

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria

Seymour – Thursday 14 September 2023

#### MEMBERS

Sonja Terpstra – Chair

David Ettershank – Deputy Chair

Ryan Batchelor

Melina Bath

Gaelle Broad

Wendy Lovell

Samantha Ratnam

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Sheena Watt

#### PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

John Berger

Ann-Marie Hermans

Joe McCracken

Evan Mulholland

Rachel Payne

**WITNESSES**

Ken Hall, Chairman, Kings Park Committee of Management; and

Pam Beerens, Secretary, Seymour Agricultural and Pastoral Society.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open the committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria. This public hearing is for the Environment and Planning Committee, an all-party committee of the Parliament looking into the October flood event. We will be providing a report to Parliament which will include recommendations to the government. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands we are gathered on today, and paying my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee. I welcome any members of the public in the gallery and remind those in the room to please be respectful of proceedings and to remain silent at all times.

Both of you, Pam and Ken, are giving evidence today, so this applies to you. 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 this 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, and 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.

At this point I will take the opportunity to introduce myself, and then committee members will also introduce themselves to you. I am Sonja Terpstra. I am the Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee, and I am also a Member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

**Samantha RATNAM:** I am Samantha Ratnam, Member for Northern Metropolitan Region.

**Melina BATH:** Melina Bath, Member for Eastern Victoria Region.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Hi. I am Gaelle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Wendy Lovell, Member for Northern Victoria.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Member for Northern Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** All right. With that, we will hand over to you. You have 10 minutes to make your opening remarks. I will give you a 2-minute warning when we approach the end of that time. Could you please state your name and the name of the organisation that you are appearing on behalf of for the Hansard record. Over to you.

**Ken HALL:** Thank you for the invitation to speak today. I am Ken Hall, Kings Park Committee of Management Chairman. I was born in Seymour nearly 75 years ago, so I have got a bit of experience in this area. I have seen floods before, and I saw this one we just had on 13 October last year. I think the one that we had last year impacted Kings Park badly given the fact that we were surrounded by a dam with the new construction in Tallarook Street. There have been developments like Aldi and McDonald's and all those sorts of things. Now, they build the premises up to be above flood level, but they also take the car parks up too, and it became a dam in Tallarook Street. I went and had a look the day after the flood at where the flood got to in front of the post office in the main street. That was my flood marker, and to me it was that close to the same spot as the 1974 flood, but in Kings Park it was 300 millimetres deeper, so I think we were in behind a bit of a dam. I am not a hydrologist, so I could well be wrong, but that is the way I looked at it. I thought we copped water that we did not need to get. The local TAFE that is built here is on stilts. The water can go through it and the car parks are down. I think with some of this new development that happens, maybe that is the model. You

know, let the water go through. It comes down to the fact that we are not going to stop the floods. They are going to come, but we have got to try and mitigate the damage of the floods. Like I said, it was 300 millimetres deeper. Now, there were a couple of buildings there that only just got in. They would have missed out on that before.

We had major damage to the properties and that, but we are run by a local volunteer committee, and I think the mental attitude of some of our members was not good. They have seen their years and years of good work put in, and it is all destroyed. There is one chap there that had probably put in 40 hours a week. He was 86 years old, but he still did it, and he did not come back. I think we lacked direction early in the piece after the flood. We did not get much assistance in what to do and what not to do, and it took until probably Christmas time before any sense prevailed.

There was major damage, like I said, to buildings et cetera, but the main football oval died because the water did not get away. The flood came and went, but our drains were all blocked and the water did not get off the oval for 16 days, and that had to get a full reconstruction that cost \$320,000. The ongoing problem with that is the drainage is there but it is blocked. The creek it runs into – you can go and have a look at it right now, because I have seen it recently. Our drain going into it is 1.5 metres lower than the water in the creek because the creek is full of rubbish. People have reclaimed it a bit, and it has got a lot of other rubbish and dirt and that in it, and the water is not getting away. That drains most of the park. It also drains a couple of streets in Seymour, like residential streets. They would have copped extra water that they should not have, because their water comes through us.

