TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations

Melbourne—Wednesday, 31 March 2021

(via videoconference)

MEMBERS

Ms Sarah Connolly—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Mr Tim Smith

WITNESSES

Dr John Tower,

Ms Katie McDonald, and

Dr Trudie Walters, President, Australian and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies; and

Mr Sam Taylor, Member, Vic/Tas Regional Council, Parks and Leisure Australia.

   The CHAIR: I advise that the sessions today are being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. Rebroadcast of the hearing is only permitted in accordance with Legislative Assembly standing order 234. Thank you for taking the time out of your day today and joining us at the public hearing for the Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations.

On behalf of the committee I acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of this land. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future and elders from other communities who may be joining us today. I also extend a very warm welcome to any members of the public and the media that may also be watching us today.

This is one of several public hearings that the Environment and Planning Committee will be conducting to inform itself about the issues relevant to the inquiry. Before we begin I need to point out a couple of things. All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that you can speak freely without fear of legal action in relation to the evidence that you give. However, it is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments made outside the hearing, even if you are just restating what you said during the hearing. You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so to check and to approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

Thank you, all, again for taking the time to talk to us today. Can I just remind witnesses and members to mute their microphones when not speaking to minimise the interference. I will kick off and introduce members of the committee. My name is Sarah Connolly, I am the Chair of this committee, and I am lucky enough to be the Member for Tarneit.

   Mr FOWLES: I think we go by surname, don't we? Sorry, so that is me—I am Will Fowles, I am the Member for Burwood, but I do not have any rank or any official title or anything exciting. I am looking forward to hearing all of your evidence today.

   Ms GREEN: I am Danielle Green and I am the Member for Yan Yean. I am also Parliamentary Secretary for Sport and for regional Victoria, so this inquiry is quite germane to my growing electorate but also the portfolios that I have.

   Mr HAMER: And I am Paul Hamer, I am the Member for Box Hill.

   The CHAIR: Thanks, Paul. We might go around the table for the witnesses to introduce themselves today, and we might start with the Australian and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies. John, we might start with you.

   Dr TOWER: Good morning. My name is John Tower. I am a life member of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies and also a past president of the association, and it is a pleasure to be able to share some information with you today.

   The CHAIR: And, John, you have got a couple of, I am guessing, colleagues with you. You have got Katie?

   Ms McDONALD: Hi. Yes, I am Katie. I am also a member of ANZALS. I am a student member within ANZALS. I have been with them for six years. As this inquiry that you are doing is in my field of study, John asked me to be involved in the presentation and the writing of the proposal.

   The CHAIR: Great, thank you. I cannot see Trudie.

Dr TOWER: No, I think Trudie is going to only drop in if she can. She has another commitment and she said she would try and join the session later in the process. She is based in Dunedin in New Zealand and she is the President of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies.

The CHAIR: Wonderful, thank you. Sam, I can see you are there.

Mr TAYLOR: Yes. Hi, everyone. I am Sam Taylor. I am the Senior Coordinator of Sport and Recreation for the City of Boroondara, but today I am presenting on behalf of Parks and Leisure Australia. I am part of the board of Parks and Leisure Australia, so I am giving you a viewpoint from that organisation. Again, I look forward to sharing some information with you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Sam. We have heard from quite a few witnesses or groups and councils as part of this public inquiry, and I think what works really well, particularly on Zoom, is if we can get each group to do a 5- to 10-minute, no more than 15-minute, presentation. If you have prepared slides, great; if you have not, no worries—many people have not—you could just speak to your submission or add anything extra to that. Then after we do that, I know that committee members have quite a few questions. So it is a little bit of a Q and A and us just asking questions around the information you have submitted, maybe the information that you have talked to or presented as part of your PowerPoint slides, and we just have a discussion about the evidence that you have given. So we might start with John and Katie.

Visual presentation.

Dr TOWER: Okay, thank you. Let me see if I can share my screen. I have prepared a presentation and it looks like it is working, so here we go. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to your committee regarding the infrastructure for growing populations review. I will usually refer to us as ANZALS—that is, the Australian and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies. Before I go any further I also want to pay respect to the Indigenous owners of the land. I respect the traditional custodians of the land where I live. I value the culture, relationships to country, kinship connections and journeys of the First Peoples of this land. I am on Kulin nation land, and I want to pay respect to the elders past, present and emerging.

My presentation or our presentation this morning will be brief because you have already had a chance to see the original submission, but there are a few points I want to raise. First I want to tell you a little bit about ANZALS. So ANZALS is the scholarly association for leisure studies in Australia and New Zealand. It was established in 1991 after a series of meetings with representatives from a number of universities in Australia and New Zealand. The purpose of ANZALS is to promote further development of research and scholarship in leisure studies. We have a membership of approximately 100 people representing post-secondary education, and most are involved in either leisure scholarship or professional leisure industry. Our main outputs are a refereed journal called *Annals of Leisure Research* that is published five times a year and a biennial conference hosted by a university. We do also deliver periodic symposia and local events, we have a regular e-newsletter to our members and we liaise with kindred associations around the world and support leisure scholarship among students and staff and universities.

I would just ask Katie to give an example of some of the initiatives that we have had for students over recent years. Katie has been a member of the board for the last four to six years—I cannot remember the detail. Katie?

Ms McDONALD: Yes, I was on the board for four years. I have stepped down to finish my PhD. The student group is just like an additional resource that we try to provide for students who are completing their honours, their masters or their PhD. In the leisure field you are often very isolated within your area of study. While you are enrolled with a group of people, there are often not many leisure people within your university, so this is a great way to provide networking and people the opportunity to come together and discuss the unique problems and issues and rewarding methodological issues that come with being a leisure student. A thing that we offer is like a workshop, which is really great for them to get to know each other before they step into the big academic conference, which can be really overwhelming for a student, but we also provide support services such as scholarships and stuff to assist students to get to the workshops and all that kind of stuff. Our base is not just Australia and New Zealand; we have got students from all of the world, so it is really interesting to hear what is happening in America or Denmark or Brazil or China so we can discuss our differences and similarities.

