

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism and Events Sectors

Melbourne—Wednesday, 16 June 2021

(via videoconference)

MEMBERS

Mr Enver Erdogan—Chair

Mrs Bev McArthur

Mr Bernie Finn—Deputy Chair

Mr Tim Quilty

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Lee Tarlamis

Mr Mark Gepp

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Dr Matthew Bach

Mr Edward O'Donohue

Ms Melina Bath

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

Mr David Davis

Ms Harriet Shing

Mr David Limbrick

Ms Kaushaliya Vaghela

Ms Wendy Lovell

Ms Sheena Watt

Mr Andy Meddick

WITNESSES

Ms Kerryn Ellis, Chief Executive Officer, and

Ms Renae Littlejohn, Director, Economy and Community, South Gippsland Shire Council.

The CHAIR: The Economy and Infrastructure Committee public hearing for the Inquiry into the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism and Events Sectors continues. Please make sure that mobile phones are switched to silent and that any background noise is minimised.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, and I pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

My name is Enver Erdogan. I am the Chair of the committee, and I would like to acknowledge my fellow committee members present here today: Melina Bath, Ms Wendy Lovell, Mr Tim Quilty, Rod Barton and Mr Lee Tarlamis.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide at this hearing is protected by law; however, any comments repeated outside the hearing may not be protected. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

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

We welcome your opening comments but ask that they be kept to a maximum of 5 to 10 minutes to allow plenty of time for questions and discussion. Could you please begin by stating your names for the benefit of our Hansard team, and then begin your presentation. Over to you, Kerryn and Renae.

Ms ELLIS: Thank you very much. My name is Kerryn Ellis, and I will let Renae introduce herself.

Ms LITTLEJOHN: Good afternoon. My name is Renae Littlejohn.

Ms ELLIS: Thank you very much. My name is Kerryn Ellis, and I will let Renae introduce herself.

Ms LITTLEJOHN: Good afternoon. My name is Renae Littlejohn.

Ms ELLIS: Thank you very much. First of all I would just like to thank you very much for the opportunity to present to the committee this afternoon on this issue. It is obviously one that is of significant importance to the South Gippsland community but also of course to the broader Victorian community, so we really appreciate the chance to talk to you.

A very quick introduction to South Gippsland for any of you who have not yet had the pleasure of visiting our part of Victoria. Our largest town is Leongatha, which is only an hour and 45 minutes drive from the CBD, which makes us an ideal location for intrastate visitation for residents of Melbourne but also for other parts of Victoria. South Gippsland is renowned for its boutique community events that link towns and communities with the arts and culture and food and beverage within the region. It is also home to the world-recognised Wilsons Promontory National Park, or the Prom as it is fondly known, and also the historical Port Welshpool Long Jetty and the Great Southern Rail Trail, which will soon be one of the longest single rail trails in Victoria. South Gippsland is a very popular holiday destination and is known for its pristine coastline and beaches, rolling green hills and unique villages and townships.

In terms of the importance of the visitor economy, South Gippsland attracts approximately 1.2 million visitors per annum, and tourism contributes around about \$100 million annually to the South Gippsland economy, so it is certainly significant for us. This is a significant and growing sector in terms of South Gippsland's economic and cultural vitality and overall success. A unique aspect of South Gippsland in relation to visitation is our dispersed population across a number of smaller towns, who utilise community halls and other local community facilities to host a range of boutique events and activities. These have been particularly impacted by

COVID restrictions, in particular due to the limitations on venue numbers and also spacing requirements that COVID restrictions have put in place.

To give you a bit of a sense of the reliance of our smaller towns in particular on visitor expenditure, some very quick data for you. In the case of a couple of our most popular and vibrant small towns, Fish Creek and also Loch, in both cases 75 per cent of overall consumer spending is attributed to visitor expenditure in those two towns. Similarly, in the case of our coastal towns, 70 per cent of overall consumer spending in Venus Bay is attributed to visitor expenditure, and in Sandy Point this is as high as 86 per cent.