The oval – there is probably an easy fix for that creek one, but that takes 90 per cent of the water out of the park that I am saying goes into there. But there is another drain that takes the oval water, and it ends up in the same creek but through a different system. It goes over towards nearly Tallarook Street – if you know where I am talking about – and it is only 50 metres off a 2.5 metre concrete drain that drains Tallarook Street. I put in this year to the shire for the budget to see if they could get pipe for that 50 metres and take it into that big drain, and they have not got any money in the budget to do it. I do not know whether there are grants available to get that sort of thing done or not, but to me the price of that pipe would be a lot cheaper than redoing the oval every time it gets flooded.

There was an interesting point they were talking about before. Kings Park is recognised as the hub for disasters, by the Mitchell shire, for Seymour. That is all right if there is a bushfire, but if there is a flood it is probably not a good disaster centre. But that is what we have got.

We probably need more funding. We have had some funding, but we probably need a lot more. There is a lot of work there. There are problems to come. There is underground drainage and all that – you know, how much dirt is in all those. It is a problem that could arise. Our road network, a lot of it is damaged. The bitumen is still there, but it is all cracked and up and down from sinkholes in it. A lot of that is probably a problem. In the next year or two it will need reconstructing, and I do not know at whose cost – I doubt whether the shire would pick it up, so where do we go? We work on a limited budget. We are always looking to try and improve the park. We get some funding. There is one that has been on our agenda now since 2007. The number one of our master plan is to reconstruct the car park, which got some damage from the flood – washed out. But basically it is just an area that we need money for. We need money for lots of things. I will hand over to Pam.

**Pam BEERENS:** Thanks, Ken. Afternoon, all. My name is Pam Beerens. I am representing the Seymour Agricultural and Pastoral Society, and my position is Secretary of some eight years. We are the only agricultural show in Mitchell shire, and Kings Park is our home. The ag society is 165 years old this year, and part of that is also the fact that we have an ageing membership and they are all volunteers, so when it comes to doing things they are not as capable perhaps as what the younger ones are, and this came to show after the floods. We run the Seymour Show in October, the Seymour sheepdog trials in March/April and Tastes of the Goulburn in November. After cancelling the 2020 and 2021 shows due to COVID, we ran the most successful show in recent times, with a record attendance over the two days last October and 1500 exhibitors and competitors. Then two weeks later the floods hit, and we were so thankful that we were one of the few regional shows that actually ran at the end of last year. So we were very fortunate, and we know that we were fortunate on that.

During the floods our storage room, which is part of the new pavilion, was underwater for 10 days. The height in that room was over two three-drawer filing cabinets, and when I walked in there it was up to here when I stood. That water stayed there for 10 days. As a consequence there was very little, if anything, that we could turn around and rectify. Our office, which is in the Ken Hall Pavilion, had 30 centimetres go through, so all the cabinetry in there. One of our members did get word. With the help of Ken they tried lifting things in both the office area and in our storeroom, but nobody was to realise that it was actually going to go higher than what it did. Under normal circumstances a lot of stuff may have been able to be saved, but because it went higher there was no chance – and the fact that it hung around for so long. In both those areas shelving tried to go floating, and their contents of course were dumped in the water, so that compounded it. As a result, basically we lost everything: 150 trestles, chairs, marquees, signage – all our equipment to run our events. When I did a total up it was just on \$50,000 worth of stuff – let alone our old records, minutes, history. 165 years have gone; we have no records on those. We are now organising this year's show. We are three weeks out. Although we thought we had captured everything we lost, of course it is not until you go to get something and go, 'Where's that?' And we are finding that now.

The clean-up – basically we received no help other than from the committee of management and it had to be done by our ageing volunteers. I reached out to council and was referred to the football club, which were not forthcoming. As a consequence of course – when you are older you are more likely to have health issues – getting around in the mud and slime and all the rest of it was not ideal for the older folks.

The grants that came up – one was a business one and you had to be registered for GST. We are not registered for GST; we are volunteers. The other one was for sports clubs. Well, we did not really fit into that one either. And we are not the only organisation in Seymour that fell under this. There was the art society, the spinners and weavers and a few of the other clubs in the same boat. They did not fit into those two grants and thus missed out. I applied for a number of grants. It is one of my little things. I usually find that I go fine until question 3. Question 3 gets me because at that point I have to say no and forget the rest of it.

