

T R A N S C R I P T

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE 2026 COMMONWEALTH GAMES BID

Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid

Traralgon – Thursday 14 March 2024

MEMBERS

David Limbrick – Chair

Joe McCracken – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

David Davis

Jacinta Ermacora

Michael Galea

Sarah Mansfield

Tom McIntosh

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

WITNESSES

Tony Salvatore, President, Falcons 2000 Soccer Club; and

Garry Silvester, President, Latrobe Valley Badminton Association.

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

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

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

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

Tony SALVATORE: Tony Salvatore, President of the Falcons 2000 Soccer Club.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Pleased to meet you.

Garry SILVESTER: Garry Silvester, President of Latrobe Valley Badminton Association.

The CHAIR: Thank you. And for the record I will also invite the committee members to briefly introduce themselves. I am David Limbrick, Chair of the committee.

Michael GALEA: G'day. Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Tom McINTOSH: Tom McIntosh, Member for Eastern Victoria Region.

Melina BATH: Hello. Melina Bath, Eastern Victoria Region.

Joe McCRACKEN: Joe McCracken, Western Victoria Region.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Sarah Mansfield, Western Victoria Region.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Jacinta Ermacora, Western Victoria Region.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will invite you to make some opening comments. I realise that there are two organisations. We normally give about 10 minutes, but I will allow you to take a bit of extra time. Please proceed.

Garry SILVESTER: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Garry Silvester, the current President of the Latrobe Valley Badminton Association. I have been involved with the LVBA as a player and admin for over 55 years. I have played and won international events, have won numerous Australian championships and Victorian titles and have captained Latrobe Valley to state titles. I have coached players to Australian and Victorian titles, and I have been inducted into the Latrobe City Council's Sporting Hall of Fame with legend status. So I have been around for quite some time and have experienced many highs in the badminton field – and a very big low with the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games in my backyard. I am very proud of Latrobe Valley resident. I have lived here all my life in Traralgon, so the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games personally hurt very deeply. I am still not over it, as so much work and effort had been put in. The powers that be do not seem to acknowledge this, yet it is the volunteers that make or break the success of sports at the grassroots in the local community.

It is with mixed feelings that we reflect on the loss of the Commonwealth Games opportunity – the feeling that we would not be able to be ready in time due to a lack of communication and involvement; the reluctance of the local council to initiate change without formal notification from the state government; the stress and anxiety

created through the lack of decision-making; the reaching out of Badminton Victoria to have us host the junior state titles, albeit at a stadium that does not meet standards; the challenges in gaining any commitment from other sporting bodies in supporting the opportunity; the excitement that a small place like Latrobe Valley would host an international standard of a sport that we love; the withdrawal of the junior state titles following the announcement that the Commonwealth Games would not be happening; being advised of the withdrawal from the Commonwealth Games through local media and not formally as an association; and the lack of recognition of the personal cost incurred by local volunteers in time, money and effort to support the initial idea of the games being run at the Gippsland Regional Indoor Sports Stadium.

The Commonwealth Games had the potential to provide the community with a chance to see the fastest racquet sport in the world on their doorstep; influence much-needed upgrades in lighting, line-marking, storage, court availability for social hitting and safety improvements; create access to a stadium that would have met international standards; provide a venue that could attract international and national tournaments; provide a local economy with a boost in tourism considering the pending loss of local industries; generate interest from youth in the popular international sport that is relatively unknown in Gippsland; and showcase the region's other local attractions. This opportunity is a loss in us trying to influence the attainment of dedicated courts for training and social hitting. Local players do not have the luxury of hiring single courts that we have in Melbourne. While we are a small association in Latrobe Valley, we are seeing huge growth in immigration at the moment, and a lot of the growth we are seeing in badminton is from these groups.

The local shire to invest in badminton – in the Latrobe Valley we primarily offer facilities that cater to the standard sports for older mainstream Australia. This was a chance for us to realise that we are becoming a more multicultural society that needs to start catering for some of the lesser known but significantly popular sports offered in other parts of the world, sports that attract huge numbers of participation and audiences throughout the world. A lesser known fact to some locals is that in our past a number of state and national players started their journey in Gippsland, which once boasted a huge number of clubs and coaches. This is something we would have loved to see reignited, and we have lost that opportunity.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Silvester.

Tony SALVATORE: Again, my name is Tony Salvatore, the current President of the Falcons 2000 Soccer Club, whereby we share the stadium the GSEP with the Gippsland United Football Club. The history of the Falcons goes back 60-plus years, and we are probably the only club in Australia that went to the national Australia league, or the national soccer league, from a little country town called Morwell – it went up to the NSL and then back to the Gippsland league.

