

# 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

**WITNESS**

Mr Terry Robinson, Chief Executive Officer, Destination Gippsland.

**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 are switched to silent and that any 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.

I would also like to add that the committee had planned to hold today's hearing in Traralgon. On behalf of the committee may I express our concerns and best wishes to everyone in Traralgon and other parts of Gippsland affected by last week's storm. We hope you stay safe and you are able to recover from the storm as quickly as possible.

My name is Enver Erdogan, and I am Chair of the committee. I would like to introduce my fellow committee members: Mr Mark Gepp, Mr David Davis, Mr Lee Tarlamis, Mr Tim Quilty and Ms Wendy Lovell. That is who I can see online at the moment. We do have a number of other committee members that may join us later.

To our witness: 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 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 questions and discussion. Could you please begin by stating your name for the benefit of our Hansard team and then start your presentation. Over to you, Terry.

**Mr ROBINSON:** Thank you, Mr Chairman, and thank you for the opportunity. I am Terry Robinson, Chief Executive Officer of Destination Gippsland. Just a little bit of context: Gippsland from a tourism point of view has been hit significantly hard, not just by COVID. I think we also need to recognise what led up to COVID in terms of years of drought, the significant bushfires in the summer of 2020, COVID and obviously recent storms and flooding. COVID has very much had an impact but so have these other factors.

Tourism in Gippsland is a really important sector. It employs over 13 000 people. It is worth over \$1.3 billion in visitor expenditure, and it attracts over 8 million visitors a year. I will start just with some of the numbers and then move into the impacts and touch on some of, if you like, the recommendations as we see them to get the visitor economy back on track.

I mentioned those 13 000 jobs, and a lot of them are young people. They are in small regional and rural towns. The visitor economy is widespread across Gippsland. The impacts of last year's lockdowns: so for the six months between April and September, there was over \$330 million worth of visitor expenditure lost compared to previous years, which would have come from 1.8 million visitors that did not come during that time. I mention that because of those 13 000 we are estimating from economic forecasts that there have been over 4000 jobs lost in Gippsland—down over a third of that job pool. A lot of them are casual, a lot of them are part-time, a lot of them are young people that would not necessarily appear in a lot of official stats or be part of unions or advocacy groups. They just do not get their shifts, they do not get paid, they drift off and do other things, and so the longer impacts from the economic side are hurting young people right across all of the towns.

The recent lockdown, I will just quickly touch on that, but it equates to over \$3 million a day of lost visitor expenditure, plus the wages that are not paid and therefore able to be spent. So the economic impact is significant, but increasingly some of the impacts are not measurable. We have surveyed our industry. We are the regional tourism board. We have contact with over 1000 tourism businesses through surveys and other communications. So what they were saying that COVID has done is, if you like, some of these less tangible

ones, in terms of the uncertainty. They are in an industry that has a lot of uncertainty. There are border closures, there are lockdowns which have obviously just happened, consumer confidence is down, we are seeing cheap flights encouraging people to go to other destinations, they have got staff shortages. There are all sorts of things that are impacting. If you are running a business in tourism in Gippsland, you know, will you invest, will you stay in that career? So that uncertainty is very much weighing on people's minds.

It has also led to I think an emotional toll. There is a lot of fatigue. I mentioned drought, bushfires, pandemic and now storms, and so the mental health of people in the community is very much I think fragile. We are seeing that in terms of the engagement while we are trying to recover. The voluntary groups, the event committees, the business tourism associations, they do not have the same, if you like, energy or commitment because people are just trying to sort of get by in their own lives. So fatigue has set in in the community. There is a lot of confusion around the regulations and the changing requirements and what is expected of businesses and staff, checking IDs, QR codes and just having sort of a different aspect to customer service than they would normally do. From a tourism point of view, last-minute booking trends: with the uncertainty, people just are not committing that far ahead, which makes it hard for businesses to roster staff, order supplies—they are really going short term, and that just decreases their confidence in investing and recruiting staff and training staff. So clearly a lot of impacts are being felt.