**The CHAIR:** You have got 2 minutes.

**Pam BEERENS:** I did secure a \$10,000 grant through FRRR, and via the flood hub from here, through GIVIT, we have received \$1050 for some trestles. Our Les Bell Pavilion had some carpentry in it for the display of exhibits during the show. They were removed of course because it was destroyed. They will not be replaced so we will have to do the show this year without the cabinetry, and I am working on grants to try and do that for the future.

We are endeavouring to plan for the future because flooding is going to happen again. Our volunteers are feeling very positive leading into this year's show on 6 and 7 October, but most of us are pretty tired already. We really have not had a rest this year because we have been dealing with the cleaning, the fundraising and the frustrations and working out how we are going to run a show this year without equipment. One of the main ones is the lack of trestles. We use something like 180 trestles. At this stage I have managed to secure probably 70 to 80. The local hire place has got 80, so that means we are going to have to fund the hiring of those and it is still not going to get us across the line. We are just going to have to work with something. I have asked CFAs. I have reached out to a number of organisations to see who has got how many trestles. But then that creates another issue in the fact that (a) they have got to be identified and (b) somebody has got to go and pick them up and take them back. Like all groups, we are lacking in volunteer numbers, and we have had more work to do this year, so we really have not had a rest. We are going from one show last year straight into this one. But we are determined that Seymour Show 2023 will happen. It will be successful for our community. The community needs it, and we will do it.

**Melina BATH:** Hear, hear.

**The CHAIR:** Bang on time as well. Thank you very much for that. Now we will hand over to the committee for questions. Dr Ratnam.

**Samantha RATNAM:** Thank you so much for your submission today. I just want to acknowledge what a trying time you all have been through. Such resilience and strength you have demonstrated – and to support the rest of the community as well. I think you have got a whole bunch of people who are going to look up when the next Seymour Show is on so that we can attend as well. I have a question, particularly, Ken, following up what

you talked about in terms of applying for funding. Where would you ordinarily go for that kind of funding? Would it be council for that kind of infrastructure funding or are you looking for state government funding as well?

**Ken HALL:** Well, a lot of our funding now – we have got X buildings that are reasonably right, but a lot of it is not a sexy grant thing, like we want roads replaced and car parks and that sort of thing. They are hard to put a badge on. We work on a master plan, and they have been identified to be done in the last three master plans, but they have not been done –

**Samantha RATNAM:** Is that council-led master plans?

**Ken HALL:** Yes.

**Samantha RATNAM:** Okay. All right. Some extra resources there. It is potentially a gap in terms of where that individual recovery money goes and where it is pooled for people to access and then where that kind of community infrastructure is. It is sometimes challenging if the building is not owned by council et cetera. But we will look into that for sure. I am happy to come back, given we have not got a lot of time.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Broad.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Hi. Thank you so much. It is an amazing facility you have got down there. I was at the event last year, and it was wonderful to kind of monitor your story and how you have been able to come back and run it. How many different groups actually utilise the facility?

**Ken HALL:** Seventeen.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Seventeen? Okay. And have they all – I heard the playgroup has not continued.

**Ken HALL:** The playgroup actually at the moment is in recess.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay.

**Ken HALL:** It is a mixture though. There are football clubs, there is the ag society, there is cricket, there is little athletics, there is riding for disabled and guides. Who might I have –

**Pam BEERENS:** What's-his-name with the skateboards.

**Ken HALL:** Gnarly Neighbours, which is probably nearly the best thing that has happened in the park in the last couple of years. A chap came in and applied to use our big green shed, and he runs groups – the age group is probably five through to 10 – of kids that he is teaching to skate. He has got a huge audience, and they all respect him. It is one of the best things that has ever happened.

**Melina BATH:** Gnarly Neighbours?

**Ken HALL:** Yes. Do you know what 'gnarly' means? I had to ask my grandson. It's 'cool' – it is a surfing term – so 'cool neighbours'.

**Pam BEERENS:** He also does screen printing on T-shirts and various other things, but he works with the young ones.

**Ken HALL:** Yes. He has got a lot of respect.

**Gaelle BROAD:** It is interesting. You have highlighted the gap in the grants, which is very interesting. I am pretty sure the agricultural show society grants are open now; I think that is \$10,000.