So we were delighted when we heard that the Commonwealth Games was coming to Morwell, as well as the rugby sevens being hosted at our club. Whilst we were aware there were going to be disruptions in terms of the redevelopment, it would help the club afterwards. That would bring it to a level that it needed to be brought to. Going back to 2019, when a master plan was prepared, we had stakeholders, consultants and Latrobe City Council along with other state government authorities involved. A master plan was prepared; however, there was not any funding available to upgrade the stadium. However, in April 2022, when the state government announced the Commonwealth Games coming to regional Victoria, it was an opportunity to upgrade our facility, which we were delighted about. We were aware that there was going to be some disruption; however, the commitment would have been much needed for a better stadium. To host something like the rugby sevens in our hometown, a bit like Garry has mentioned – the benefits to the sporting community would be unbelievable.

However, obviously it did not last long. We were very disappointed when we were told that the games would be cancelled. On one side we were very disappointed from a club point of view and what is happening in terms of running an event. On the flip side, the state government have announced that there would be funding available for the GSEP to include the redevelopment of the stadium. So from that point we are quite happy that those concept plans are now in place, but we just have not been given a time line of when that will start. We are happy that it is still happening. Thanks, David.

The CHAIR: Thank you. And thank you both for appearing today. Mr Silvester, you spoke about the disappointment – the personal disappointment and the disappointment of players – at the cancellation, and

many sporting organisations have expressed this to us. But you also mentioned the amount of work, money, time and effort that had gone into planning and preparation. What sort of work are you referring to there?

Garry SILVESTER: Well, it was to be ready to hold the games and be a host association to the badminton and of course to prepare. We had already set up local meetings and everything to try and be ready, because obviously you want to prepare to be your best, and to us that was a big chance to highlight it. Now, the local community got that chance when the Victorian junior titles came for one year, and our local community got together and supported the event and put on a good show sort of thing. But the rest has gone. And then there was just going to meetings and everything else as a volunteer – you know, have a meeting for the Commonwealth Games. You had to drive over to Moe to meet the representatives from the thing. All this is just time taken out, and it has sort of been wasted in my eyes, you know. And I could not get information on it. That was the biggest drawback.

The CHAIR: Yes, we have certainly heard similar stories from other sporting organisations as well. What are your hopes from here? And I suppose I address this to both of you. I know that you said there has been some funding promised. I guess we have to wait and see what happens with the budget before we see what is happening there, but what are your hopes for what will happen next? The games is not going to happen now. Many sporting organisations have said, ‘Well, that’s not going to happen but we’re hoping that we’ll be able to do something else instead.’ What are your hopes next?

Garry SILVESTER: The hope for badminton was that because of the advertising and everything and the spotlight being put on it we would be able to take that to schools and provide coaching and everything else. Now, this is all done on a volunteer basis and everything, and it needs the enthusiasm of children as such. Now that they are not going to see that, that enthusiasm will not be there. Unfortunately, badminton being a lesser known highlight in the community and one of less popular sports I suppose in this part of the country – I mean, if you go overseas, it is number one sport in the world sort of thing in their countries, but here we are still building on that maybe. The hope now – it is a negative enthusiasm at this stage, so we have got to regain.

The CHAIR: It is something that we have heard a fair bit of evidence on. In fact the business case for the games itself spoke about increased sports participation through people seeing it on television, especially lesser known sports or lower participation level sports. That was certainly something that they spoke about in the business case. And yes, it is certainly a drawback if it is not going to have that highlight that you were hoping for. Mr Salvatore, what do you hope happens from here on?

Tony SALVATORE: So our hope is that our original master plan that was prepared back in 2019 is adhered to. So whilst they have agreed there is funding available, we would want to see that funding bring back the original master plan. Now, when the new plan was prepared for the Commonwealth Games, whilst it was an upgrade, it was also set for the Rugby Sevens. If Rugby Sevens will not be held there, the extra money that was required to comply with the rugby rules, we will now hopefully put that into the soccer stadium. Hopefully, we will get another synthetic pitch out of that. We do have one; we would like to have two. And obviously the stadium needs to be upgraded. So that would be –

The CHAIR: So you do not feel that the upgrades are necessary for rugby because the game will not be held anymore. Then that money that was going to be spent on that is unnecessary now and could be reallocated to something that is more useful.

Tony SALVATORE: Correct. The stadium is more designed for soccer; therefore, it should just be purposely built for the soccer. It was going to be purposely built for the Rugby Sevens and then converted back to the soccer stadium. However, now that could be a significant saving to use those resources or funding to perhaps make it more friendly for the soccer fraternity.

The CHAIR: Understood. I will pass to Deputy Chair Mr McCracken.