I will just quickly touch on what we would like to see or recommendations or a way out of it. A lot of it starts with the vaccination program. I will not get into sort of health policy, but clearly until there is a certain point with vaccinations the tourism industry is going to be vulnerable to further lockdowns, and that is a difficult space to be in. We have seen it in other countries and other jurisdictions, that once it gets to a certain point then there is a little bit more certainty.

The regional and metro divide I think is very much an area of opportunity. You know, you take an area like East Gippsland that did not have any active cases for a long time. Restrictions and the lockdown that apply to the whole state as one size fits all means that the visitor economy in East Gippsland, for example, that has been through drought, been through fire and now COVID, is I think in some ways unfairly sort of treated in this. If there was a sophisticated sort of postcode/local government area sort of model of being able to have almost a local bubble where the local community can meet and can, you know, enjoy the visitor economy, then that would be ideal. But the whole state at once does impact on areas that I think could be quite safely treated a little bit differently.

The government support has been welcome, particularly the November state budget. But it is taking a long time for a lot of those programs to sort of hit the ground and make a difference. Some of the eligibility: we are hearing from businesses if you are not GST-registered or if you do not have a certain payroll, then you are ineligible, so some of these small businesses just are not seeing the support. And this is where federal government policy comes in, with JobKeeper and other wage support systems, but recently regional Victoria was not considered a hotspot, even though it was in lockdown, for federal support. So again, if there was a distinction between regional Victoria and metro, that would be welcome.

Look, there are things that can be done. We need to drive the demand back—anything to support events. Events have been hit really hard last year and this year; two years of events have been lost. It is hard for some event promoters to come back a third time, so any event support and also the rules and regulations allowing events to go ahead; there has been a lot of red tape there. If there can be sort of more—I will say innovation, but more trust in the business community to find solutions. The loosening of liquor licensing and that red line on the outdoor dining was a really welcome move. You saw just how quickly businesses moved. They created some fantastic outdoor spaces, so with some funding support and some loosening of red tape the business community really acted swiftly and created some opportunities, in their own vested interests, but it helped communities as well to see that they could take some things on board and control some of the response themselves. There are quite a lot of things I could go on about, but I might stop there, Mr Chairman, and take questions.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Robinson, and I thank Destination Gippsland for your advocacy. In my time in Parliament I have noticed that you have been a very strong advocate for your region. You did get a relatively good outcome at the last budget, but obviously the storm and a number of other factors have I guess conspired against you. But thank you for that quite comprehensive overview. You have really touched on a broad range of issues, so I know we all have questions. What I might do is just have—I am moulding a list. I might let

Mr Gepp and then Mr Davis go. Could I ask all committee members to please only ask a maximum of two questions—a question and a follow-up—so that everyone gets an opportunity. Mr Gepp is to go first.

**Mr GEPP:** Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Terry, for being with us today. I have got Mr Quilty and Ms Lovell with me from Northern Victoria, and we know precisely what you are talking about in terms of communities confronting difficulty after difficulty. You know, we have had the droughts right throughout the Mallee and we have had the bushfires up in the north-east of course, and it can be devastating. It seems like it is just one punch after another that is coming our way, so props to you for your resilience and the resilience of your community.

Terry, you spoke a little bit about the budget—the 2020–21 state budget—and I know that there was an allocation of money there for the Gippsland tourism recovery package. I wonder if you might tell us a little bit about that and what sort of projects that money will be used for down in Gippsland.

**Mr ROBINSON:** Yes. I think that is the package that had a lot of public infrastructure funding. Wilsons Promontory National Park and other national parks are getting improved infrastructure, and there are visitor experiences that will come out of that. For those programs a lot of the money has gone to DELWP or to Parks Victoria, and it is welcome. Very much the national parks and nature-based tourism are key attractors. Those things are very much welcome. They are sort of for the medium to longer term, so once that infrastructure is in place and those improvements are there, then that sets Gippsland up. Short term there are some marketing dollars, which are really important, and some industry training, which again is welcome. Part of this is the economic modelling showed that Gippsland was going to be one of the hardest hit regions—on the back of bushfires—that COVID would impact, and that it would be a long-term recovery, so 2023–24 is probably in some ways a scenario of when things could get back to normal if everything stays on an improvement path.