**Pam BEERENS:** That is the state one, yes. That is for \$10,000.

**Gaelle BROAD:** I am happy to write a letter of support if you need it.

**Ken HALL:** Yes.

**Wendy LOVELL:** All three members for Northern Victoria will.

**Pam BEERENS:** My aim with that is – I have already asked for a quote from the local joinery place that did some joinery for me previously – to replace the show cabinetry that is, or was, in the Les Bell pavilion. I am waiting for his quote, then that is when I am going for that \$10,000. We are hoping it is going to come in under the \$10,000. Most years we get that \$10,000 for something, whether it be the sheep yards or various things we have got over the years since I have been involved. Going for grants is just one of my little things, and I have been quite successful, thankfully. So here's hoping that putting in the fact that it is for flood recovery might help me along. Thank you for the offer of support. Yes, it is more than welcome, but I think if I am putting it down as replacing stuff for flood recovery, I am hoping that that is going to get it over the line for us.

**The CHAIR:** We have 8 minutes left. Ms Tyrrell.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** If you had another one about the grant –

**The CHAIR:** I just want to make sure everyone gets a crack, but if you do not have a question, we can come back around.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** No, no, that is okay. The 17 other organisations that use the facilities – have they applied for grants to help?

**Ken HALL:** A lot of them have put in for equipment grants and that sort of stuff that they lost. Some clubs lost various things. The only building that did not go under water was the football club. They got minimal damage, but everyone else copped it. The RDA, for example, lost all their horse saddles and all their gear and all that. The little aths had a big loss too, because they lost all their high jump mats. You think they are only a bit of foam, but they are \$10,000 each – they are big money.

**Pam BEERENS:** But they actually qualified for that initial grant because they are sporting clubs. It tended to go down two lines: you were either a business registered for GST or sports. So a lot of them were able to pick it up in that format.

**Ken HALL:** One that I did forget to mention, which is probably just as important, is netball. There are seniors, juniors and little ones again, so there is a lot of netball played there.

**Pam BEERENS:** Yes.

**Ken HALL:** And probably our biggest event is the farming expo. We get 15,000, 20,000 people turn up to that over three days, and that is why we try to have the thing looking pretty right for them. That probably comes down to this road infrastructure, because people walking in those areas do not want to be walking in mud or holes or whatever. The show is probably our second-biggest event. But a new event that has only been going for a couple years now – COVID interrupted it, but last year it was pretty big, and it will get bigger – is a car show and shine run by the local car club. The Lions Club run a swap market with them and all that, and that is becoming big.

**Wendy LOVELL:** All of the buildings that are actually in Kings Park, do they belong to the committee of management, or do they belong to the ag society? There is your building. There are also all those exhibition spaces and stuff like that. Who owns –

**Pam BEERENS:** No. It basically belongs to the shire.

**Ken HALL:** Yes. The shire are the owners of the land – well, it is Crown land. We are a committee of management and we run it, but everything has got to go back through the shire. If we want to do something major, we have got to get approval from the shire to do it. We just cannot put a building somewhere.

**Pam BEERENS:** If we get any shelving, if we do anything, we have really got to get permission to be able to do stuff.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Did you have a dollar value for the actual damage that was done to buildings and to the ground and everything? And did the ground have to be repaired by you as the committee of management, or did the footy club do that?

**Ken HALL:** Well, that is what I touched on earlier there. We did not get much leadership early in the piece, but the oval was wrecked and we knew that. We have got a professional curator on our committee, and we were wondering how we were going to try and get this up. We did not find out until late November the oval was actually insured. The information was not forthcoming. That was covered by insurance, so that was good, and all the building repairs have pretty well been covered by insurance because the shire had insurance on them. There are still ticket items that Kings Park committee is going to have to take up – like I said, the drainage, the roads if they fail and all that sort of stuff. We are left with that. There was a fair old cleaning budget. I do not think some of that was spent wisely. I have heard some ridiculous figures that got spent by people that I do not believe should have – but that is another matter.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Who funded the cleaning budget?