Joe McCracken: Thank you very much, Mr Salvatore and Mr Silvester. Firstly, thank you very much for your time today and the effort that you have taken to be here. I guess I might just start with a bit of a time line of your involvement with the Commonwealth Games preparation. What sort of advice and meetings did you have with the Victorian government in the lead-up to and the planning of the games, particularly with your involvement with your sport?

Garry SILVESTER: That is hard to answer, because the government actually did not come to us. In the lead-up to it we had heard a rumour that it may be coming, and so I had a lot of dealings with the Badminton Victoria side of things and I suppose with the local council. But when I went to the government to find out about it, and this was after it had been released, they made me write a submission into why it should be held at the GRISS.

Joe McCracken: Could we have a copy of that submission if you do not mind, thanks? It would be very good to see that.

Garry SILVESTER: I would have it in an email somewhere, I believe.

Joe McCracken: Yes, that is fine.

Garry SILVESTER: When badminton came out, it was said that it was coming to Gippsland. Therefore because the Traralgon stadium is really the possible place, everyone thought it would be held there. But they would not confirm yes or no whether it was going to be held there. We had a meeting when the government came to Moe one day –

Joe McCracken: Who was that with, if you do not mind me asking?

Garry SILVESTER: The sports minister.

Joe McCracken: Sports minister? Okay.

Garry SILVESTER: and who was in charge of the thing. The ex-health minister – not health minister. He is the guy that was in charge of –

Melina BATH: Legacy? Was it Mr Leane?

Garry SILVESTER: No, COVID and that.

Melina BATH: Mr Weimar.

Garry SILVESTER: Yes. It was not until that day, when they had a media announcement or something to do, that they actually confirmed that, yes, it would definitely be going ahead and it would be in Traralgon sort of thing.

Joe McCracken: That sounds about right actually. Do you have any copies of the correspondence or any of the lead-up to that that you might be able to provide the committee so we can see what has happened from your side as well? Are you able to provide that? You can take it on notice and have a look through your emails and correspondence and whatnot.

Garry SILVESTER: There should be a trail at some stage, but yes. After I wrote that submission, I followed up a couple of times, and I never heard back from them whatsoever – so very disappointing.

Joe McCracken: Yes, I can image it would have been incredibly disappointing. I was going to ask Mr Salvatore: did you want to comment as well?

Tony SALVATORE: Yes. Obviously, it was not as bad as with Garry. We did have several meetings with the state government along with Latrobe City Council and all the stakeholders. Probably four or five meetings were held. The original one was when Jacinta came down to make the announcement that the rugby sevens was going to be at our stadium, and from then on a committee was formed. Top of my head, four or five meetings were held.

Joe McCracken: Are you able to, even if you want to take it on notice, give a summary of when those meetings happened and what those meetings were about just so we can establish a time line of what happened and when? You can take it on notice of course as well if you need to go and look through your records.

Tony SALVATORE: Yes, I am happy to provide all that info. Most of the meetings were about the redevelopment of the stadium and what the rugby sevens – whoever that group was, whatever they are called – requirements were versus what the soccer stadium required. There were concept drawings prepared, there were

some valuations of what it was going to cost put together and some time lines around when our stadium would be inaccessible. Whilst as a club we understood that that was okay; we accepted that. We just had to find a place to train and play depending on when the works were going to start, but obviously the works did not start. I cannot give you the specifics, but I have got them on record if you require.

Joe McCracken: That is fine. I know, Mr Silvester, you spoke about your disappointment in the way that you found out about the Commonwealth Games. You found out in media reports just like the rest of us. How do you feel about all that?

Garry Silvester: Sorry, how did I –

Joe McCracken: How did you feel about that?

Garry Silvester: Disappointed that it could not be – because immediately it was announced I was receiving media calls to do interviews and stuff like that, and I had to tell them, ‘Sorry, I’ve got no information,’ because, once again, for badminton it came out that it would be held in Gippsland and no-one could confirm whereabouts in Gippsland, and that is what the media wanted to know. So that was put on hold. And immediately as soon as it was cancelled, the same thing happened. I got inquiries: ‘Why’s this going on?’ and everything else, and ‘Can you do an interview with me, and can you do this?’ It was just pressure. After it had been announced, the Premier was immediately just saying, ‘Oh, no-one’s affected and everything’s fine.’ Well, it was not fine, and he showed no appreciation for the volunteers that had put in all the work.

Joe McCracken: I think my time is up, but I appreciate that you obviously felt disappointed and extremely disheartened. Thank you.