Dr TOWER: Okay, thanks Katie. Just to finish off this background, one of our objectives is to provide relevant comment and advocate for more effective leisure policies and programs to government, community

and commercial agencies, and so we are particularly happy to provide our submission to your committee and this presentation today. One of the main themes that we wanted to highlight from our submission was the value of the benefits that we provide. The benefits that are achieved via environmental infrastructure, such as parks and open space, sporting fields, forest and bushland, wildlife corridors and waterways, to people living close to urbanised areas is fundamental. The body of research over the last few decades has reinforced this time and time again. The research is clear about the benefits gained from experiences with natural environments and parks. As far back as 1989, in their book *Experience Nature*, Ruth and Stephen Kaplan were documenting the benefits of nature on individuals and communities. The role of infrastructure benefits to the community in terms of environmental focus is absolutely fundamental to communities' wellbeing. The physical and mental benefits are clear. The infrastructure provides opportunities for physical activity and spaces for people to gather. Last year we saw throughout Melbourne and Victoria that people were using parks for a range of activities during our lockdowns. Our open space was crucial to helping people to maintain their social and community connections. Access to that environmental infrastructure is fundamental. The infrastructure needs to be provided so it is safe, accessible and capable of meeting community needs. Current research suggests that quality green space needs to be within a 10-minute walk of a resident's home. We can create accessible environmental infrastructure by planning by and with the community.

So when we talk about planning for environmental infrastructure, we know that each community setting is unique and consequently there is no established standard of infrastructure provision that can meet community needs. Instead, we advocate for an infrastructure planning approach by and with the community. We promote a four-phase planning process, with ongoing community and stakeholder engagement throughout a continuous planning approach. The planning process needs to document a scope for what the plan is trying to achieve. We need to understand what it is trying to do, its financial allocations, how its governance will be managed and how the planning process will proceed. It needs to be very clear in terms of what a planning project is going to do. This then needs to be supported by rigorous research to inform a plan. The research needs to draw on community consultation and understanding of existing provision, leisure participation trends, the current socio-economic and demographics of the community as well as the trends of those socio-economic and demographic characteristics, and also understand nearby programs, facilities and services. The research can be a really demanding thing. Much of it is already available, but from time to time it is necessary to undertake original research. The scope of the plan and the rigorous research will then lead to a documented plan that draws on those details. It needs to set goals, objectives and strategies from the data from the research. The plan's implementation is crucial. There needs to be a capacity to monitor the delivery, outputs and outcomes of the plan.

Lastly, there needs to be engagement with members of the community and stakeholders throughout the planning process. We really believe that the whole involvement of the community and recognition that each setting is unique is a fundamental aspect of delivering environmental infrastructure in any community. We strongly believe that a continuous planning approach based on the four phases and engagement with the community and stakeholders will help to guarantee effective and efficient delivery of environmental infrastructure. That is just a quick overview. Is there anything else I need to add, Katie?

Ms McDONALD: No. I think you have got it all covered there, John. Well done.

Dr TOWER: Okay. So thank you, and we will be happy to answer any questions along the way.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much, John. Sam.

Mr TAYLOR: I will also share a quick presentation with you, if this works. Hopefully that is coming up now—is it?

Visual presentation.

Mr TAYLOR: Can you guys see those slides? Yes? Okay. I just wanted to start off by giving you a bit of background, I guess, on Parks and Leisure Australia. As you can see there, it is a national member-based peak industry association for professionals working in the sport, leisure, parks and open space sectors in Australia. We have got five regions throughout Australia aligned to states and territories and centralised administration and support services. In terms of membership, 2500 national members reach more than 10 000 industry professionals through the sharing of information and onforwarding of member news. The Vic/Tas region, which we are a part of, has 750 members, the majority of those being LGA staff and others, including peak

body organisations, consultants, tertiary institutions, industry suppliers and service providers. That is a bit of background on Parks and Leisure Australia.

Just in terms of our submission, we split it into two distinct, I guess, important areas: active and passive recreation firstly and then urban green infrastructure secondly. I am just going to highlight a few of the key points from each of those areas and our conclusions as well.

Firstly there is just an important factor to note from an active and passive recreation perspective. I suppose we just want to flag that although a lot of talk recently with everything obviously has been about COVID-19 and the impacts of COVID-19, the importance of active and passive recreation goes beyond that, and a number of other influences, I guess, show the importance of active and passive recreation. There has been an increase in and an increasing emphasis on health and wellbeing, particularly through walking, cycling and other activities that can be undertaken wherever and whenever people have the time and opportunity, particularly in a time-poor sort of world. There is the diminishing size of backyards and private open space, encouraging people to rely on public open space instead of these for exercising and socialising. There is an increased awareness, I think, in the community of the availability of diverse public open space, and we are also seeing—and this partly is related to COVID—a refocus on people wanting to do things in their local area.

Another factor we are seeing or another thing we want to highlight is the increasing importance of trails, pedestrian and cycling paths in encouraging people to get active and out in the community. That is a big trend we are seeing. There is a real importance and opportunity, I guess, for innovative new approaches to engage more people in open space. Non-traditional things are becoming much more prevalent; facilities like co-located playgrounds and skate parks, pump tracks and bouldering walls are becoming more and more popular. So there is a great opportunity to engage those what we would call non-traditional users of open spaces. We feel that is really important. And then of course—this gets talked about a lot—there is just better access to sporting fields and facilities for structured sport. It is really critical, particularly in many local government areas and inner-city areas. Boroondara is a great example. It is facing significant shortfalls of space, particularly with the growth of women's sport in traditionally male sports in particular—so football, cricket and soccer. So yes, we are seeing some real pressures there. Those are probably the key factors we wanted to note from an active and passive recreation perspective.

Talking to urban green infrastructure, I guess we just want to flag the obvious point of the immeasurable benefit to human life of urban green infrastructure on physical, social and mental health. There are five particularly important components that we highlight. There are environmental areas—so large patches of vegetation providing wildlife and refuge areas. There are green corridors—so linear linkages of creek-lined aquatic and terrestrial vegetation supporting wild habitat. There are grass areas—so parklands, sports and recreation areas, catering to both passive and organised sport. There are urban forests—so trees planted in the streets, open spaces, things like garden beds, lawns; critical ecosystems, I guess, to service people. And then there are wetlands—so natural green spaces that assist in managing stormwater run-off and water quality. The other thing we want to note or highlight particularly with urban green infrastructure is just the potential to help mitigate climate change impacts. We see a real importance in having a resilient landscape with a sustainable ecosystem to ensure that social and economic factors are not greatly impacted as the climate changes into the future and with a more extreme climate than we are seeing at the moment. That is a really important one.