The government budget was very much welcomed. I suppose I would make the point that there is always a case for sustained support. Particularly we have got to build the supply, the infrastructure and the experiences but we have also got to, I think, generate the demand, and there is going to be a lot of competition from other states. We know that, so we cannot be complacent. So the government support was very welcome. Ideally we see it as part of an ongoing commitment to the visitor economy

**Mr GEPP:** Thanks. And just on that, I noticed in your submission that you talked about your destination management plan. Just on the back of the response that you gave there, how does that tie into the things you are talking about with marketing, increased visitation et cetera?

**Mr ROBINSON:** We have got a destination management plan, and that has essentially been our strategic document. That was actually prepared before fires and COVID, but it has held us in good stead in terms of: what will make a difference over the next 10 years? What does Gippsland need to grow its visitor economy, to employ people et cetera? Part of it was to get the marketing right and to invest in those demand-driving activities, secure new events, but also to invest in product—both government side such as the Wilsons Prom package and some of the trails but also encouraging private sector investment. I think one of the big impacts from COVID is the confidence of, if you like, the private sector and investors—will they invest in regional Victoria? Will they invest in Gippsland given all the uncertainty? Our destination management plan is something that we have worked with government on, and they have been supportive of it. There is a lot more in it that can be implemented, and that will form the basis of submissions and future grant applications and all the programs that are being set up from the tourism recovery package. But, as I say, some of those opportunities have not quite come along yet. They are taking a little bit of time to work their way through the system.

**Mr GEPP:** Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** I might go to Mr Davis. I just also want to acknowledge that Melina Bath and Mr Rod Barton are also present. After Mr Davis, Ms Melina Bath, then Mr Quilty, in that order. Mr Davis.

**Mr DAVIS:** Okay. Mr Robinson, thank you for your submission. I think Melina is here. She has been caught up with a lot of flood-related matters, so you will be well versed in all of this of course. I notice in your submission you talk about acquisition of events and a focus on events. You also talk about the insurance challenges that are involved in that. As I understand it in talking to event people both in Melbourne and in some country areas it has become a tremendous problem. You cannot get insurance that actually provides you with the assurance that you need to proceed with some of these important events. Now, obviously events are important attractors of tourism into your region. Do you have a way forward with these issues of insurance?

**Mr ROBINSON:** Look, we do not. Insurance is always a tough one, and it is not just events. The cost of insurance and new premiums for any small business, whether they are in East Gippsland, bushfire affected or other regional, is becoming cost prohibitive, and for some businesses it may be the tipping point. For events it is even harder given the need not just for COVID-safe plans but to insure against all sorts of scenarios. We have got private sector event operators. They will make commercial decisions, and potentially if they have got a big music event or a sporting competition, they could just take it interstate. They do not have to deal with Victoria if they have that choice, and that is going to be, I think, an ongoing challenge. We are trying to work and grow an event acquisition budget. So you need to bid, you need to be competitive, but for some of the commercial event organisers that possibly have more negotiating power over their insurance, they could take events interstate, and given that lockdowns are still a reality, they probably need some certainty there.

The other side of events which is worth acknowledging is a lot of the community events are run by volunteer committees and groups and they are doing it for the goodness of—you know, they want to promote their town or their food and wine sector, and so dealing with the insurance, there is the cost but then there is just the complexity of dealing with all the information and everything to go with it. And for people that volunteer to sort of run an event, that is not why they are there. So the insurance side, we need to help committees in their capacity to deal with event matters, including insurance, OH&S and all sorts of things, just so they can run the event that they want to do. So, look, insurance is a big one. We are trying to find solutions and work with them, but it is a complicated thing. It is a barrier for smaller community events to run, but it is also I think going to be a competitive disadvantage for Victoria.

**Mr DAVIS:** Should the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority or similar authority at the state level play a role here, to support some of the insurance behind some of these events?