Moving on to the impact of COVID and the restrictions that we have all been experiencing, the South Gippsland tourism and events sector was heavily hit by COVID restrictions and lockdowns. However, in more positive news the sector has also responded positively due to the nature of the community's strong connections, the resilience of individual businesses, collaboration amongst all levels of government and also the ongoing commitment of recovery of this sector post COVID. The response of the wider Victorian community to support our tourism industry has also been appreciated through increased visitation to South Gippsland, which has enabled the region to create innovative ways to deliver small, medium and larger scale events and experiences. In fact once the restrictions on the metropolitan Melbourne area were loosened we actually found that we had a very significant increase in visitation to South Gippsland.

The South Gippsland accommodation sector, tour operators, retail, hospitality and broader industries have experienced significantly reduced income during this time, particularly when metropolitan Melbourne was in lockdown last year, and some of our businesses were closed for a very extended period of time. Once reopened, some businesses experienced limited income earning capacity due to reliance only upon regional Victoria for a period of time, and while retail and hospitality were very well supported by our local community, we do have a small population base, which limits the capacity of our businesses to earn income only from local business. Accordingly we have seen a heavy reliance on the JobKeeper program and also a range of state government support funds, and a large number of our sole traders in the region were not supported by state government funds due to a range of eligibility criteria. We have also experienced significant staff shortages right across the shire but in particular in terms of hospitality and retail staffing, and the feedback from industry is that industry is uncertain about the future in terms of visitor numbers but also about the possibility of future lockdowns and that ability to secure staff. This also applies in our case to community-based groups who lead and drive many of South Gippsland's smaller events as the scale and effort and commitment required, particularly when a number of these groups are driven by volunteers, is quite daunting in an environment where they may put a lot of planning into an event and find that it is not able to be delivered.

We have also had feedback from our business owners that the current restrictions place significant responsibilities on them. For example, many of our businesses feel that they are playing a regulatory role at the moment; for example, checking identification from metropolitan guests and also ensuring that patrons are checking in as required. Some of these businesses are already experiencing difficulty in attracting staff, so they are operating with very limited staff numbers, and it does place an additional strain on those businesses that are already quite stretched. We have also had feedback from businesses that visitors provide quite negative feedback at times about having to check in and show identification, including some patrons refusing to stay and refusing to spend money in those businesses, which is obviously not a great experience for our business owners.

In terms of council's response to the COVID pandemic, we have taken and we continue to take the opportunity to deliver a number of initiatives to support the sector during COVID. Council implemented a targeted tourism, arts and events grants program for our local providers, both businesses and community providers. We have also delivered a number of low-cost or free arts events and programs to support local artists and also to support the recovery of the industry but also to foster community connection. We have utilised the state government's Working for Victoria program which, as you are probably aware, is a program that was targeted towards local government. We chose to use that program as an opportunity to recruit resources specifically to provide industry support to the tourism industry but also to provide outreach and industry development, and we took the opportunity during that period to develop a new visitor economy strategy for South Gippsland which is very much focused on industry resilience, regeneration and recovery post COVID.

Moving now to some of the opportunities as we see them, on the positive side and looking forward, we see that the potential for tourism, events and visitation to play a key role in rebuilding the South Gippsland economy is

a really significant opportunity. Our capacity to attract and retain the local market is very key to our success, with boutique events and culinary and artistic experiences available within a short drive from Melbourne, which is a very attractive offering in the current climate. As such we think the time to invest in the growth and development of the tourism and events sector in South Gippsland is now. We have witnessed significant innovation from many of our businesses, who have adapted through initiatives such as implementing online shopping, takeaway and mobile offerings and also implementing a range of virtual experiences, and we know that other businesses across our shire and our region would benefit from support to similarly learn and grow and innovate.

In terms of overall visitor spend data, there have also been some real positives for South Gippsland once the metropolitan Melbourne market was able to travel again within Victoria. So, for example, if we compare the period from November 2020 to March 2021 to the period 12 months prior, we experienced a 45 per cent increase in visitor spend in South Gippsland, which is attributable to the lifting of COVID restrictions and that desire for Melburnians to get out of Melbourne and visit rural areas, particularly with a captive market—people not able to travel interstate or overseas. For us this really highlights the importance of the metropolitan Melbourne market to South Gippsland and the significant role that it plays in our visitor economy but also the significant attractions that South Gippsland has to offer to a Melbourne market.