I guess just in conclusion we have three takeaway messages or key priorities from a PLA perspective. The first one is planning and policy changes to maintain and improve Victoria's livability—so livability about creating and beautifying urban centres that are attractive for people, that support economic factors and that improve the health and wellbeing of the community. We are talking about things like green corridors and protective vegetation through those policies and regulations as an example. The second one is making as much space available as possible whilst giving careful consideration to development planning, so things like how embellishments from developers are dealt with and managed and opening up current land and facilities to use them more intensively, particularly in the case of established municipalities. Those are things like opening up state government land, opening up schools—that type of thing—to try and increase the amount of use we are getting from facilities. And then the third key message is around designing to increase and intensify use of spaces and facilities and attract a wide cross-section of user groups. Some of the innovative stuff I talked about earlier—things like bouldering walls and pump tracks and co-locating playgrounds and facilities to try and maximise the use of space—we have seen done very well in parts of Asia, where every little space is used for something. Even non-traditional shared spaces will be used for mini little pocket pitches and all sorts of things

like that, and I guess we are looking to opportunities like that and things like also including rooftop facilities and those types of opportunities to better use the space that we have got.

Those three key messages and takeaway points are probably the key ones that we wanted to put across to the panel. I think that is everything from me, and as John said, I am happy to answer any questions from the panel. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks so much, Sam. I might kick off with the first question, and it is really to everyone. We know at the height of the COVID-19 restrictions in Melbourne in particular we saw some really innovative examples of the provision of additional parks and open spaces, particularly in higher density LGAs. One of the more, I guess, high-profile examples has been the opening up of Northcote Golf Course to the general public. Do you have some views that you want to share about allowing public access to land such as golf courses and school grounds post COVID?

Dr TOWER: I will take a quick shot at that. First of all, I should declare I am a golfer, but I have not played at Northcote yet. I think the whole idea of shared spaces has a lot of merit, but I am also very conscious that often in terms of pursuing sports there is a need for very specialised, dedicated types of facilities, and so it is not necessarily something that you can just open up and allow people to start using. It diminishes the quality of the sporting experience and those sorts of things. I think that one of the things that struck me, having read the reports about the Northcote Golf Course over the lockdown and how much the community valued it, was along the lines that we need to make sure people are aware of the opportunities. I do not think people would have been even aware in many instances that those public golf courses existed and that, you know, there was something there that they potentially could see. So helping our communities be involved in the planning processes and in existing reviews of what they do and those sorts of things is going to be fundamental.

Ultimately you end up getting into one of those wicked-problem scenarios where you have got two groups with very conflicting ideas and expectations and threading that path of compromise is going to be the only way you are going to find a viable solution. Getting those groups that are interested in getting access and maintaining the existing group's access is part of the challenge of all of that, but unless you get them talking to each other and working together, it is not going to be resolved.

Mr TAYLOR: I think from a PLA perspective—to add to what John was saying—it is definitely something that should be encouraged under certain circumstances, but it is a risky business because there are many different stakeholders. We see this conflict across sports grounds, with dog walkers and passive users wanting to use, you know, grounds that traditionally are used for organised sport, so we see this conflict all the time. I think one crucial part of this, and something that the City of Melbourne has started to do well, is to start to use extra bits of space and to try and utilise that space really well. We have seen a lot of these little parklets and little green spaces popping up around just where they have the opportunity to do that, and also the City of Melbourne is introducing mini little skate areas into public realm areas where they have got effectively dead spaces to try to really be a bit smarter about how we use some of those under-utilised spaces. I suppose, in summary, it is something that PLA sees as an opportunity, but also we have got to be mindful that there are many different stakeholders and many different views and so it has to be really carefully balanced to try and keep everyone happy or satisfied, I guess, from our perspective.

The CHAIR: Katie, did you have anything you wanted to add?

Ms McDONALD: I suppose a couple of things that I was thinking about with the shared venues that John touched on are that it is really tricky to make sure that that venue is specific to that sport and that sport can be conducted really safely, because in the 80s that was a really popular thing—that they started to try to implement sports into different venues. But they were not conducted in a safe manner and it caused a lot of issues, so they sort of had to step back a little bit. So while it is a really good initiative, it has got to be taken carefully just to make sure that that sport fits into that venue and it fits with all the stakeholders as well.

And just an interesting comment: I used to live in Boroondara, where Sam is from, and while they have got some fantastic walk paths, a lot of my friends were saying that during COVID it was just chaotic, because while the tacks are well used, they do not get as much usage as they did during COVID. 'There were people skateboarding and walking and riding and dogs everywhere'. So it is such a tricky situation with so many people that probably is not going to be a normal one, but it is an interesting experiment to see what people like to do and how they can move forward and stuff.

Ms GREEN: Sarah, I have got a follow-up question around that, if people do not mind if I push in. On the Northcote Golf Course issue, I have actually been and visited the golfers and the golf course there with the local MP. It is actually quite a sad situation because you have now got quite a lot of zealots saying, 'Let's re-wild the golf course', and they are really ill-informed because in terms of the biodiversity of the golf course, it is actually one of the most biodiverse areas in the whole Merri Creek corridor. But you have got these zealots, and I would say they are members of the Green Party—councillors—who are now setting up this conflict. It is a public golf course. It is not a private cutaway, tucked away; it is a public golf course, so it is accessible. What seems to me to be the problem for councils and others is they need to do consultation with older people, because particularly for older people but especially older women, walking is the top activity for women across the board. But in terms of older women trying to socialise and be fit, bowls and golf are it. And it seems to me that with a lot of local governments, because of the way consultation is done using technology, the voices of older people and people with disability are often silent. So I am really interested in how we get those voices in so that we do not just get a young cohort saying, 'This is what's needed', which then overrides older people.

But it links in with that shared user path too. I was at an event with a Paralympian—he is a vision-impaired runner and he lives in my area—and we were talking about the shared user path and whether it has seen its day. Are governments going to have to say, 'Look, we have cycling paths and we have walking paths', so that for people with disability—we talk about vulnerable users, vulnerable trail users—we can resolve that conflict? I am interested in those two scenarios and your ideas about how we ensure that those voices of vulnerable people are heard.

Dr TOWER: Can I take a stab at responding to that?

Ms GREEN: Please do.