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

Michael Galea: Thank you, Chair, and thank you both for joining us today. I have got a few questions for each of you, so I will try and be as fair as I can. I will start with you, Mr Silvester. I just want to clarify something you said. You said that, I understand, you pitched for the badminton events to be held in the Latrobe Valley, specifically Traralgon. You said you did not get a response, but am I right in understanding that that was the selected venue for a badminton event at the Commonwealth Games – that Traralgon was?

Garry Silvester: Yes. It ended up being at the GRISS.

Michael Galea: Yes, and that is at the Gippsland Regional Indoor –

Garry Silvester: Yes.

Michael Galea: I note that whilst it is not the Commonwealth Games, there will still be the upgrades as part of the announced regional package, including to those courts as well.

Garry Silvester: That is true, but the problem with that, if I am talking as a badminton person, is that we do not get access to the ‘premier’ sporting courts at the GRISS.

Michael Galea: Is that because they are basketball–netball?

Garry Silvester: Yes, basketball take highlights. We have been fighting for years to get line markings on a dual basketball court, and this is meant to be a multisport stadium, yet we cannot get access to that at all. And when we get do get access, we have to put down the lines, and that takes about 4 hours to do.

Michael Galea: And is that a council-managed facility?

Garry Silvester: Yes.

Michael Galea: That is good for us to be aware of. Thank you. Especially as upgrades are coming through, it is definitely good for this committee to be aware of that.

Garry Silvester: Yes. So now when all their funding comes through, or the legacy of it, it may be a money amount but where is it going to go, for badminton particularly? It will go to the stadium, which will be

used for those ‘premier’ courts and everything, and we will still be laying down the floors and doing all the hard work and on the back courts of the stadium.

Michael GALEA: As you know, we have already had council in this morning, but perhaps that is a question on notice we can put to them, so thank you for that.

Mr Salvatore, you spoke about the benefit of having the two pitches rather than a rugby pitch which would then have to be converted. As a soccer fan myself who often sees AAMI Park changed a bit for rugby as well, which can be a bit frustrating – nothing against that sport of course – what sort of challenges would there be? I note that obviously rugby is frequently a Commonwealth Games sport and football is not, which perhaps provides a rationale as to why that would have been the case. But without that happening now, what benefits can you see coming through locally to the sport of football from having this funding solely for football and not for doing something for two weeks and then switching it back?

Tony SALVATORE: I suppose there are two parts of that. The first part is that because we already had a master plan before the Commonwealth Games was announced, technically we could revert back to that master plan that said ‘Upgrade the stadium for the soccer facility’. The other part is council along with sport and rec Victoria have then identified, ‘Well, we’ve got some other issues with our grandstand; perhaps let’s change this master plan,’ and the new drawings have appeared. However, a bit like Garry, I spent a lot of time on that other committee for 18 months, and a lot of money wasted, because if we are going to throw out that master plan of 2019, and then COVID came and so forth, the new one perhaps will lend itself to be better. As a result of what happened through the Commonwealth Games, where they were different concept drawings to now where we are, it has changed again. So again, it is specifically for soccer.

Michael GALEA: With that, I guess – reverting to the master plan, whatever updates are needed to be done – is that the optimal outcome for your club in the use of that facility at the GSEP? Are there any specific things that you would like the committee to be aware of – say, things that need to be factored in to account with how the upgrade takes place?

Tony SALVATORE: Yes, there are many things that will still need to be looked into. We have not seen the final detail, because we do not know how much money the state government is putting towards it. They have agreed to upgrade. We are waiting on a costing, and then this new committee will be given time to review what is required. Because it is multi-user, similar to what the stadium in Traralgon is like, we want to make it easy for all stakeholders involved to utilise the venue without moving things out of a fridge or a coolroom. You have got to have multiple things, like at AAMI Park.

Michael GALEA: Sure. Thank you. As I mentioned earlier, I am from the south-east suburbs, where football is particularly booming. I think one of you mentioned migrant communities as well, which has an impact on that – in fact AFL is almost falling behind in some of my suburbs. What sort of demand – I will start with you, Mr Salvatore – are you seeing for football amongst the community in Morwell, Moe, Traralgon and the whole valley?

Tony SALVATORE: The uptake from the juniors is quite significant. In fact we are having gradings, which we have not had for many years, to identify our under-11s and under-13s. So therefore there are a lot more kids coming onboard, particularly females as well. From the senior level it has probably dropped somewhat, which is disappointing, so we need to bring the youth back into the game. It is so important to get kids off the street and get them to play sport, hence the Commonwealth Games was just going to be the icing on the cake for us all to benefit the next generation coming through. Again, that is disappointing; we do not have control, but let us make the best stadium we can so we can get more kids on the park on a weekend.