So in summary, while the COVID period has definitely been a very challenging one for our shire's tourism and visitation industry, we have also seen significant examples of innovation and adaptation and the industry is very much ready and willing to partner to further develop the experiences for visitors that are available across our shire.

Again we thank you very much for the opportunity to present today on this important topic and we very much look forward to continuing to partner with the state and federal government and other agencies to support the recovery of our tourism industry. We would be very happy to take questions from you. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Kerryn, for that quite comprehensive overview and different outlook. I think you covered different issues about the regulatory burden being passed on to business and had a different outlook, so I appreciated that definitely. It was a bit more original than some of the other submissions we have had, so I always like that.

I might kick off with the first question and then pass over to Ms Bath. Your submission refers to how business adapted to remain profitable. Can you tell the committee a bit more about how businesses in South Gippsland shire adapted to changing circumstances and how the council supported them? You did touch on it, but maybe you could give a bit more specifics on how you went about delivering that.

Ms ELLIS: Yes, for sure. Look, we certainly had businesses in the shire that took the opportunity, particularly over winter last year, to sort of reimagine the physical spaces within which they operate but also to think about how they might evolve their offerings to either have a virtual component or to be able to be delivered in a different environment where they both had more, I guess, resilience and flexibility built into their business models so that they could adapt and also so that they could potentially continue to deliver some offerings whilst, for example, there were restrictions on numbers of people that were able to visit smaller spaces or smaller event spaces.

In terms of the role that council played—and as I said, we were supported through the Working for Victoria program—we also very much, I suppose, redirected the efforts and energy of our own staff to very much working closely with businesses to, firstly, understand what the restrictions really meant for them. We had a lot of businesses in the shire that were initially quite confused as to what it all meant, and we provided a lot of hands-on support and advice to them in interpreting the restrictions and understanding how they may be able to adapt their business in order to continue to be able to operate. Then we also had a strong effort both in terms of grant funding and programs like that but also just through one-to-one outreach to support businesses to innovate and think a bit differently about the kind of experience that they might offer to their consumers.

Renaë, did you want to elaborate at all on any of that detail?

Ms LITTLEJOHN: Yes, thanks, Kerryn, and thank you, everybody, for this opportunity. Probably another highlight for our organisation was undertaking the outdoor dining program. It enabled us really to work individually with our chambers of commerce. We took a slightly different approach to our neighbours. We

tended to work independently, allocating certain funds based on the size of our towns—for example, our four largest towns we allocated a total cost of \$25 000, and that enabled them to activate spaces where people could actually reinvent a space—the community collectively could reinvent a space—for people to come and dine and just experience a new outdoor dining experience with family and friends. That was really well received. And we also embarked on a marketing component alongside the physical space. That is something that we are currently really enjoying. We have got smaller towns such as Fish Creek that actually had beautifully handcrafted furniture made by local artisans as well. So we engaged local businesses, we activated spaces—we re-energised and repurposed spaces that were not otherwise utilised and that the community could not really envision as spaces of opportunity—and we worked in partnership with our chambers. Apart from providing that one-on-one support, that chamber of commerce and business association support was critical in implementing that program, and we are still working very closely with the community groups to continue that program. We are very proud to partner with local artist Alison Lester, who is well renowned as a children's author and illustrator. Alison was very, very proud to be part of that as a local person, a local identity, and that really helped build the profile of tourism, arts, food—it really collectively brought a lot of elements of tourism together.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. I might pass over to Ms Bath, then Mr Barton.

Ms BATH: Thanks, Chair. One of the absolute blessings of South Gippsland is that there are multiple towns with different nuances, different activities and different attributes. There is no one central source, so customers and visitors, tourists, need to explore the whole region. But with that we need this vibrant economy; we need each of those towns to bounce back. I go down the streets and I see many empty shops which 12 months ago or 18 months ago were open. But I want to just talk about the community events. You know, the shire has lots of halls, for example, and they are leased out to deb balls, weddings, parties and anything. There has been an impact on that, but it is more about community resilience. I guess those sorts of things can bring in outsiders as well, so it is not just the big item, it is multiple across the board. What do we need to do to help you bounce back and stimulate those multiple events?

