

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Food Security in Victoria

Melbourne – Tuesday 20 August 2024

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WITNESSES

Elise Cook, Co-Chief Executive Officer, and

Lyndon Galea, Founder, Eat Up Australia; and

Rachael Terry, Grants Program Officer, and

Solly Fahiz, Director, Advocacy, Strategy and Impact, SecondBite/FareShare.

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the Inquiry into Food Security in Victoria. During this session we have members from SecondBite/FareShare and also the founder of Eat Up Australia. Welcome, Rachael, Solly, Lyndon and Elise.

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

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

Just for recording purposes, could you please state your full name, your position and the organisation you are with, please. We will start with you, Rachael.

Rachael TERRY: Racheal Terry. I am Grants Program Officer for SecondBite and FareShare.

Solly FAHIZ: Solly Fahiz, Director, Advocacy, Strategy and Impact, at SecondBite and FareShare.

Lyndon GALEA: Lyndon Galea. I am the Founder of Eat Up Australia.

Elise COOK: Elise Cook, Co-CEO of Eat Up Australia.

The CHAIR: Okay. Welcome. I know we received your submission, but I do invite you all to make a quick opening statement before the committee has some questions for you. Would you like to start, Rachael.

Rachael TERRY: Solly will be making –

The CHAIR: Oh, Solly.

Solly FAHIZ: Yes, sure. Thank you. I will start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land upon which we meet this afternoon. I pay respects to elders past, present and emerging.

I will go through a little bit of information about SecondBite and FareShare and provide a little bit of further context to supplement our submission. I have been listening in and out throughout the day, so I will make some comments as well on some of the things that I have heard. I will start by saying I picked up on something Mr McCracken said earlier in the day when he mentioned that obviously the preference would be that none of us had to be here, and I could not agree more. I do love my job, I think we all do, but I would be happy to go and do another one if it meant that we did not need to be doing this.

A bit of information: SecondBite is one of three national food relief providers, and when I say national, I mean acknowledged by the Department of Social Services at a federal level, along with our colleagues who you heard from this morning, our great colleagues at Foodbank and OzHarvest. SecondBite works with growers, manufacturers and retailers to rescue surplus food, and we deliver it free of charge to agencies across the country. We support just shy of 1100 local charities and not-for-profit organisations nationally. We have got warehouses in Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia, and we work with partners in both Tasmania and the ACT on the ground. Since its foundation in 2005 SecondBite has

rescued and redistributed the equivalent of more than 350 million meals. In Victoria in the last financial year SecondBite rescued and distributed 4.5 million kilograms of food, equating to about 9 million meals in Victoria, and that is through work with 227 charity partners.

FareShare, founded in 2001, has been cooking free nutritious meals for people doing it tough. FareShare operates the two largest non-profit kitchens in Australia, one in Melbourne and one up in Brisbane. FareShare distributed about 750,000 carefully curated nutritious meals in Victoria through a network of 150 charity partners last financial year. There has been quite a significant upgrade to its Abbotsford facility, with expectations that that figure will be up closer to about 1.2 million meals a year. The careful curation of those meals is to focus on nutrition and a lot of community-led approaches to how they cultivate those meals. A big part of the FareShare operation is its volunteerism. It has a cohort of thousands of volunteers, which includes a mix of regular volunteers – about 800 of them; in the last year 232 corporate volunteer programs in the kitchen; 128 schools; and also some volunteering in the community gardens that it runs.

Importantly, the two organisations have worked together for quite some time, and on 1 July this year announced that they had merged. We have now merged, which is very exciting. We have 154 staff nationally and 92 people employed here in Victoria. We have got a Heidelberg West warehouse that SecondBite has operated out of for a number of years, which is the hub for aggregating, sorting and the distribution of food; an Abbotsford kitchen and warehouse – an excellent kitchen; I would invite all members of the committee to come and have a look at the work that happens there – a warehouse in Derrimut that is used for food storage and processing some food before it gets to the kitchen; and then the community gardens in Abbotsford, Moorabbin, Clarendon and Dingley. There are 20 vehicles in the combined fleet from small Sprinter vans all the way to SecondBite's large 14-pallet trucks that we operate particularly through to the regions.