Michael GALEA: And build better. Great. Thank you. Thank you, both.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thank you, Chair. Thank you very much, gentlemen, for being here today. If I go to Mr Silvester to start, I listened with sadness to your contribution, because it has clearly been a devastating experience for you. You have seen the excitement and the disappointment and the loss of opportunity for your sport, for the infrastructure. You said that the CEO of Commonwealth Games Mr Weimar came to the valley and had a good photo opportunity with you, and then it was cancelled. In terms of what you want now – the

government has promised legacy, promised you will get something – I want to understand: have you had any detailed information from the Victorian government about that legacy for your sport?

Garry SILVESTER: None whatsoever. We had council meetings, and I am saying way back in October, it would have been –

Melina BATH: Of last year, 2023?

Garry SILVESTER: Yes. There was a committee, and I was put on that to discuss the legacy and so forth.

Melina BATH: And that was from the Latrobe City Council?

Garry SILVESTER: Yes.

Melina BATH: So it was not from the Victorian government, per se?

Garry SILVESTER: I think it would all be involved, but the council wanted us –

Melina BATH: Yes, was organising that. And at that meeting it was not made available to you that this representative was from a state government department who will then facilitate the discussion on the negotiation with you?

Garry SILVESTER: I am not sure what is involved.

Melina BATH: It was not clear, though. That is all I am asking.

Garry SILVESTER: No. I am not sure who actually is involved with it. All I know is that we expected something and to hear things, but we have still heard nothing.

Melina BATH: Yes. And still from that day from October last year, or the like, to we are now into the middle of March and we have not heard anything.

Garry SILVESTER: No, nothing.

Melina BATH: Okay. I want to come back to that. But, Mr Salvatore, in terms of the legacy infrastructure, you are here to get your fair share and your piece. What would you like to see for a time line so that you will have confidence in that – otherwise it may blow out to the never-never? What do you want to see?

Tony SALVATORE: Realistically, we would love to see the upgrade start in September 2024, so this year, and to be completed by May 2025. We would give them that six, seven months to do it, which if it is planned right, can happen. That would be our goal.

Melina BATH: This is not putting it on you, but how will you know when you feel that that could actually be achieved? What sort of is your critical time to know that you have actually got a conversation about that master plan to know that that could be started in September this year?

Tony SALVATORE: So that is the conversations that we are currently having with council and the other stakeholders, sports and rec Victoria. And even to the extent that we are suggesting you do not have to shut the whole stadium down, you can –

Melina BATH: Do it in stages.

Tony SALVATORE: We are going to do two sides. So on one side, let them still train, and we might have to juggle the juniors and the seniors on one pitch. And then as that side is done, well, we can segregate that and do the other half. Even if we miss that time frame, if we can get in and it is all done at the end of the season, they have got all summer. We have got spring and summer and autumn to get it all done again. To me it makes sense.

Melina BATH: Thank you. And, Mr Silvester, coming back to you. In relation to what you want, what do you feel you were promised? It will be different, but what do you want for the sport of badminton in Latrobe Valley? What do you want from us to make a recommendation to government?

Garry SILVESTER: Ideally, it would be a lighting upgrade.

Melina BATH: To GRISS?

Garry SILVESTER: To our courts.

Melina BATH: Your courts, right. Clear definition.

Garry SILVESTER: Because when I say there are eight basketball courts, we play on three of them and we get access to two others when we put lines down. We want permanent markings put down so that we can just walk on the court and not have to put in 4 hours work of laying the court.

Melina BATH: Which is a huge amount of work for volunteers to be taking. This does not sound like it is highly expensive. Have you got ideas of costings that you would require? You can take it on notice and do some research and get back to us.

Garry SILVESTER: Yes.

Melina BATH: Like is it a million dollars? Is it half a million or a couple of thousand?

Garry SILVESTER: No. The line markings themselves, because they say they have to put it under the surface and everything, I could be wrong but it is about, now I am not sure if it was \$70,000 or \$10,000, to do that part of it. But the biggest problem is getting council to allow us access to those courts, because they push us away and say that there is not demand.

Melina BATH: So there has been this stress now between you and council because of the promise that came from the government that has now been rescinded, and you want to see some development go on.

Garry SILVESTER: That is right. And we want access to more courts so that we can spread.

Melina BATH: Come up. And what benefits do you get from playing badminton? I will put it into context. We have heard from hockey when we went down to Geelong. We heard from the local hockey organisers down there, the hockey club, that they projected a 15 to 20 per cent increase in participation because of that local Commonwealth Games flavour in their town. Did you envisage a growth in badminton?

Garry SILVESTER: I did envisage a growth because of just the fact that it is highlighted. Once again, badminton not being a dominant sport –

Melina BATH: Second-tier sport.