Ms ELLIS: Thank you for the question, and you are absolutely right that when we look at tourism and the visitor experience in South Gippsland, community connection and community vibrance is very much connected to the broader sort of economic and industry benefits of tourism. It is very difficult to pull those two things apart because they mutually support each other. As I said in my opening comments, a lot of our events are quite small in scale and quite unique—very sort of individual and very much aligned with the unique character of the town in which they originate—so there is very much a community connection and community vibrancy element to those events as well as them being a strong attractor for visitation, and then they provide flow-on support to other businesses that benefit from local but also Melbourne and broader Victorian visitation. So it is definitely true to say that the benefits are sort of social, cultural and community benefits as well as being economic and industry benefits.

In terms of what you can do to support the recovery of tourism in South Gippsland but also similarly to support the reactivation, I guess, of community events, we do have a number of initiatives that we think would be quite helpful in terms of supporting council and the community to rebound, and I am certainly happy to run through a few of those for you now. From our perspective we think that funding the signature projects that are identified in the Gippsland destination management plan, including all the remaining tracks and trails which are connected to the Gippsland trail, would be a terrific initiative and certainly bring visitation to our smaller towns. Similarly, adding resources to the Gippsland events acquisition fund and also the establishment of Events Gippsland would be a very helpful initiative.

In terms of, I suppose, at the more practical level, streamlining the public events framework and also the approvals process for event organisers would be something that would be really helpful, particularly for our volunteer and smaller community event organisers. And we would also be very supportive of the provision of additional competitive funding for brand marketing campaigns to drive visitor demand into the Gippsland region and also into South Gippsland in particular. Very rightly you pointed out that our towns do all have a unique character, and we would very much like to support them to develop that visitor brand more fully. Considering the degree of reliance that our tourism industry had on JobKeeper, we think it would be a great thing, I guess across both tiers of government, for a sort of JobKeeper 2.0 type of business and wage support program specifically targeted towards the visitor economy. And I suppose we see that as two halves of the whole—to also invest in delivering a statewide but also a Gippsland-targeted skills and workforce planning

program, which we think would really assist the sector to overcome skills shortages and also to develop the visitor experience. We are really keen that whilst we have this captive market of Victorians travelling locally we make sure that the experience that they have is as positive as possible so that visitors are likely to continue to want to come back to South Gippsland, having perhaps had their first experience with us, because of the fact that there are some travel restrictions in place.

A couple of other more specific initiatives that we think could be really useful: providing access to insurance protection through the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority for tourism businesses that are affected by the lack of access to or affordability of insurance coverage; and then the other one, which picks up on the point we were making before about the regulatory impact on business, we think would be really valuable—if there are further lockdowns, particularly with metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria having different restrictions—is to have a statewide campaign to help educate the public on the importance of QR check-ins but also the fact that businesses are required to ask for details if metropolitan Melburnians are travelling into regional areas, to just help build that awareness and also lessen the burden on individual businesses to be communicating that information.

Ms BATH: Fantastic.

The CHAIR: Did you have another question, Ms Bath?

Ms BATH: Yes. You are very kind, Chair. Thank you. This might be a home-town advantage here on the netball court, so thank you, Chair. Just maybe a left-of-centre question, but we had Martin Richardson, who is the president of the Paynesville and district tourism association, and he spoke about a notion that is not widely used in Victoria but is used in Tasmania, and that is private investment on public land. He gave the example of Cradle Mountain and Lake St Clair and how there is accommodation there that the government is kind of revamping and that also has a fairly small footprint in terms of the footprint but is an economic driver. I am interested to know what South Gippsland council would need to know to form an opinion, or do you have a position on that? What would you need to do to form an opinion on something—potentially at the Prom, because we know that is our beautiful asset down there?

Ms ELLIS: Yes, absolutely. As you are speaking, the Prom is immediately the example that jumps to mind for us, because I think there are definitely significant opportunities for private investment to enhance the visitor experience at the Prom, either on the site or adjacent. That can be through things like provision of accommodation, but it can also be through supporting local businesses to have a presence so that if we do have people that come into South Gippsland just to visit the Prom, they might also be able, for example, to experience local food and beverage or local arts and other sorts of things like that. So from our perspective I suppose in principle we are really supportive of it and we think that it is probably an important area for us to explore in the future. But as always, the devil is in the detail around these things. So it would just be making sure that where there might be instances of, for example, if council is the land manager on a particular piece of land and we are encouraging private investment, that all the governance arrangements around that are very clearly understood and that we are making sure that that community asset is still being used in a way that is of genuine value to the community, because obviously that is always an important consideration when we are considering use of our land. And then obviously the state I presume has to consider similar things when it is land that the state manages. I think that in principle, yes, we are supportive, and then in practice it is about how do you make sure that those decisions are being made in a really responsible way and that we are still getting really good outcomes for the community as a whole.