Dr TOWER: I made a note after both Sam's and my presentation that one of the things that neither of us really emphasised was the access of disadvantaged groups, and I know from my research, which has looked more at the built environment, that access of disadvantaged groups—and I think when we add them all up they are a significant part of our community—is something that we do not necessarily see in a lot of our leisure programs, facilities and services. So we do need to reach out and get their insights, and I agree with Danielle's comment about, with a lot of the consultation being online, we do miss out on a lot of groups. So I think it is really important that when we do consult with our communities and get them engaged with our planning processes, we need to make sure that we are reaching out to all the sectors of the community. Too often in my research you look at a report that may be done that says they had a consultation, and if you look at who is actually involved in that consultation, it is a very limited number of stakeholders and it does not include a lot of the groups that Danielle was referring to, especially older women in particular. So what is really important is that you do need to be reaching out, you do need to be targeting particular segments of the community—people with disabilities and a whole range that are covered under that umbrella—and people from culturally diverse communities and all of those areas need to be involved. So yes, it is an important issue, and it is only through getting people involved in that process that you will be able to start working towards solutions.

The CHAIR: Katie and Sam, do you have any comments around that?

Ms McDONALD: I agree with John that you have to—

Mr TAYLOR: Two things that I would add to that would be in terms of that [Zoom dropout]—

The CHAIR: I think Sam might be having some technical issues. He has frozen on my screen. Katie?

Mr FOWLES: And mine.

Ms McDONALD: I was just going to say, similar to John, that you really need to target. You need to be specific on who you want to get information from and target them and go to their retirement villages or where they are. You sometimes need to actually go there because they might not be able to get to wherever you are holding the meeting or something like that. So you kind of do have to put in the extra effort to try to get those consultations done and for them to be able to get their voice out, and you might need to get some interpreters if it is multicultural and they have trouble with English, just so that they can get their views out. Particularly in sport and leisure they have very particular types of leisure activities that they like to do or do not like to do, and the only way to find out is to talk to them about it and try to work out how you can adapt to it.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Katie. Sam, have you come back?

Mr TAYLOR: I think so, yes. Sorry about that. I think they were all great points from John and Katie. The only things I would add maybe is I think first and foremost it is about, as you say, there is a lot [Zoom dropout] where you can work and reach into a lot more focus groups, and so identifying particular demographics within [Zoom dropout] actually asking people to apply to participate and then selecting a representative sample of the community [Zoom dropout] and actually having people sit around a table, having discussions with council officers. That has been really successful [Zoom dropout].

And then probably the second thing is working with specific groups on projects specific to them, so two examples were working with people with disability in a gym environment. In conjunction with La Trobe University, we [Zoom dropout] to get people with disability more active in gyms, and we developed a program, sort of co-designed with people with disability, so I think that [Zoom dropout] a successful one. A similar thing with older adults who are isolated: we ran a program with the aim to get more older adults who were isolated more active. And so I think sort of as both Katie and John said, involving those groups in the decision-making and the design process by going out to them, identifying them and giving them that engagement, and then they see the program outcomes. I think that is really critical to moving forward. I think that sometimes we get lost in a bit of a numbers game with some of this stuff, that with the online engagement it is easy to get thousands and thousands of people, but then when you are engaging with [Zoom dropout] harder-to-reach groups, the numbers are much lower [Zoom dropout]—

Mr FOWLES: Sam, we are having further difficulties with your feed there. Do you want to have a crack at maybe just turning off the video and seeing if you can continue orally?

Dr TOWER: I might just jump in and clarify a little bit more, given Sam is playing with the technology side. One of the things that we put in our proposal was that continuous process and that focus on community engagement.

Mr TAYLOR: Does that seem to be better?

Mr FOWLES: Not really.

The CHAIR: Maybe, Sam, let us try it this way: if you exit the meeting, then come back in and see if that helps.

Ms GREEN: As Will suggested, maybe turn off your video. That is why I have got my video off—because it improves your bandwidth.

The CHAIR: If you want to continue, John.

Dr TOWER: Okay. Well, I just wanted to make a quick point. It is that continuous process so that your community is being engaged on an ongoing basis, whoever those stakeholders are, and that we see the whole leisure planning process is something that never stops. It is always going. It is part of a process, so you are always assessing and trying to understand what you can do, based on some of those principles of continuous improvement. And that whole community engagement side and recognising the disparate groups within our communities is a really important element within all of that we often do not see planners in particular taking on board. It is often seen as a discrete start-and-stop project, and there is certainly very limited evaluation as to what in particular infrastructure planning projects have achieved two, three, five years afterwards.

Ms McDONALD: Yes. I was just going to say about the evaluation that it is really, really important. Once the program is there and in, that is not the end of it, as John said. Continue your communication with those groups to make sure that you are providing the services that they are after. It most probably needs to be tinkered with. You can never get it right the first time, so keep your conversation going with them to make sure that the program is effective.

And what makes a program effective? I have heard of programs before that were really successful—an older person's dance group, and I had a lady who was in her 60s or 70s run it. They had about 50 people there, and she left. And then they got a 21-year-old in, and they all left. So through an evaluation they could see, 'Okay, right. This isn't the right fit. We need to find someone that fits with this group and to move forward that way'. So yes, it is constant, as John was saying.

Ms GREEN: Chair, can I seek clarification just on my point of, do we think the day of the shared user path is over and whether we need to be investing more in separate paths?

The CHAIR: Go for it.

Dr TOWER: I will take a stab at that. I think that it is like many things—it is not a black-and-white answer. It is more a case of how the shared paths are managed. I think that there is capacity for continuing shared paths. I am not directly involved in government delivery, but I know the development and maintenance of paths is expensive and creating shared paths adds another dimension to that expense. I think there is probably a role for a lot more community education if you are going to use shared paths so that people understand that there are constraints to how you use it.

I will raise my hand again—I also am a cyclist and a runner, so I use shared paths a lot. And I am always dismayed when you see in particular cyclists that think it is a racing track and pay little regard to people with some mobility challenges and things like that or families with children in prams and those sorts of things. So I do not think it is necessarily a this-or-that kind of answer. I think it is more about how we manage it and also how we educate our communities to use our resources responsibly, and I think that is probably a more cost-effective approach. But where you have it in places like along some of the Yarra trail, where you have got access for a pedestrian area and a cycling area, it does work really well. But I think in many places around our communities that sort of infrastructure delivery would be a luxury and in fact a lot of areas would just like to have a reasonably well-maintained shared path.