Garry SILVESTER: Yes. The advertising – even to get advertising in the local paper and so forth, we struggle at times to get on the back sports page and things like that. It was a way of highlighting badminton for us and from that came the opportunity to take it to the schools and everything else. It would have boomed, and from that is where we would need more court access. Being a junior coach, when we do coach juniors, we only can coach on one basketball court, which is four badminton courts. If we get too big of a group, we cannot go out onto another badminton court outside, because they are located in different areas. For the safety concerns and the coaches and everything, we cannot do it. That is why we want the double court, so that we can watch them and then that way –

Melina BATH: Yes – safety, security and positive training. I think my time has run out, Mr Salvatore, but take it on notice if you want to answer.

Tony SALVATORE: That is fine.

The CHAIR: No problem. Ms Ermacora.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Hello and greetings from Warrnambool in south-western Victoria. Thanks very much for appearing, Mr Salvatore and Mr Silvester. Really appreciate your input. Just in relation to badminton, I did not catch the numbers of participants that you have got.

Garry SILVESTER: In the Latrobe Valley association?

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes.

Garry SILVESTER: I think there are about 260 members playing, consisting of veterans, senior players and juniors.

Jacinta ERMACORA: And what is your catchment area?

Garry SILVESTER: Latrobe Valley is probably down to Moe, Traralgon, Morwell, Flynn, Glengarry, Traralgon South and Yallourn clubs.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Oh, yes, and Yallourn. So mostly the Latrobe Valley city council area.

Garry SILVESTER: There is the Mid Gippsland Badminton Association and there is a Sale Maffra association as well. We are in the heart, or the middle, of the other two clubs. They have different members as well, so if we had had it, it would have boosted those numbers as well.

Michael GALEA: Sorry, where was the mid-Gippsland one based?

Garry SILVESTER: Warragul, Drouin, and I am not sure how far it goes into Melbourne, but yes.

Michael GALEA: So you are in the middle. Sorry, Jacinta. Thank you.

Jacinta ERMACORA: No worries, Michael. Yes, so with the 260 members, in terms of Latrobe Valley, do you have any other venues that you use to play?

Garry SILVESTER: Yes, we have a pennant competition, which is played at the GRIS stadium on the Tuesday night, and then on Thursday nights we have a home-and-away competition, which is all the local clubs in the area. So there is Glengarry, Traralgon South, Yallourn, Flynn, Rosedale, Gormandale – we go and play in those halls.

Jacinta ERMACORA: All right, so the classic home-and-away kind of thing.

Garry SILVESTER: Yes, that is right.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes. Oh, great. Okay. I just wondered if the association has got a strategic plan.

Garry SILVESTER: A strategic plan? Just to continue. No. As I say, we are fighting for lines. We cannot increase juniors too much, or try to, because of the reason that I cannot leave the four courts and go out onto another four courts because the children would be left unattended sort of thing.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes. So if you had a strategic plan, you would have that articulated in it.

Garry SILVESTER: Yes.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Or your aspirations for the future and all of your hopes and dreams. Plus you would have them maybe costed and about the members that are involved.

Garry SILVESTER: Yes.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes, okay. Thank you. Just in relation to the soccer and community sport participation, there are a lot of benefits, including mental health and physical wellbeing for member participation, and of course regional community sporting clubs are often the lifeblood, or a network of lifeblood, that belongs in a community and supports other things. How important is it for clubs like yours that the state government is actually providing infrastructure funding, in particular for the soccer club?

Tony SALVATORE: Great question, Jacinta. It is really important that we have junior development. When you talk about strategic planning, we had objections a while ago saying ‘Let’s focus on the seniors.’ Well, if we do not have junior development, we do not have a senior side. The strategic plan is about getting very good participation from the juniors. It is not about winning, it is about development. The setback for us at the moment is there is nothing that I can get from the state government or from council. For example, we have got these gradings on the weekend, and we need drinking fountains because there is a duty of care. Fortunately we

have Gippsland Water now giving us a little trailer with some water fountains that we can use on Saturday. It is those sorts of things that we are lacking. Sure, it is coming, but in the meantime there is still a duty of care to ensure that these juniors are looked after. The infrastructure component is important – that we have got a facility – but then it is up to the clubs to ensure that they are doing the right thing and making it as comfortable as it can be for the junior players to not only come on training days but come on game days, enjoy themselves and then know that they will be there when they get to an age where they can play seniors.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes, that sounds very familiar and very positive from a broader community perspective as well. I did not catch –

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms –

Jacinta ERMACORA: I have got a bit more time, I believe.

The CHAIR: No.