Ms BATH: And the environment is sustained and enhanced and there is that investment in that environment.

Ms ELLIS: Absolutely.

Ms BATH: I have more, Chair, but you have been very kind. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Bath. I might pass over to Mr Barton, then Ms Lovell, then Mr Quilty.

Mr BARTON: Thank you. And I want to thank Melina for asking all the questions and congratulate the ladies for giving fantastic answers—very informative. I am going to go a little bit different. Ladies, we have heard today that people are reluctant in the rural and regional areas to be vaccinated. The key to us opening up and stopping having the health boffins locking us down is if we can get more people vaccinated. What can we

do as an education program? Do you support an education program? Could the council work with the state government? What do you think we could do to help improve this education? And I take on board about your QR codes and things like that because I have experienced some people having issues previously.

Ms ELLIS: That is an interesting observation. I am not sure whether South Gippsland is unique, but we have not had a lot of negative feedback from our community about getting vaccinated. But we have had feedback that our community are a bit frustrated because there are not local options, and when I say 'local', I am talking about within the shire. Most of our community need to travel either to Latrobe Health or to Bass Coast at this stage. There are plans for a vaccination centre at Leongatha to open at the start of July and indeed options for Foster as well. So for us the majority of the feedback that we are getting from our community is not about not wanting to be vaccinated, it is about how difficult it is both in terms of travel time and all that sort of thing—

Mr BARTON: The mechanics.

Ms ELLIS: Yes, the mechanics of it. In terms of response to that we have certainly reached out to the health services—so South Gippsland health and the hospital at Foster—just to say to them, 'Look, how can we work together?', because we have immunisation staff available as well and looking to collaborate. They have been very receptive to that, so my sense is it is not so much that there is a lack of desire, it is more just working through—for very small health services they then need to make sure all their staff are vaccinated and they have got all their arrangements in place. So we are certainly collaborating with them to do what we can to expedite that, but in terms of what the state government could do I think it is really about making sure that the vaccinations are available to as many people as possible in as many locations as possible so that people who have any appetite at all to be vaccinated find it really easy to do so.

Mr BARTON: Well, I will just give you a little something. I have just asked the transport minister to consider letting taxis drive some of our people, our seniors, into vaccination centres and to help them get around like that because certainly some feedback from rural areas that we have got is that it is really difficult because there is no public transport.

Ms ELLIS: Yes, for sure. That is also a challenge in our area as well for some people.

Mr BARTON: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Barton, for that different angle. I might pass on to Ms Lovell then to Mr Quilty if they have a question.

Ms LOVELL: Thank you very much—a very detailed presentation. Just before you outlined quite an extensive package of support measures that could be put in place to support South Gippsland shire, and I guess that that is probably going to be replicated across 79 shires in Victoria if we sit down with each one of them and ask them what can be done. You went from everything from support directly to business along the voucher line and regulatory relief to the other end of the scale of investment in your tourism attractions. So I was just wondering if you could outline whether you think the highest priority should be immediate support for businesses to keep them viable at the moment or the support for your infrastructure—which one is the highest priority? And what would your top, say, three things out of that extensive list be for South Gippsland?

Ms ELLIS: Good question. We hate being asked to prioritise; why can't we have everything? No, just joking. From our perspective we think investment in some of the visitor attraction opportunities in the shire would be a really significant benefit because I suppose at the end of the day people generally come because they want either an experience or to visit a particular environment. We believe in South Gippsland we have got the environment from a natural attractions perspective, but to use the tracks and trails as an illustrative example, what that does is join together the different experiences that our unique townships provide by creating a point of connection, and then it also enables businesses of all scales to complement that piece of infrastructure through visitor experience—for example, everything from bike hire to B & Bs to other tour operations, arts attractions. There is a range of things that sort of hang off the spine of some of those larger infrastructure pieces. So from our perspective that investment in the visitor attraction infrastructure is key.