**Mr ROBINSON:** I think they should, and that is part of our submission and I know part of the Victorian Tourism Industry Council, representing industry and events, is advocating for that as well. And that is where some not so much flexibility but just some recognition that these are extraordinary times and events are part of the recovery, both from an economic point of view but from a community pride point of view. If events drop off the calendar, it is lose-lose, so I think that authority does have a part to play.

**Mr DAVIS:** It is community pride, but it is jobs too, isn't it? That is the point.

**Mr ROBINSON:** Well, that is right. I mean, the long weekend, we have just had a lot of events cancelled and not just sort of, you know, ticketed, 'We're going to an event'-type things. It is the weddings, it is the opening of the snow season, it is the family gatherings, it is all those things in a group situation. As you say, it is jobs not just for the staff at the venue but the suppliers do not get the orders—

**Mr DAVIS:** And it has been disastrous, I think is the truth. And [Zoom dropout] many small businesses and the jobs associated.

**Mr ROBINSON:** Yes. And the benefit of events and why we are sort of so strong on it is you can sort of choose when you have events, you can sort of fill the off-season. It is not all about sort of, you know, summertime when things are busy. If you can sort of have an events calendar spread throughout the year, you start to smooth out some of the ups and the downs, which again, if you have a stronger winter and off-season, businesses can employ staff. They can have longer term relationships with suppliers at the moment. So we really need to sort of build the events calendar. We have got some great venues and the government in recent years, particularly in the Latrobe Valley, have invested in sporting facilities. We need to fill those venues. We need events, you know, in the swimming pool, in the basketball stadium—

**Mr DAVIS:** But they cannot get out of Melbourne, I will let you know. They are not allowed to go, you know. We are unique amongst all the states and it is a disaster. Anyway, I will not say more.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I might pass over to Melina Bath, who is also one of the upper house members for Eastern Victoria, and then we will go to Mr Quilty.

**Ms BATH:** Thanks, Chair, thank you for that, and I do apologise for being late. I was in a flood and storm briefing and I needed to ask some questions there. Really good to see you, Terry. Thank you for being here and a witness. I would put it to you that unfortunately and devastatingly Gippsland has had drought for three years in various parts of Gippsland, it has had bushfires that decimated our region in the east in particular, and

COVID on top of that. It has been an absolute headache for all the events, accommodation, tourism and hospitality. I would say that there is a case, and I will put the case as a Gippslander, that there actually should be a special level of funding and special, say, treatment for Gippsland and potentially the north-east as well—not being too parochial, but I want to be—and if so, what are the targeted things that you would like that spent on in Gippsland, because it is a brilliant place to live, work and visit?

**Mr ROBINSON:** Thank you. Look, I agree. We cannot separate COVID and its impacts and the response to COVID from all of the other things that have happened. Gippsland was in many ways after the fires very vulnerable to any future impacts. We have seen that with COVID even most recently. We had a reasonably good summer, but that has not recovered what was lost in 2020—new lockdowns, storms and we have lost a long weekend, so look, where there is the potential for additional support and recognition of Gippsland doing it particularly tough, we would obviously welcome that.

The destination management plan has various priority projects in there, whether it be the Gippsland trail—there is a Gippsland Lakes aquatic trail—there are a range of projects. But getting back to it, marketing dollars are needed to drive demand. We need dollars to secure events. We need, not just for our organisation but across the board, this point of supporting communities and the voluntary committees. We need the capacity in the region to deal with all of this and then to have the longer term plan in terms of staff training and workforce planning, because we have seen people leave the industry. It is too stop-start. It is open to future shocks. I think where there are dollars and resources to help businesses retain and train staff, that is most welcome. Demand-driving activities, whether they be marketing campaigns or event acquisitions, are most welcome and will help in the short term. Longer term it is the investment in the infrastructure and the visitor experiences. We need to become a region that is more resilient all year round. All those things that you have touched on have meant that unfortunately we have been one of the worst hit and it is going to be one of the longest recoveries of any region in Victoria, if not Australia.