Mr TAYLOR: Hopefully you guys can hear me a bit better now. I have changed to wi-fi rather than using my SIM card. Look, I would support what John is saying. I do not think shared paths are dead, but I do think that where there are opportunities to separate out walking and cycling and other forms of participation, it should be done. But the reality is, as John said, often it is not possible from a space and sometimes a cost perspective, and so we would rather see a shared path go in than no path go in. I suppose ultimately what it comes down to then is focusing on education. John talked about the Yarra trail and there are parts where there are pedestrian paths and [inaudible] parts where there is just not enough space and so you only get the opportunity to have one trail. So I think we would encourage the separation of those activities where feasible, but on the basis that where it is not feasible, those shared trails do not have a role to play. I think that would be our summary.

Ms McDONALD: It is really interesting. I live out in Cardinia and we have got a lot of new developments, so they are doing a lot of the individual trails. The walking trails are normally just a footpath and the bike trails are a bright green or a blue or some different colour. It just attracts the walkers. All the walkers are on the bike path rather than on the concrete paths. It is interesting. Maybe it is the education—they are not sort of getting: 'Okay, this is the walking path and this is the riding path'; they are like, 'Okay, that's the path there. It is bright. That's where I need to go'. I ride as well; we still have many issues with the walkers on the riding paths.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Katie. I just have a question off the back of that. We are focused on places like golf courses and shared user paths. What do you think about schools? For example, out my way in Tarneit in the outer west there are huge amounts of growth. We are building lots of new schools in Wyndham with really big gymnasiums, indoor-outdoor basketball courts, soccer fields—I would say sporting facilities for many different types of sports. Say, on the basketball courts they have got netball lines—all that kind of thing. What do you think about a shared use of schools on weekends and after school?

Ms McDONALD: Well, I think it is a great use of resources if it caters for the sport that it is being used for, as long as all the safety requirements are in there and there is the space within the area. They have got to have the change rooms and all those kinds of things. As long as it fits into all those criteria, I think it is a great use of space. The school could probably get some money out of it as well, which is beneficial to the school and the education. It just provides another resource to add an extra team or an extra competition for the community.

Dr TOWER: I would just add: I think it comes down to management again. I think back through my years of experience, and I remember this issue being debated in the 80s when I was spending time working with the state Department of Sport and Recreation. The whole issue around dual usage of school facilities and dual development so that communities were actually putting resources into some of the school facilities was a big issue back then. It is still there. If I go far enough back, to my life in the USA, I can remember that some of the school facilities there were so busy there was no room for the community. The fact that a school was programmed from basically, say, 5.00 or 6.00 am until 9 or 10 o'clock each night with school-based things—

there was not room for it. If there is scope within any facility—and I think there is lots of scope to use other community facilities, like churches and other sorts of settings where there are spaces for groups to get together; obviously with sportsgrounds you need the big space. But it is a matter of how it is managed. Dual-use arrangements are quite viable, but they need to be managed carefully and effectively.

The CHAIR: Sam, did you have anything you wanted to add to that?

Mr TAYLOR: No. The only thing I would say is I absolutely support the multi-use and the opening up of schools on weekends. The only thing I would say is that we are starting to see a lot of pressure from schools to actually expand their buildings out into playing surfaces and traditional playgrounds just in terms of enrolment numbers and supporting students, and so we are actually seeing pressure the other way, for schools to use public open space for recreation. So that is just something to be mindful of in terms of how schools are planned and catered for, but I think absolutely it is crucial to be able to open schools up after school hours and weekends for public use, most definitely.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Will, I know you have got a question.

Mr FOWLES: Thanks, Chair. I just have some questions for Sam around the recommendations in your submission. In particular I am interested to find out a bit more about I guess some of the infrastructure builds that have been kind of the less traditional things, like for mountain bikes, bouldering walls—I do not actually know what they are, if you could talk to those—and urban mountain bike tracks. Just talk to us a bit about those I guess emerging uses for environmental infrastructure and what your views are about the importance of developing those and how best state and local governments can go about that.

Mr TAYLOR: Yes, sure. A bouldering wall, just firstly, is effectively a low climbing wall—so rather than climbing vertically, people climb horizontally along a wall. For example, on the Yarra trail John was talking about earlier, under the bridge just as you are coming into the city, there is a bouldering wall along there. So it is effectively about using spaces that traditionally have been not used, just sort of dead spaces. So that is a great example—underneath a bridge, a pad of concrete, and just by putting some bouldering fixtures along that bridge they have created a usable space where youth will go down—not just youth, but people will go down—and use that as an opportunity to be physically active. It is a similar thing with mountain bike trails, and one trend we are seeing across local government areas at the moment in particular is—and again it is linked back to COVID—especially young people going out and building their own trails within areas, and it is creating a lot of conflict and a lot of issues actually in terms of how councils manage that, because it can be quite dangerous. But again, it is just using non-traditional spaces, so the kinds of edges of parks and those areas, to build up these non-traditional spaces.

The other really critical one that we are seeing more and more in a non-traditional way is the co-locating of facilities together, so we have got a number of facilities now that include maybe some outdoor gym equipment for older adults, a skate area, a learn-to-ride area, a playground, and so the whole family goes into one place and can sort of exercise and be physically active together. We are seeing that is really important. Probably the critical part of it is getting into those dead spaces that traditionally have not been well used, like underneath bridges, and that have not been well utilised and trying to get some use out of those spaces. Where we are already seeing the benefits is that what these spaces are doing is attracting people into recreation who traditionally do not participate, so be that CALD groups, young females as another example, people with disabilities—so trying to engage those groups by making the offering slightly different, I suppose.

Mr FOWLES: Are there any learnings out of the sky rail experience in relation to taking under-utilised space and turning it into something useful?

Mr TAYLOR: I am not fully across the details other than what I have read in the press, but I think the care has to be taken most definitely to get it right. It is not just a case of just any old space and it will do; I think it is about careful design and careful management. One good example I would give there is—I think I mentioned it earlier—the stuff the City of Melbourne are doing around allowing some spaces in the city to be used for people to skate, so not creating skate parks as such but just designing areas in a way that can allow for that type of use, for people to use it for skating and those things, but also still be usable space for people to migrate through or to sit in and those types of things. It comes down to careful design I think and really placing a lot of focus on getting the design right in the first place.