Some additional context – and I will get into a little bit of trouble here, because this is hot off the press; some of my colleagues have not even heard this yet. We have just had a SecondBite agency survey infield, and I have just got some of the high-level figures from that today. In terms of overall demand, our agencies – and this was from 337 agencies who were surveyed – are seeing on average 329 clients per week, which is up from 199 two years ago. Seventy-five per cent – three-quarters – of our agencies are anticipating the demand that they are seeing to increase over the foreseeable future. In terms of demographics, demand has increased most for single-parent families, low-income workers, people receiving government benefits and those who are unemployed. However, food insecurity is also impacting other demographics such as double-income families, and two in three agencies that we work with have experienced an increase in those types of families coming to seek support.

We focus on some excellent programs that we are working on and have planned in our submission, so I will answer any questions on them, but obviously we have got our Meals for the Mob program, which has been excellent, in Queensland, and which we are rolling out in Victoria, and a medically tailored meals pilot, which is underway at the moment, and we are at advanced stages in the preparation of retort freeze-dried meals. From a FareShare perspective and from our SecondBite program, this farm gate piece is going to be really beneficial for us and all of the organisations we work with in the ability to provide fresh fruit and veg and meat and poultry.

I will just say – I am sure there might be some questions; it has been a bit of a theme today, I understand – I have had some involvement with Foodbank Australia and OzHarvest at a national level in the tax incentive Bill. I am no accountant by any stretch, but I have some idea of where that is at, so I am also happy to take any questions on that.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Lyndon or Elise?

Elise COOK: Thank you. Eat Up is about feeding kids at school. Sadly, one in five Australian children experience food insecurity. We value the opportunity to be here today to discuss our submission. Our recommendations centre around addressing food insecurity in schools, specifically expanding the number of regional schools supported, and equally piloting a model to feed the most disadvantaged students. I will start by walking you through Eat Up and what Eat Up does.

Eat Up originated in Victoria and is now a national organisation that serves over 900 schools. We are tracking to provide a million lunches this calendar year alone. Eat Up feeds hungry kids so they can learn, grow and

succeed. We do this by working with volunteers to make cheese sandwiches, which we deliver along with nutritious snacks. The sandwiches are frozen onsite at the school so they can be toasted, and then teachers can discreetly provide them to children who come to school without a lunch.

Eat Up is a data-driven organisation. Through our evaluations we see that the Eat Up program is improving students' wellbeing, nutrition, school attendance, classroom participation and academic performance. Ultimately, we are helping kids to make the most of their educational opportunities and breaking the cycle of poverty.

Over the last decade Eat Up has evolved strong school relationships. Our schools understand and appreciate the benefits of the Eat Up program and are tightly linked to Eat Up. As one school principal stated:

When kids are hungry it makes it very difficult for them to concentrate. And when kids can't concentrate, it's nearly impossible for them to learn.

Eat Up engages with more than 15,000 volunteers each year. This helps keep our costs low and also provides meaningful benefits such as sense of purpose and community. In regional areas we operate a community-led model by working with groups such as Rotary clubs, schools, corrections units, the army and other organisations. We equip volunteers with all required supplies so they can lead Eat Up in their local communities, making and delivering sandwiches locally. We are very passionate about providing opportunities to engage communities to support local schools.

In metro areas such as Melbourne we work with over 100 corporate workplaces to create vibrant, fun volunteering experiences. This has developed into a financially sustainable arm to our model, which is important because we do not currently receive any government funding. Eat Up is grateful for the significant in-kind partnerships it has developed and maintained over the years. These partners supply ingredients and nutritious snacks that are accessible in metro and some regional areas.