**Ms BATH:** Chair, thank you. Thanks, Terry. I am interested in you unpacking a little bit more around the events industry. I have not been on this committee in other zones; I have jumped on particularly because Gippsland is my area of interest and we are all on multiple committees, but I want you to understand and share with us. When there are events, often—I can give you an example of the Paynesville Music Festival that was cancelled this year. It was in the gap between lockdowns, but there were just too many issues in terms of compliance and in terms of barriers and volunteers. Can you unpack what the state government can do to streamline and support events? This is the landscape for the future. What do we need to hear in this committee so that good events can happen without burdening the towns or the volunteers so completely?

**Mr ROBINSON:** This is where, if you like, their system, the approvals system, changes regularly. There was a period there—and I think it impacted the Paynesville event—where everything needed to be signed off by DHHS. So even if you had a COVID-safe plan and even if you had complied with other things, it was then fed into a DHHS approvals system that was a bit of a bottleneck and took ages, and in the end some events came and went and did not have that approval. So that is one thing in terms of the mechanisms of state government—how to get approvals for events. If everything is channelled into DHHS, then that slows things down.

There is an East Gippsland Winter Festival that is going through some really challenging decisions and planning at the moment on whether they go ahead or not, and a lot of that is getting back to the distinction of regional Victoria being caught up in whole-of-state restrictions and gathering limits. If there was that separation of areas—local government areas or postcodes—that have essentially been free of COVID for a long time wanting to do something within their own community, then could there be flexibility from state government to allow gathering limits for certain events, given that they have got all the COVID-safe plans, all of the protocols and everything else in place, but they just artificially have a number that they have to work within which makes it unviable. Again, the answer to that is some flexibility and some recognition of what areas of Victoria are safe to hold events or to have less restrictions imposed on them. That would make a big difference, because we have got this situation where unfortunately with this most recent lockdown we had events that were lost last year throughout 2020, and 2021 was meant to be the recovery and the bounce back of those events and now they are in jeopardy. Two years without an event, despite all the planning, despite a lot of the cost being expended, means that we are unlikely to see them, you know, next year and beyond. So I think some flexibility would be supported. Some extra resources to help event committees navigate their way through the approvals and the insurance and just all the operational details additional to previously, that would also be welcome.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Quilty, did you have a question?

**Mr QUILTY:** Yes. You have touched on it already, just in your last response—you talked about not having the whole of the state locked down when we have—and there are vast areas of the state which have no cases and have had no cases for a long time, I think many of us support the idea of having lockdown based on where you are. But presumably a lot of your tourism is coming out of Melbourne, so even if we were doing that, that may not benefit you. So how do you see that just having localised lockdowns would still save your tourism and events industry? And then secondly, if the approvals process to let things go ahead was more localised instead of being centralised in the Melbourne DHHS people, do you think you could make things work better that way?

**Mr ROBINSON:** Thank you. I mean, Melbourne is our main market; there is no doubt about that. However, a lot of these events could still run even if it meant that they, I will say, were held, broke even and it kept them back on their feet so that next year there is the confidence to build with external visitation. Some of these events are relatively small. If they are, I will say, food and wine-related events indoors where the gathering limits are, you know, quite restricted, all those would be filled almost by local community anyway. So some of these events just are celebrations for locals to get out and about, and they have not done it for so long. The lack of the Melbourne market I do not think would mean that these events could not go ahead, but it means that, you know, the organisers would just be a bit more flexible in what they offer and what is viable. But definitely if regional Victoria can travel, then, you know, there is still a big enough market to I think keep these events going for this year and then they build next year.

But the decentralised approvals—and look, DHHS, and you have got organisations like Regional Development Victoria, they are dealing with businesses, their specialty is working with sort of either events or business groups. So if there were protocols within government where the Gippsland base of DHHS or RDV or, you know, working with local government, there are plenty of mechanisms for approvals to be made rather than it all be centralised. The government structure is decentralised in some ways, with agencies and offices all around. Put them to use is probably what I would say.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Barton and Ms Lovell, do you have a question? Mr Barton.