Mr FOWLES: I was interested in your thoughts about the sport and recreation activities identified as experiencing high growth and demand and needing more support. I am unsurprised about basketball and netball because they are infrastructure intensive, and I am unsurprised about the growth in soccer and the need for more in skate and BMX. Tell me about Australian Rules football. Are you referring to ovals themselves— because it would seem that we have a lot of them—or are you talking more about things like change facilities for girls?

Mr TAYLOR: Yes, it is a bit of both. Probably—and I put my Boroondara hat on here—we have got 40-odd ovals in Boroondara at the moment, and they are absolutely at capacity during the evenings and on weekends with organised sport. That is even forgetting about all the other uses—from dog walkers and people who just want to kick a footy around. The reason we are really seeing the pressure there more than anything is the growth of female participation in non-traditional female sports, which is a fantastic thing to be happening. We are seeing the exponential growth in women and young girls participating in football, soccer and cricket— particularly AFL, and we link that to the AFLW being so successful. That is creating pressure on grounds, just in terms of allocations. Many inner-city councils just do not have enough grounds to allocate to the number of teams now that are participating. We are investigating at the moment, for example, pushing into night matches and more intensive use of those grounds. Obviously it comes with more cost when they play on those grounds et cetera—but then, yes, as you mentioned, a big focus as well on changing facilities and effectively expanding millions to incorporate more changing rooms. With a number of clubs at the moment, just as an example, there is an expectation that when females participate in sport, such as football, they do not have a shower after the game—they just go home and shower at home—which is a really poor outcome for that group. But yes, there is definitely real pressure across both ovals and facilities.

Mr FOWLES: Finally, if I continue just some of the recommendations, because I am very keen, I think we are all kind of on the one page in terms of the value of environmental infrastructure and what it does for communities. Our job as a committee is to make recommendations to government about things that need to be done differently. You have spoken about things like canopy cover targets and protecting significant vegetation. This idea about an urban green infrastructure manual to inform infrastructure projects—can you tease that out a bit for us?

Mr TAYLOR: I probably do not have enough background on that if I am being completely honest. It is sort of a bit of a joint submission. I am happy to provide some further information to the panel on that. It was the team that put that one together, so I probably do not want to try—by virtue of the fact that I do not have as much background on that as some of the other panel members.

Mr FOWLES: Sure. Thank you, if you can flick that through. Do you have any other specific recommendations to government about changes in controls or funding or the other levers of government that you think are the most important things for us to address?

Mr TAYLOR: Yes. One thing that we did mention in there is probably the embellishments from developers and how they are handled and managed and what the regulations are around that, because we see two ends of a scale: either developers creating spaces and facilities that are unmanageable in terms of cost once they are sort of handed over; or then, secondly, developers creating spaces that are just effectively non-usable because they are poorly designed and they are effectively just ticking a box. So I think some strengthening of regulations and/or policy around how those embellishments are managed and some of the rules and stipulations around them probably would be a good starting point from our perspective.

Mr FOWLES: You reference things like gas mains and fringes of urban—those developments or whatever. Are there one or two areas that sort of stick out as being the glaring omissions in this space?

Mr TAYLOR: Look, from our perspective it is probably across the board. I can get you specific examples of locations, but I do not have them off the top of my head. It is probably across the board, but it is certainly about just making sure those spaces that are created are usable rather than it being a set amount of area but then that space not actually being developed in a way that it can be used by the broader community, I guess.

Mr FOWLES: Finally, Chair, if I can, a process question: what is the best way for governments, local and state, to find out what the community usage expectations are? I mean, there is lots of self-selected surveying going on, but in terms of finding out whether people actually really want a BMX track, a mountain bike track, a dog park or whatever, do you have any views about the way in which all of us consult on these things?

Mr TAYLOR: Yes, I think just generally, at a high level, my comment on that would be just the link between state and local government. I think local government has an important role to play there. They are probably very close to the community, from the research that we do and the development of things like community plans and council plans, and I think it is really important for state and local government to perhaps work more closely together on occasion on some of those things and to seek input from each other in terms of what those trends are and where the key bits of activity are, particularly when we are talking about crossover between state government land and council land. So at a broad level that would probably be my recommendation: closer linkages between state and local government, which I think we sometimes get right, but it can always be strengthened. That would probably be my input on that.

Mr FOWLES: Great, thank you. Thanks, Chair.

Ms McDONALD: Can I just add a little bit. There was something you said, Will, about how things need to be done a little bit differently. Yes, we need to think about different activities and stuff that we provide, but I think particularly from my PhD, which I am just completing, we really need to plan differently. Going back to the ANZALS submission, we really need to look at how we do plan and how, while it is great to implement all these different activities and resources, we need to plan to make sure that they are going to be used efficiently and effectively. I think that is a really big thing that needs to go back to the state government—how things are planned and the processes that are taken when we do the planning, just to make sure that—

Mr FOWLES: So do you have any specific recommendations there, Katie? With absolutely due respect, the ANZALS submission talks a bit to the goals of the process and says we need to do things better or whatever, but are there specific recommendations—things you would like us exactly to do differently?

Ms McDONALD: I think probably what we would like to see is some sort of structure within the planning. Within my PhD I have also been looking at the development of $40 million to $50 million aquatic and recreation centres, and they are not planned with any structure at all. They are kind of just—

Mr FOWLES: So what exactly do you mean? When you say they are not planned with structure, there are enormous layers of rules and complexity and input from communities. To me it feels like there is heaps of structure around these things. What precisely are you looking for?

Ms McDONALD: When the people go in to plan, they are doing what they think they need to do rather than following some sort of process. So yes, they are doing the community consulting—absolutely, 100 per cent— and they do that really, really well. But they do not do a lot of the research into the different communities and the trends that are popular. The demographics are looked into a little bit, but maybe they are looking not so much into the disability, as we were talking about before with Danielle, and the smaller groups. But they do not seem to be taking any sort of formalised structure when they go into it. They are doing what they think they need, and often things are missed. Particularly in my study the two local governments that I looked at did not have any aims and objectives for their project. I guess the aim was to build the centre, but there were no specific aims for what they needed to plan towards, and then they were not referred back to those constantly throughout the planning process. So it just made it—

Mr FOWLES: So if I can parse your words a bit, you are talking about how both the research into the community needs needs to be done better—or at all in some circumstances—and the project rationale needs to be developed before the project is undertaken.

Ms McDONALD: Absolutely, yes.

Mr FOWLES: All right. Well, I think we can frame a recommendation around that. Thank you.