Eat Up began in Shepparton and now reaches 22 per cent of Victorian government schools. Last financial year alone we delivered 340,000 lunches to 350 schools; 157 of these are in regional areas of Victoria. In the past financial year Eat Up has delivered 68 per cent more lunches to Victorian schools as we work towards meeting a growing need. We are sadly seeing the demand for our service increase and know that there is more work to be done.

Eat Up is at an exciting time in its evolution, and there are two opportunities here. The first one is to expand our model and reach more regional schools. Eat Up's proven model can be readily expanded into additional regional and remote areas. The benefits will extend beyond hungry school students to teachers, who can teach to a more focused, less distracted classroom, and to the many community volunteers who prepare and deliver the lunches. Our only limitation is funding.

The second opportunity is to target schools with very high levels of food insecurity and pilot a program to feed all students at these schools. Recently we completed a feasibility study and have significant insights and costings for a pilot program to test this opportunity, and we encourage collaborations with others such as SecondBite. In a few weeks Eat Up founder Lyndon Galea, who is here, will be travelling on a Churchill Fellowship to gain international lessons and connections from real-world experiences of this model.

This is an exciting time, as the Victorian government has an opportunity to take a leadership position, as there are gaps in the pilots of this model completed in other states. To date none of the Australian pilots have directly addressed socio-economic disadvantage. Eat Up is hopeful for the opportunity to deepen our level of support for Victoria's most vulnerable students, to improve their nutritional intake and optimise their learning environment, supporting these students to break the cycle of disadvantage so they can look forward to a brighter future ahead. Thanks so much for your consideration of our recommendations.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. I have two questions for you, but I will quickly go to you first. Eat Up – I think the program is fantastic in addressing this for kids and helping their families. I was wondering: in your submission you made, it said 20 per cent of Victorian government schools. Was there a reason why it was just government schools and not other schools – cultural and religious schools or private schools or independent schools? In the region I cover they have got over 176 different schools. I was wondering: is there any reason why you only target government schools? I know insecurity exists across the board regardless of what socio-

economic background you come from, so is there any reason why only government schools have been targeted?

Elise COOK: Yes, absolutely. We do not just target government schools. We do support some Catholic schools, and we do not discriminate with any school. If schools come to us and need support, we will support them if it is within our logistical capacity and capabilities and we have the funding to do so. We have not really had any private schools contact us needing support. We find that we are sort of following the need, and it is mainly government schools that we are supporting. But as I said, there are some Catholic and independent schools and special needs schools as well that we support.

The CHAIR: You do understand why the private school would not be approaching you – because it is a private-run school. It is the families who are facing food insecurity, not the school itself, so it would be the kids and their families –

Elise COOK: It is the families.

The CHAIR: So would the onus be on the organisation to actually approach those private schools, ask those private schools, who run a business? I was just wondering if you had looked at that perspective, because kids and families are the subjects of food insecurity, not the school, so I was wanting to open that for you –

Elise COOK: I think I understand your question correctly, but jump in if I am not answering it properly. We are there to support the students of the schools, but we are there also to support the schools and the teachers. We hear at a lot of schools resources are being spent on ingredients to make lunches to give the kids who come to school without lunch something to eat, and teachers are spending a lot of time preparing lunches and finding something for kids to eat. So we are there to support the kids primarily and give them something to eat so they can get the most out of their school day, but we are also supporting public schools in saving them time and money and resources.

The CHAIR: Thank you. You said you are not funded by the government. Who is funding the organisation?

Elise COOK: Yes. Sure. About 40 per cent of our funding comes from trusts and foundations through grants and philanthropy. Another 40 per cent comes from the corporate sector. We have corporate partnerships, in-kind support and donations. We also run workplace volunteer sessions, and that has become a financially sustainable part to our model. It is some social enterprise activity where corporates pay for the experience of us coming to their workplace. They make sandwiches and have a great time doing so. It is a great team-building exercise, and then we get some sandwiches to deliver out to schools.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you. The initiative is fantastic to help the students. I will quickly turn, before my time runs out, again to a similar question: what financial support are you getting from the state and federal governments?