**Mr BARTON:** Terry, it does not seem like you can get a break down in Gippsland. It has been one thing after another. But you have had a really good presentation there, and I will pass on to someone else. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much, in appreciation of the time. Ms Lovell, do you have a question?

**Ms LOVELL:** Yes, I do, thank you. And thank you, Terry, for your presentation, and our thoughts are with the people of Gippsland at this present time. Terry, like you, I come from the north-east. As Mark said, Mr Quilty, Mark and myself all represent the north of Victoria, but like you we lost last year. We had the bushfires at the beginning of the year that affected so much more than just the area where the fires were because of the smoke and just tourists are not coming to the region because of that, and we then shared with you the pain of last year with closures due to COVID. We then had the overreaction of the Victorian government who slammed the New South Wales border shut for our long weekend over the New Year's weekend, which shut out of vast areas of New South Wales. New South Wales already had their hotspots closed down, but it shut out vast areas of New South Wales from coming into our border towns. We also shared with you the loss of the Valentine's weekend and the June long weekend.

We heard last week from Jamie Lea, who is running the Shepparton Festival. The Shepparton Festival actually started last Friday. She has done a tremendous job of adapting that festival to continue to run it in a COVID-safe environment, including breaking up events that might have had 100 people at them into much smaller events and doing multiple screenings or multiple presentations of the same event to make them COVID-safe. You mentioned the outdoor dining, and certainly we have seen history show that small business people are great innovators. When government introduced a ban on smoking in pubs in Melbourne, the rooftop bars shot up, because small businesses are great innovators. I just wondered if you thought there might be some role for government to play in perhaps having an innovation fund for small business to show how they can continue to provide the tourism offer in a COVID-safe environment?

**Mr ROBINSON:** Thank you. The answer is yes. I think anything that gives the business community—obviously they need some guidelines and the framework, but the example of the liquor licensing and the outdoor dining I thought was a good one, and as I say, the rooftop bars. Events could do the same. You know,

'Here are the rules'. The problem for events in particular is that the rules are changing, the gathering limits are variable depending on things and the dates and it happens so quickly. So I think businesses in general, events specifically, if they were given that opportunity, 'Okay. Here are the guidelines. What could you do? What would you like to do?', and to work with them on the solutions.

It is not just more of the same, because things have changed significantly. I think things that encourage innovation take the pressure off government. When I say it takes the pressure off, it is in terms of grants and specific business packages, because in the end what business wants to do and what events want to do is just trade as normal. That is how they get their cash flow. That is how they get their confidence, their self-esteem. Their reason for being in the private sector is: we want to run the business; we do not want to be applying for small grants. That is not what recovery looks like. So their ability and their willingness to, I think, work within a government framework but have some encouragement to be innovative is really important.

When it comes to events, too, what is going to be really challenging is the business events, the conference market. Because of Zoom, because of what we are doing right now, a lot of small corporate meetings and conferences probably will not go ahead. What was planned to come to East Gippsland—particularly after the fires there was quite a strong push and events were going to come, but COVID hit and they are unlikely to return. So there is going to need to be, I think, some innovation, both from the businesses and from government to see what can happen to overcome what is going to be a dramatically changed business model for events and venues that deal with corporates and business events, let alone the bigger outdoor ones. Outdoor you would like to think should be easier. It is the indoor events that are getting really restricted by what is happening with COVID.

My other point is to recognise that the border closures definitely for the north-east had an impact, and in East Gippsland as well. The connection with south coast New South Wales, Canberra and the Sydney–Melbourne coastal drive means that normally Gippsland benefits from, if you like, travellers coming from the north into East Gippsland, and with those borders closed I think what we saw was an exodus going the other way rather than coming into Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. On behalf of the committee, Terry, I wish to thank you and Destination Gippsland for first of all for your submission but also your contribution today. It has been very informative and helpful.

**Mr ROBINSON:** Thanks, Mr Chairman. Thank you, committee members, and good luck with the rest of the inquiry.

**Witness withdrew.**