Ms McDONALD: That is all right.

Dr TOWER: Can I just reinforce a little bit of what Katie was saying, Will? I think the bottom line is that we often do not get enough rigorous evidence to inform the decisions that are going to be made about a plan. So if you look at our submission, we list the rigorous research about five different areas. And from my experience doing research and certainly from some of Katie's research it is clear that that is not done often in a very rigorous way, so there is great scope for a lot more rigour and the hard evidence to inform that. That probably comes back to a resourcing thing, because if you have a budget of tens of thousands and you are talking about a multiple, multiple million dollar project and you are trying to get all of these things done with a consultant

getting paid $15 000 to $30 000, you are going to get somewhat very superficial evidence. So from a government's point of view an investment up front into more rigorous planning is probably going to generate a lot more accessible, usable, tangible outcomes for the community, and following on from that, very, very poor evidence to suggest that we are doing enough evaluation and monitoring.

The state auditor years ago—in 2016, I think it was—did a review of aquatic and recreation centres, and one of the things that came out of that was that we never assess the outcomes: how is our community changed as a result of this infrastructure, where is the quality of life being raised that we can say, 'Because we've done this, we can now see that people are more physically active, that people's mental health is better, that there is less crime, that there is more youth engagement and positive things'? We do not measure those sorts of things. So there really is a need for the government to be able to invest in that. And it is not just those snapshots and economic impact sorts of studies, which I know our governments do from time to time; it is more in-depth and meaningful data. And it needs to be done. Let us do it at three years after the project, let us do it at six years after the project, let us measure it at nine years after the project, because the sorts of things that we are ultimately trying to achieve with all of these leisure programs, facilities and services is enhancing communities' quality of life. Those things are really hard to measure, and a snapshot does not tell you anything, but longitudinal types of studies will. So I think for your committee, one of the things I would really be encouraging is rigorous ongoing research to inform the plans and then rigorous and ongoing evaluation of what that infrastructure is contributing to a community's quality of life.

Mr FOWLES: Yes. Understood. Thank you. Sam, sorry.

Mr TAYLOR: Sorry, Will. One thing I would add to that, John—and I agree with everything you have said—is we are actually in the midst at Boroondara of undergoing some work with Deakin Uni around the benefits, exactly in response to that VAGO report, and trying to understand the true benefits of using leisure aquatic facilities and measuring that through time, and each year we will run a study. I think one thing that has been really critical and is important to acknowledge is that local governments often are not set up to do this research from a resourcing and from a knowledge point. And I think where partnerships between local government and I guess state government and universities can be encouraged, I think the more we can do to encourage that, the better. Universities are set up to do this research and we have done a number of projects in conjunction with a number of universities now, and a number of local governments are getting more into that. And I think the more that can be encouraged, the better, because the reality is that local governments are not really well set up at the moment to do detailed evaluation of projects. I agree, it is a gap, and I think the more we can involve university-type research in that, the better, from my perspective.

Mr FOWLES: Indeed. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Will. I am going to throw over to you, Paul.

Mr HAMER: Thanks, Sarah. My question is probably a starting point with Sam, and it is just in relation to financial contributions and how environmental infrastructure can be grown through that process. I know you touched on it in your submission, particularly in relation to the growth areas, but I would also be interested both with your PLA hat and perhaps also with your Boroondara hat on. We have heard from quite a number of councils and developers, the development industry, about the contributions that exist at the moment and the planning tools that allow for that. I would be interested in your thoughts as to what are the challenges with the current system and if you think that there are mechanisms by which that could be improved or streamlined to deliver a better outcome for open space.

Mr TAYLOR: I will say from the start that I do not a have mass knowledge on the planning system and how that works, not specifically in my area, but from my understanding one thing that would probably be a real benefit and a real improvement is—I think the way that it works at the moment with developer contributions and the need for developers to provide open space and whatever else through their developments, it does not necessarily involve local councils at the delivery level, so therefore the infrastructure may not necessarily meet what the community needs because the local councils have the knowledge I guess of the specific areas and the specific needs of the community. So if there is a way for that money to be channelled—whether it is channelled to local government or local government have a sort of opportunity to influence the exact type of infrastructure and how it is developed—I think that is probably critical to ensuring that it is the right infrastructure, rather than it just being infrastructure for the sake of being infrastructure. I think make it more targeted; involve local government in the decision-making somewhere along the way. I think they would probably be my thoughts.

Mr HAMER: I would just, I suppose, build on that though. I can understand in some of the growth areas it may be that it is done almost at the block level, so that whatever PSP is introduced, the developer is looking at that particular PSP, because there is an interest from the developer as well to be able to say, 'Oh, you're buying into this estate and it's got this amount of open space', and it might not necessarily be part of a wider strategy. But councils—and I probably see Whitehorse closer than others—have an open space contribution which they collect, along with many of the others, and it is primarily then up to councils in terms of how they implement that strategy, because it is almost on a site-by-site basis and they are just putting money into a pool. Yes, I appreciate that you do not have that sort of planning expertise, but I am just wondering if you have a view in terms of, with that pool of money, whether there are particular approaches in terms of where it should be directed. Is it being targeted in the right locations, for example? Sorry, that is in a strategic sense. I am not talking about at an individual block level but in terms of: should there be perhaps more guidance related to how that money is used or collected or any of that?

Mr TAYLOR: Yes, I think from my understanding, the rules around how it is used are fairly loose at the moment. I am not quite sure how they apply, so I think any further direction to sort of enable that to be a bit more specific and detailed for local governments in terms of how they deliver that into the community. And I think it is just important to acknowledge that, particularly in the close-to-the-city areas like Whitehorse and Boroondara, with the amount of development and the type of development, it is hard because you are talking about one house being replaced by multilevel apartments, which puts a lot of pressure on open space irrespective of how much money is being put into a pot to develop open space. I think it is probably acknowledging that it is not just about a contribution of money, because the reality is it comes down to the use of space. So maybe it is about broadening out that definition of what that money can be used for—to consider better use of current facilities or current locations. An example is rooftop facilities and those types of things. It is probably more an issue for inner-city local government; the space is probably more an issue than the money. I think that is probably what I am trying to get at.