Solly FAHIZ: Sure. Obviously not as much as we would like. We have enjoyed support from the state government over a number of years both at SecondBite and FareShare for some infrastructure kinds of upgrades – warehousing and that type of stuff. In terms of other funding, it has largely been in response to disaster, whether as part of the pandemic or as part of flooding support et cetera. But from the state government, in terms of funding to cover any other kinds of operations of the place, we have to seek external funding and philanthropic and corporate support for that. At a federal level, ourselves, OzHarvest and Foodbank – being the three national players – do receive some annual support. It is not a large amount by any stretch; the current federal government has topped up some of our funding whilst it is undertaking a review into some of these programs, but it has been about the \$1.4 million mark, shared between Foodbank, OzHarvest and SecondBite.

The CHAIR: That is from the federal level. We are state, and we are here to hear your recommendations, so what do you require from the state?

Solly FAHIZ: Yes, certainly. As I said, the funding that we have got in terms of programmatic support has always been in terms of disaster response. I think we need to do a bit of a sit-down and review how we can better fund the players in the sector so that we are not scrambling post event trying not to clog up logistics systems when we have all been given this money and need to act. A forward-thinking bucket of funding would

enable us to have a reserve that we can put on the road after an event rather than trying to scramble. So I think it is certainly more funding but also potentially the way in which we are funded that needs to be looked at.

The CHAIR: So it is not done annually?

Solly FAHIZ: No.

The CHAIR: Okay. Just quickly, before I go to my next colleague, you mentioned the tax incentive Bill. Could you just, quickly, in short, give us an update on where they are at in relation to the donation incentives?

Solly FAHIZ: Yes, sure. The tax incentive Bill, in terms of where it is at: it was introduced to the federal Senate by Senator Dean Smith from Western Australia. The Bill that he put to the Senate successfully was referred to a committee stage, so there is now an inquiry – and I think a previous witness suggested that public submissions for that closed this week. In essence, the treatment of food donated into the food relief sector has the same tax treatment as if farmers, for example, ploughed it back into the ground. Obviously there are other costs incurred to put it on the truck and send it into town, for example, to support a charity, so the crux of the incentive is to allow for that to become easier because of those costs that are endured by a farmer or a grower or an abattoir, for example. The projection is that by 2030 – this is KPMG’s modelling; they supported Foodbank through the development of this recommendation. The KPMG modelling suggests that it would unlock about 100 million meals annually by 2030 and would also go some way to addressing a federal government target, which I believe was set under the previous federal government, to halve food waste by 2030 as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Michael.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you all for joining us. That actually answered one of my questions too, so that is very interesting to know and very seriously impressive from all of you. So thank you for all the work that you all do.

I might start with Eat Up Australia and Ms Cook and my possibly long-lost cousin, Mr Galea – it is especially good to have you here. It is quite impressive to be in 22 per cent of government schools, and obviously you would be seeing the impact that you have. I really enjoyed the case study especially of Mooroopna Park Primary School where you spoke about how in their program they are removing the stigma of needing food relief by providing it to all students. We have spoken earlier today about the school breakfast clubs as well, which is a government project that you would be aware of, so it is really good to see you guys doing this in the lunch space too. I am curious that you say in your submission that you have a report that is going to be coming out soon. Is that right? Would it be possible for us to get a copy of that once it is released?

Elise COOK: Yes. Once it is released, we will be happy to share results confidentially with the committee.

Michael GALEA: That would be great. Thank you. We might get our secretariat team, who very ably assist us, to reach out to you about that so we can see how we might be able to incorporate what you found, as best we can, into what sort of recommendations we come through with. If I can ask you, though – from being out on the ground and seeing the impact that you are having, what sort of changes do you see from the implementation of your program or similar programs?

Elise COOK: We evaluate our program every year and we can see in the schools that we support, with the kids we are supporting, that concentration in the classroom increases dramatically, educational outcomes increase and, importantly, school attendance increases. We hear anecdotally from teachers that there are many kids who prior to having the lunch program at the school were being kept home from school, possibly because parents were embarrassed to send their kids to school without lunch or fearful that it would trigger a department of human services contact from the school. Then once they learn that the lunches are at the school, the attendance increases, which is really phenomenal. Then there are all the other flow-on benefits of having a full tummy at school – being able to engage better in the classroom and improved educational outcomes.