Tom McINTOSH: The time is gone.

Jacinta ERMACORA: My time is up? Okay.

The CHAIR: Yes, your time is up, Ms Ermacora. I will go to Dr Mansfield.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you. Thank you both for appearing today. You have touched a little bit on this, but we have heard from other sporting clubs about a lack of broader strategic planning around investment in infrastructure funding for different sports, so a broader vision for soccer across all of Victoria and what different facilities might be needed in different areas, or in this case a broader vision for badminton as well. Are you aware of any strategic planning that has been done, and if not, is that something you would like to see? Do you think that would be helpful?

Tony SALVATORE: In terms of our club, we have our own strategic plan, and we adhere to that. The ones that are available through government – no, I am not aware of any one that I have had from state government or local government.

Sarah MANSFIELD: And how about for badminton?

Garry SILVESTER: For badminton I am sure Badminton Victoria and Badminton Australia have got plans in motion and everything else – there are definitely things out there. We all just want to increase the juniors, as Tony said.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Okay. From your perspective have your local sports groups faced any particular challenges, or have you observed any challenges with getting funding for regional sporting facilities?

Garry SILVESTER: We are fighting with the local council all the time to try and get an upgrade to give us more venues and, as I mentioned, to get line-marking and that done, and the lighting. Whether it is as a result of the legacy, we have not heard that that is coming to those areas or anything like that, so it will probably go to the main stadium.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Yes. Okay. And how about for badminton?

Tony SALVATORE: Well, the government has promised that there is money available, so I am hoping that the redevelopment of the stadium will cover all that.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Yes. Okay. I guess prior to there being any legacy funding available, I am curious to understand how you would normally have to approach getting funding for your facilities. Is it just trying to work with the local council and get funding, applying for grants? What is the sort of process for clubs like yours to try and get funding for infrastructure?

Tony SALVATORE: Sure. There is a range of ways we raise money. One is through applying for grants. So whatever grants are available, we have got one dedicated person looking for grants. Whilst the grants are drying up – the state government does not have much money I have been told – we also have club sponsors.

We will run functions where we will raise revenue. Pretty well we are all volunteers, and to run a club costs money, to buy the line marking paint that you have got to do and all the other things that go with it. It is not an easy job, but because again, our seniors, we are an amateur soccer club, and whilst we were at the highest level of Australia, now we do not pay players. Therefore the costing is not as expensive as it was back in 1992 to the year 2000. It is not easy, but we are always looking at it, and state government also obviously help with the funding as well.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Are there any things you would like to see change about that funding system, whether it is about investment in new infrastructure or maintenance renewal funding to do your activities. You may not have thought about whether there is a better way, but I am just curious.

Tony SALVATORE: From our club point of view – if I take you back to a bit of history – the council sold that stadium, and it was owned by a private owner. We were paying rent to that private owner, and we were doing all the work. So we went through a significant amount of heartache for several years, and it was only probably in the last four or five years council bought the facility back. So if you ask, is there a better way? Yes, there are better ways. I understand it is still an asset, so they still need to ensure that it is not going to break the council. What is the preferred methodology? I do not know.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Okay. I think that is all I have got. Thank you.

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

Tom McINTOSH: And just following up on that – sorry, Tony, if you have mentioned it before – the membership of your club, both players and supporters as well, what is all that sort of stuff?

Tony SALVATORE: For the players, sadly, they have got to pay to play, which I do not agree with, but that is okay. It is \$280 a year. Eighty per cent of that money goes to Football Victoria, and there is about 20 per cent that comes to us. The supporters, they can do a yearly membership, which gives them access to all the home games, gives them access to some merchandise, and that is about 70 bucks a year.

Tom McINTOSH: Okay. As far as that funding to Football Victoria and that membership fee, is that lower than metropolitan clubs? Is my understanding right? It might be outside your knowledge.

Tony SALVATORE: It is the first year that we have actually gone to Football Victoria. It used to be Latrobe Valley Soccer League, and this is the first year they have taken over. I think it is lower than the normal metropolitan costs, yes.

Tom McINTOSH: And how many playing members do you have?

Tony SALVATORE: Senior members, around 60, and juniors, around 150.

Tom McINTOSH: Right. And for you, Garry, how many playing members are in your association?

Garry SILVESTER: I think there would be around 200 all up, or 150 to 200, and it varies.

Tom McINTOSH: And just to understand, with the putting down of the lines, you are laying that in tape, are you? Is that right?

Garry SILVESTER: Yes.

Tom McINTOSH: Righty-ho. So you have got a couple of hours setting up and a couple of hours pulling it off, before and after games?

