like a huge amount of money but with a \$10 000 budget, that was a third of their budget gone.

Mr DAVIS: Did they ever get that back or did they just whistle Dixie?

Cr GSTREIN: No, council reimbursed them.

Mr MASON: It has all been covered.

Mr DAVIS: Good on you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Andrew. Thank you, Mr Davis. Mr Tarlamis, do you have a question?

Mr TARLAMIS: I just want to thank you for your presentation today. But I also just want to pick up on a point you made where you said you are not like Bright and other areas. I just want to reassure you that we understand that areas are different, and that is one of the reasons why we are travelling around talking to the different regions, so that we can reassure people and get the understanding around that areas are different and we know that they have different experiences. We are hearing loud and clear that visitor numbers do not necessarily translate to visitor spend and things like that as well, so we are cognisant of that. I just wanted to reassure you of that.

Mr MASON: Thank you.

Cr GSTREIN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Andrew and Ruth, and the Corangamite Shire Council. Thank you for hosting us, first of all, and thank you for your submission and presentation today. It has been very informative. I am sure the committee members have a few more questions that they would like to tease out. If you are happy, it is probably easier if we just email you, Andrew.

Mr MASON: Yes, sure.

The CHAIR: If we have got those questions, we will forward them to you. On that point, we have got our next witness ready, so the committee will now take a short break.

Mr MASON: Thank you.

Cr GSTREIN: Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.