Michael GALEA: That is all terrific. Thank you. Especially with your focus on regional schools, do you see much difference between the food access issues facing regional students compared to metropolitan ones, or are they fundamentally the same?

Elise COOK: In terms of our model, there are some slight differences. We access some in-kind support in the metro areas where we deliver lunches, and we cannot always access this in-kind support in regional areas. We do deliver the sandwiches and get snacks delivered with those and fresh fruit when we can, but it is a little bit more expensive to deliver out to regional areas.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. When did you start this organisation?

Elise COOK: In 2010.

Michael GALEA: That is very incredible.

Elise COOK: Sorry, 2013.

Michael GALEA: 2013 – well, even more impressive in 11 years then. You spoke of some other similarities. I was quite interested – you said that no other Australian pilot has actually addressed the socio-economic disadvantage element, which I would have thought would have been a very big part of any pilot program.

Elise COOK: It is interesting. There are some other pilots in other states that are being rolled out to schools and there does not seem to be a focus on disadvantage; it is just schools applying. I do not know what other criteria they use to assess which schools are taken off the waitlist and piloted with, but there has not been a focus on disadvantage. We think that this is an opportunity to develop up a pilot to feed kids at schools where they need it most.

The lunch box model in Australia works pretty well for most kids. Most kids come to school with a lunch and that works well. Eat Up at the moment is doing a great job of providing our core model, which is sandwiches and snacks for kids who come to school sometimes without food or fairly frequently without food. But there is this opportunity to have a nuanced model that is targeted at the most disadvantaged schools to feed all kids at these schools, reducing stigma and providing them with a very well-rounded meal. For some of these kids, and most of these kids at the schools we are talking about, it might be their only proper meal for the day, sadly. As I said, there is a real opportunity here to target it and create a real difference for these kids.

Michael GALEA: It will be very exciting to see that happen. You spoke briefly about some international comparisons as well. Are there any particular ones that we should be looking at when it comes to school lunches?

Elise COOK: International models – Lyndon is actually going on a Churchill Fellowship shortly and will be looking at some of those. Lyndon, you might like to speak to some of those international models.

Lyndon GALEA: Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much. I will be visiting Japan, Italy, the UK and the USA. These are all countries that have that in-school, whole-school model type of distribution, so the goal is to be able to learn from global best practice and bring those lessons back here into Australia. Like Elise said, we are not looking at broad systemic change of all schools changing into an in-school model but rather the very, very highest need schools in the state where that much larger level of investment that is required for a model like this will deliver its greatest returns in terms of the outcomes for the students.

Michael GALEA: Wonderful. Thank you very much. Hopefully we might be able to hear from you after that as well, even if informally. Thank you very much.

Lyndon GALEA: No problem.

The CHAIR: Primary school only or high school as well?

Lyndon GALEA: In terms of the in-school model?

The CHAIR: No, just in relation to your services.

Lyndon GALEA: Primary school and high school.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you. Aiv.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Good afternoon. Thanks for coming in. It is really interesting stuff to be hearing about today. Thank you for the work that you are each in your own way doing across the community. I might begin with SecondBite. Just looking through your submission there is the line:

Australia produces more than enough food for its population, yet nearly 30% of that food is wasted.

That is cited via Food Innovation Australia. Why is this?