Then the other thing that I would say to sort of support and supplement that is we think that piece about supporting skills and workforce development for the tourism and visitor attraction industry is really critical.

Obviously that is not just for South Gippsland—I am sure you will hear a similar thing right across the state—but we certainly know through Destination Gippsland, which is our regional tourism body, and the consultation and involvement they have with tourism businesses, which is significant, that the key thing that businesses are asking for is support to develop their own skills and capability in their industry to offer a better product and also think about workforce investment, development and attraction over time. They are probably the two things that I would highlight if we could pick two.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. I might pass over to Mr Quilty.

Mr QUILTY: We have heard from a number of regional towns and communities that the housing crunch—the massive shortage of supply and the surge in demand—is really choking the tourist economy and economies in general. I am curious as to what South Gippsland Shire Council is doing to address that lack of supply and what the state government can do to help with that.

Ms ELLIS: Thank you. Again, a very good question. Yes, that is definitely true in South Gippsland, and it affects the tourism industry in a couple of ways. We have got a lot of properties that were previously holiday houses, visitor properties, and we have had over the last 12 or 18 months people actually coming to live full-time in those properties, which is great in one sense because it means our communities have more, those houses are occupied more and we have more regular residents, but for us those properties provided a significant component of the accommodation offering in our shire. We do not have a lot of big resorts in South Gippsland, so from a visitor attraction perspective, whether that is through the Airbnbs of the world or some of the more formal house share type tourism offerings, that kind of housing is or was previously a really big part of our accommodation market, so there is that impact. Then there is also the fact that we have got some towns that were previously almost completely towns that revolved around visitation. They have now got much larger permanent communities, which then impacts the experience of people that come to visit, so there is definitely a number of implications, some of them positive and some of them really challenging.

For us probably the biggest issue—we have got two issues in terms of, for want of a better word, strategic land use planning. One is availability of land, and there is a lot I think council can do, and we would very much advocate for the state's support in terms of getting zoning correct and making land available. That is both for industry and for residential, because obviously you need both if your population is growing. So we definitely seek support from the state in that regard. But the real challenge for us in terms of growth—again, whether that is residential or industrial—is the supporting infrastructure that needs to be developed in order for some of our communities to grow, in particular around water supply and sewerage, which is a key challenge for us. It means that residential development can be prohibitively expensive, particularly in some of our bigger towns that are really ready for growth but where the supporting infrastructure is not there to enable that and it would be very costly if developers were providing that on their own, so it ends up being unattractive from a business investment perspective.

We have just developed a new economic development strategy in the last few months, and one of the key platforms or objectives of that strategy is getting our land use planning framework right so that we are investment ready both in terms of housing development and industry, and we think that is a key point to partner with the government on to really make sure that the vision for South Gippsland's growth is clear and that we have got all the supporting policies and planning schemes and all those other frameworks and then the right enabling environment for infrastructure growth so that we can really target growth in the right place and then make it an attractive proposition for people that have a mind to invest in our shire.

Ms BATH: Chair, would Kerryn be able to provide that as an addendum? Is that something that you could share with the committee?

Ms ELLIS: Yes, certainly. Council is actually considering it next week, so we could provide it to you next week. I would be more than happy to do that.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that, Kerryn. I know there might be a few more questions that some of the committee members may want to ask—and some of the committee members that were apologies. If we were to have any more questions, is it okay if the secretariat writes to you, Kerryn? Is that okay?

Ms ELLIS: Yes, absolutely. Or you can come and visit us.

The CHAIR: Yes, that is right. Well, that was our plan initially. I said earlier our plan was to be in Traralgon actually. Not in your—that is in Latrobe.

Ms ELLIS: It is probably just as well you are not in Traralgon, unfortunately, at the moment.

Ms BATH: Gumboots.

Ms ELLIS: Gumboots, yes.

The CHAIR: Yes, that is right. On that note, I might just thank you for your submission and your contribution today. It has been a pleasure to hear from you. It has been really refreshing. On that point, that concludes today's hearing. Thank you, committee members, and thank you, witnesses.

Ms ELLIS: Thank you.

Ms LITTLEJOHN: Thank you very much.

Committee adjourned.