Dr TOWER: I am just going to comment, if I may. Most of the things that we have been talking about touch on a number of things that Katie and I have been working on over a number of years, and we have recently published a book about community leisure and recreation planning. It is in the list of references, except when we put it in the submission it was in press and it has now been published. But I wanted to comment about the whole approach on contribution schemes. We deal with this in some detail within the book, and what we talk about there is the fact that that is a starting point. So you get the contribution, but it is more about how that contribution is used within a broader leisure planning context. I am not familiar with all the details of the constraints about the contributions, but I would argue that that contribution needs to be taken into a whole community's planning for leisure developments that does go by that principle of planning by and with the community, so if it is seen as a contribution and you have that engagement with the various stakeholders involved, then it becomes a catalyst for doing more effective provision. To some extent my understanding is that there are often limitations as to what can be done, so if there are recommendations that can be used, then perhaps there is value in looking at contribution schemes as a mechanism for being incorporated in that broad community leisure perspective. I see warehouses getting torn down and multiple units going up and those sorts of things—they have no space. So how do you work with those communities and those sorts of settings? I think there is a lot that we can do better in that space.

Mr HAMER: Thanks, John. I had a related question, and that was, I guess, challenging you to put a value on the most valuable open space. I think, Sam, in your submission you talked about converting or using relatively underutilised land for open space, and that might be something that could be state government owned or may be privately owned. It could be a drainage reserve. In Whitehorse we have got the Healesville freeway reserve, which has been talked about as a conversion into open space, and that would be a fairly large area. That is as against access to smaller pockets, which would provide that 10-minute walkable catchment but would have a much smaller footprint. Do you have a view on whether a greater number of smaller parks that are more accessible have more value than a larger perhaps regional park that you may expect people to drive to, run to or use other modes to get to but which, once they are at that site, provides a greater range of uses? I guess ideally you would have everything, but in a constrained environment would you put a value on one above the other?

Mr TAYLOR: I think it is a really tricky question because, as you say, both serve a purpose and both are really important. But I think ultimately our view would be that probably the most critical thing is that people have infrastructure and green spaces close to them that they are able to walk to, preferably, because that just encourages more people to be active and takes away the issues around travel and parking and all the rest of it.

So I think if I had to pick one I would probably place more importance on the ability for people to exercise and to have green spaces close to where they live as opposed to a larger regional facility. Obviously it is not a black-and-white one, but that would probably be my view.

Mr HAMER: John or Katie, did you have a view on that?

Dr TOWER: I will quickly share. It is really a case, in my understanding, of: what is the existing provision like? So again one of the things that we think are really important in terms of understanding the research or the evidence that you have to inform decisions is: well, what is available in nearby facilities? A regional park is usually a destination park, whereas the local park is going to be something that is an accessible and walkable type of thing. So if there are regional parks outside of the City of Whitehorse that are accessible—that people are likely to go to—and there are less local parks, then the local park is an easy option. But if you have plenty of local parks that are accessible and other areas, and there are no regional facilities, then you start looking at that. The other thing I would encourage in terms of when we are talking about developing regional types of facilities and that may be a recommendation your committee could consider is encouraging more cooperation amongst municipal governments to look at regional developments rather than leaving them on their own. We see that from time to time, and I think that is probably a really positive initiative. But until you understand what is the breadth of the existing provision you cannot really make that decision, and so it is getting the evidence about it and then weighing up what your options are. By working with your community you will get their insights too as to what they are going to find as being more valuable.

Mr HAMER: Yes. Thanks, John.

Ms McDONALD: Just going on a little bit with John with regard to the regional facilities, I think it is a really grey area. What actually is a regional facility and what does it consist of? I was in some community consultations with a council, and they suddenly brought up a district centre: 'We're going to build a regional centre or a district centre'. I sort of asked, 'Well, what's the difference?', and they could not really say what the difference was. They both had similar things within them. So I think there needs to be a little bit more clarity over what different terminologies are used, particularly for built recreation, and then they might be able to better assess which one fits within their community to meet community needs and how they are going to do it. It just needs some clarity over it all.

Mr HAMER: Thanks, Katie. I do not have any more questions.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Paul. Will, did you have any more questions?

Mr FOWLES: No, I am fine. Thank you, Sarah.

The CHAIR: I have just got one very general question before we wrap up today. I am really interested in tree canopy and urban shade, particularly because I am a member of Parliament for an area of that has got very few trees out there in the outer west. John, Sam and Katie, do you have anything you want to add about that issue and maybe the unequal distribution of tree canopy and urban shade, the types of parks that are being developed or comments that you have from the community or research that you have done?

Mr TAYLOR: We actually were doing something interesting on this just this weekend in the development of our community plan at Boroondara, and we had a lot of discussion on tree canopy. It is a very topical issue amongst people. I mean, obviously the more that tree canopy can be encouraged on streets and private and public land is obviously beneficial. There are just a couple of things that need to be considered. One is obviously the safety aspect of trees and trees falling over and limbs falling and that being carefully managed, and that obviously comes at a cost to local government or whoever to manage. And then secondly, it is the types of species that are being planted—to make sure that there are not species that require a lot of ongoing cost to maintain, I suppose. One thing we often get from the community is, 'Oh, you should just plant more fruit trees and more trees that grow produce that people can come and take'. And there are issues then around fruit dropping on the ground and creating issues, and also those trees tend to be quite high maintenance. So it is just, I suppose, about giving careful consideration to species. But I think that, from our perspective, the more that it can be encouraged—you know, in the right way—I think there are some clear and definite benefits to people.

Dr TOWER: I completely support what Sam is saying—way beyond my realm of experience, beyond common sense. I always like the principle that if you are enjoying the shade of the trees, then someone a generation or two before you had the vision to plant it. So you know in areas where there is a need for more tree

coverage and all of those sorts of things then it is investment, but it is an investment you will not see a return on until the next generation comes along. There is that kind of challenge within it all. I will leave it at that.

Ms McDONALD: Yes. I was simply going to say that, yes, it is a long-term investment. You kind of have to do some short-term things to get you through to that long-term benefit at the end. I suppose the expenses need to be weighed up against those two processes, but certainly in the future to have the tree there are a whole lot of environmental issues that benefit from that as well. It is just getting to that point.

The CHAIR: Thank you. On behalf of the committee I want to say thank you very much for taking the time and coming to share your experience, your research, what you are hearing. It is very valuable to this inquiry. I think environmental infrastructure for growing populations is something that hundreds, if not thousands, of Victorian families are very interested in, and hopefully the recommendations that come out of this report at least families can benefit from.

Witnesses withdrew.