Garry SILVESTER: It is setting it up, because you have got to get exactly all the markings and the right things. Pulling it up is easy.

Tom McINTOSH: Okay.

Garry SILVESTER: It is the 4 hours setting up and 15 minutes to pull it down, sort of thing.

Tom McINTOSH: Okay. No problem. Okay, Chair, that is all for me. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Davis.

David DAVIS: Chair, thank you, and can I thank both of our two presenters. I am just going to follow up. I have heard what has been said by others. I just wonder, with some of these upgrades and things that you would desire, do you have not a full business case but a mini document each that actually lays out what projects and supports you would seek from government? Is there such a document you could provide the committee?

Garry SILVESTER: Speaking for badminton, yes. We have provided to the council what we called a ‘wish list’ prior to the Commonwealth Games and so forth, so that would definitely be available.

David DAVIS: That would be very helpful. Thank you. At least we know what is on the horizon and that you have done the work behind it. And is that true with soccer as well or not?

Tony SALVATORE: Yes. Again, sport and rec Victoria have got concept drawings done. Whilst they are not relevant until we know how much funding we are going to get, I have seen them. They look great. There is not a lot of detail. But until we know the funding – then we can determine what gets done.

David DAVIS: In effect what I am asking for is a mini business case, not a full-fledged thing, but something that gives us a bit of understanding about what might be needed.

Tony SALVATORE: That we do not have yet.

Garry SILVESTER: Correct.

David DAVIS: Okay. Well, anything you may be able to rustle up in that regard, we would welcome.

Tony SALVATORE: That will be good. I will get that.

The CHAIR: I believe Mr Davis has finished. Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thank you. I am interested to note we have got the *Latrobe Valley Express* in the room today, Mr Silvester.

Garry SILVESTER: Oh!

Melina BATH: No, no, it is good. It is a good communication, but I was looking in one of their articles that was on 27 July, so just a week after the announcement of the Commonwealth Games cancellation. They spoke about ‘Latrobe Valley budding player Alicia Cook, 16’ – she is probably now 17 – and the talented girl was asked, and she complied, very kindly, to drive all the way across to Ballarat to be in the ceremony for the thousand days before the Commonwealth Games. I just want to know, when she found out about the games cancellation, how did she feel about that, because my feeling is that the government would have known very closely that that was near to the end, when the announcement was.

Garry SILVESTER: That is right.

Melina BATH: How did she take it, and what is she doing now? How are you coaching her now?

Garry SILVESTER: She would have been devastated as well with the fact that it was done. Fortunately, she has continued playing tournaments. I know she has got a tournament this weekend at Shepparton as well to go to and is still pushing for selection and that there.

Melina BATH: Sorry, just quickly to interrupt, would she have been a potential to go to the Commonwealth Games or stay for the Commonwealth Games?

Garry SILVESTER: Yes, definitely. Maybe it would have been too soon for our games here, but if she puts in and does all the hard work, which is what you have got to do if you want to play for Australia, yes.

Melina BATH: So she is a talented girl?

Garry SILVESTER: Yes, there was the possibility there that she could succeed.

Melina BATH: And if there is no games in 2026, what is Badminton Victoria/Australia trying to do to compensate? It is not their fault, but what are they trying to do to compensate for that lack of that high-level interaction and performance? How are they trying to compensate for that, or can it be compensated?

Garry SILVESTER: I suppose there are other tournaments, because in badminton we have international events against other countries and silver international tournaments as well. But there is nothing like the Commonwealth Games. That takes the highlight. The Commonwealth Games and the Olympics are the two things that elite badminton players aim for, and that was the main thing on the cards, so to actually think we were getting it in our backyard for once was outstanding.

Melina BATH: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thanks, Chair. Just one briefly. Mr Salvatore, obviously we cannot let you go without acknowledging that your club has a very strong pedigree as the most successful football club in regional Victoria. There are obviously discussions around second division coming in in the next couple of years. Do you have future aspirations to be climbing those tables again?

Tony SALVATORE: In our strategic plan that is certainly what we are aspiring to. It was a wonderful thing to be playing the best soccer in Australia in our backyard, as Garry would say. To do that again or at the second tier would be fantastic. So if we can get the stadium right and we get the rest happening – people still talk about the Falcons, and 20 years have gone by. They do not talk about the other clubs because they have never heard of them, but the brand name is still there, so we want to continue that legacy.

Michael GALEA: Very good. Hopefully we will see that come through. Thank you.

Tony SALVATORE: Hopefully.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you both for coming in today and giving evidence, and I am sure it will be very helpful to the final report. You will receive a copy of the transcript about a week before it will be published on the website. The committee will now reset for the next witnesses in a few moments.

Witnesses withdrew.