Solly FAHIZ: It is a good question and a very complex problem that we face. Obviously there are a number of factors. If we look at where food is wasted, we know that actually the largest portion of food waste happens in the household. After that you are looking at the farm gate and retail and manufacturers, so the cause of that large chunk in the household is going to be a mix of things, including habits. Do you bulk buy your groceries? I know that OzHarvest are doing quite a bit of work in the educational space, which is quite valuable. In terms of primary production and manufacturing where we see a lot of wastage, I would hate to speak for our peers in farming et cetera. But what we are looking at with the food donation tax incentive is the cost of donation is quite a hindrance, so that is certainly a factor. What we have seen in terms of consumer behaviour is obviously supermarkets will stock what they believe the consumers are going to purchase. We see a lot of stock come through our doors that are delicious, perfectly edible, healthy fruit and veg that might be slightly misshapen or slightly too small or slightly too big. If it were not for organisations that are involved in food rescue, that would be wasted.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I think we heard about France as a model earlier, where I believe it has been mandated that that food must be received. Either it is held by the supermarkets or it must be donated. Should there be government regulation to ensure that supermarkets are accepting more of that food that is good to eat, ready to go?

Solly FAHIZ: Look, I think that is a tough one. I certainly would not attempt to work through the decision-making of corporates and how they service their customers and their client base. I think there is a piece around supermarkets stocking what they know will sell. That is probably a bit of an indictment on us as a community in terms of what we will not purchase, for example. Whether it is a place for government or not I am not sure. But I think there is certainly work that needs to happen in community with business and corporates and with the sector and government perhaps – some type of coordination approach to oversee that work.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Sure. With respect to that model of the mandate in terms of donating, like in the French model, do you have a view to that?

Solly FAHIZ: I think France also had a tax incentive that went hand in hand with that. I am quite sure, and I can provide the committee with some more information. We definitely looked at that as part of the incentive. I am not sure if it was France or not. But there are instances where similar mandates have been considered and instituted, and it led to dumping, for example. So we would want to make sure that any kind of approach like that did not lead to a rush on charities, for example, and basically dumping stuff that we would not consider dignified. We would certainly want to have a look at some details around it, but we need to do more, because the wastage is not acceptable for a country like ours.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Just quickly to Eat Up, are any of those international jurisdictions that you are going to or learning from more of a cafeteria model? Do you have a view to any of those models that exist elsewhere?

Lyndon GALEA: They are – all of them actually. They are all countries where that is their norm. Australia is actually quite unique in terms of our packed-lunch model. So definitely the ability to see firsthand the scale they achieve and how that works will be enormously insightful. Our approach would be to direct that support towards the highest needs schools, recognising the enormous cost that it would take to change all schools that way. We think that doing that would likely be overinvesting in the need. We see, thankfully, the packed lunch system works so well, like Elise said, for the majority of families. Even for the majority of schools where there is a need, Eat Up's core model of the sandwiches works very well – it is really just those schools at the tip of the spear. So by way of background, for Mooroopna Park for example, we used to drop off our lunches – the sandwiches – to them. They have got about 130 kids, the majority of whom were arriving without food, and they were finding that needing to toast upwards of 40 to 50 lunches every day just lost its efficiency. We have

only heard those examples from two of our 917 schools nationally, so thankfully it is not the majority of schools, but we know the schools and the kids who need it most could really benefit from support like that.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Is that the scale that they are having to go through? Is that why it came up in those two schools?

Lyndon GALEA: Yes. They are smaller schools in terms of the number of teachers they have, and just needing to toast that many, and thinking, 'Well, jeez, there are so many. Let's try and give them something warm, nutritious and delicious every day.' They have initiated that themselves. They are phenomenal – the teachers and their students and their community there – and they have had incredible results with that impact. They have been very open with us in terms of meeting with us and we have had conversations surrounding 'What you are doing is incredible. How could we learn from your lessons and impact and potentially scale that to benefit more schools in a similar way?'

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Renee.

Renee HEATH: Thank you, guys, so much for your submissions and your presentations – they were just amazing. I have got a couple of questions; I might go to you and then to you. So first of all, are community gardens quite cost-effective or are they not?

Solly FAHIZ: Sorry, cost-effective in what sense?

Renee HEATH: From what you get out of them compared to what you invest. Obviously you would have to have land, you would have to have manpower – and then what do you get from it?