**Ken HALL:** It was out of insurance.

**Pam BEERENS:** Our contents – we have a small contents insurance, but we did not insure for the fact that we could lose \$50,000.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Everything.

**Pam BEERENS:** Everything, literally everything, and our records et cetera. So the funding is not there.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. I feel like I am looking at some very treasured people in this town and community. It is Crown land but the buildings are owned by the council?

**Ken HALL:** Yes.

**Melina BATH:** The council has the insurance, and then you have your own internal insurance.

**Ken HALL:** Yes.

**Melina BATH:** With some of your functions – I have heard Seymour Show is fantastic but also the Seymour expo. I know Steph Ryan and now Annabelle are really keen contributors and supporters. Is it a cost recovery? How do you raise funds to keep going on? Under really tight times, is the Seymour expo profitable for you, or is it just a cost recovery or –

**Ken HALL:** I will answer it this way. The shire gives us a running budget, and it is close on \$100,000 a year. Individual groups, depending on their status – like the football club pays the most and the cricket club –

**Melina BATH:** Proportional.

**Ken HALL:** and the ag society pays the next and so forth. And we try and look after the juniors. Like the RDA and all that, they pay token figures, so we try and do that. And the expo, they pay close on 20 grand. It is a commercial venture, but that is not too high; that is being fair.

**Melina BATH:** No, it is modest.

**Ken HALL:** But the value of the expo to the park – it is some of the money, but it is the advantage to the town.

**Melina BATH:** Economic stimulus.

**Ken HALL:** Like, you go and tell a motel owner or a publican or a restaurant that it is not a good thing, and they will –

**Melina BATH:** ‘Do you like the expo?’ And they will give two thumbs up.

**Ken HALL:** Yes. ‘Can you have 50 expos this year?’

**Melina BATH:** So it is a community service as well, in essence?

**Ken HALL:** Yes.

**Melina BATH:** And community spirit – like it is a really positive thing to happen.

**Ken HALL:** Yes.

**Melina BATH:** I guess if we were writing a recommendation – and we have heard that you are a mixed business at Kings Park – is that about a more flexible state government grant process? You do not fit the sporting – is that something that you would like us to recommend?

**Ken HALL:** Yes.

**Pam BEERENS:** I think any grants should be able to cover everybody and not just certain – yes, they have got to have their criteria, I understand that, but to have missed it because we are not registered for GST and we are not a sporting club has been pretty hard, if you know what I mean. And the fact is now we have got to replace everything ourselves.

**Melina BATH:** So some flexibility there?

**Pam BEERENS:** Yes. All costing is coming back onto us unless I can turn around and see how many grants I can find, but grants take time to fill in. At the moment I am very focused on what has got to be done for the show, to get the show up and running. This year we will have just on 80 stallholders, so just dealing with those alone, let alone our entertainment and the competitors – last year we had 1500 competitors and hopefully we might get a few more this year. But the challenge is: how are we going to display their exhibits? It is a challenge.

**Melina BATH:** This sounds like a Dorothy Dixier, but it is not. Is it important to have ag shows anymore? Is it important?

**Pam BEERENS:** I think communities need them. They bring the community together. The children at school: we are really liaising with schools very much – well, we have tried to in past years, but this year we seem to have got it right – and the children are really looking forward to it. They are looking forward to exhibiting their things and to coming and seeing what is going on. Personally, I think there is a lot of hard work that goes into a show, and I think the community does need it. They need some positivity. They need something. Last year, with the grant from the government, we were able to let children under 12 in for nothing – sorry, last year it was under-18s that got in for nothing with our grant that we got. This year we have continued that with allowing under-12s to come in for nothing. And if you want to enter the show with an exhibit, there is no cost. Usually it is \$2; this year we have waived that. So we are trying to give something to the community. You were talking about how we raise our funds. We had a Bunnings sausage sizzle last weekend. We picked up \$900, which was really good. We sell fruit fly traps. That is an ongoing fundraiser for us. We will never be millionaires out of it, but we are offering a service to the community and we get a couple of dollars.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Well, thank you very much for coming and giving your evidence today. The time has beaten us, but thank you very much for coming. We really appreciate it.

**Committee adjourned.**