Solly FAHIZ: Yes, sure. I would say a few things. Some of our gardens are certainly longer standing and more advanced than some of our others. Some of these are quite new that have come on board. For FareShare it is certainly a great opportunity for a few things. One is providing volunteer opportunities. It is obviously an additional source of revenue for the organisation. Produce, for example from the Abbotsford garden, is absolutely used in FareShare meals. I would be able to provide the committee with some figures on what we get out of those gardens. I think that it is the kind of opportunity we get from those gardens both from volunteerism and providing that diversified revenue, but also we have seen great examples of rooftop gardens in the city, obviously for volunteering but also for social connectedness. There are a variety of different uses beyond just the produce that we are able to get out of them. We have one excellent staff member who manages the gardens and a lot of it is supported by volunteer work as well. So in our instance it is absolutely worthwhile, and something that we are looking to, in fact – post merger – dial up quite a bit and do more.

Renee HEATH: Fantastic, yes. I just wanted to know if there is anything you would like to add or any gaps that potentially we have not filled with our questioning?

Rachael TERRY: Is that everybody already? It was so quick.

Renee HEATH: Fire away.

Rachael TERRY: Look, Solly is very well versed. He obviously knows his stuff and he has been involved with the government stuff a lot more than I have. Our submission was very much focused on the targeted programs that FareShare runs, and then together with SecondBite we kind of have the national reach – we have the larger trucks as well. So yes, together we are very excited about what we can do for the food relief sector into the future. Although we do recognise of course food relief is not the answer to food and security – of course not, but –

Renee HEATH: But we will always need it.

Rachael TERRY: We are going to be around for a while, unfortunately. Yes.

Renee HEATH: Yes. Thank you for the amazing work you are doing. I just wanted to know, Lyndon, what made you start Eat Up?

Lyndon GALEA: I actually had no idea at all there were kids in Australia missing out on food. I had just always assumed in a country as lucky as ours that that would not be the case. It was actually a local newspaper story, in the *Shepparton News* in 2013, so it was a very grassroots origin story. The article profiled what happened to be the two closest schools to where I lived and said that kids were regularly arriving at school without food from home and come lunchtime would just simply miss out. I was really taken aback to read that. I really love the Shepparton community – it hits extra hard when it is your home town – and I just wanted to do something to help. I had a very basic idea, nothing grand, and just thought, ‘Look, what if I just make some extra sandwiches at home and drop them off?’ It was actually at my mum’s kitchen table. So I pinched what I could from her cupboards – bread, cheese, margarine – and bought some extra loaves, and then we made the first drop-off from there.

Renee HEATH: Wow. That is really amazing. Congratulations. It is so good and grassroots. I guess you are the CEO, aren’t you? How have you managed to do all of this without any government funding? I think that sometimes the more the government gets involved in things, the worse things get. How have you managed to do that?

Elise COOK: To date we have managed to do it because we have an army of volunteers. We work with, as I mentioned earlier, 15,000 volunteers every year to do what we do. We also have some strong corporate partnerships who provide in-kind support; they provide bread, cheese, margarine and snacks. And our model is very efficient. We work with corporate volunteers who make lunches, and we deliver them. We partner with so many fantastic community organisations in regional areas around the country. That is what we do best: we bring people together, we collaborate, we partner. We focus on our sole mission, which is getting food out to kids and managing those partnerships with the schools, ensuring that schools have what they need, and that has taken us to where we are. But we know that government support will be important as we scale and grow, particularly as we look at new models of support for those most disadvantaged schools, because that is a different model that will need more support, as we mentioned earlier, as we look to scale and grow into more regional areas.

Renee HEATH: That is amazing.

Elise COOK: I do not know if you have got anything to add to –

Solly FAHIZ: No, you summarised it very well.

Renee HEATH: Thank you so much. Somehow we have still got time; we must have started that late.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for your submission and also the evidence you have given today. It shows how valuable your contribution is, and the work you are doing at the moment is really assisting the community. We will be taking your submission and evidence into consideration for our recommendations down the track. Thank you again for your time and effort.

Witnesses withdrew.