

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Closure of the Hazelwood and Yallourn Power Stations

Melbourne—Wednesday, 16 February 2022

MEMBERS

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Mr Bernie Finn—Deputy Chair

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Ms Wendy Lovell

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

Ms Harriet Shing

Ms Kaushaliya Vaghela

Ms Sheena Watt

WITNESS (*via videoconference*)

Mr Anthony Wasiukiewicz.

The CHAIR: The Economy and Infrastructure Committee public hearing for the Inquiry into the Closure of the Hazelwood and Yallourn Power Stations continues.

I wish 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, and I am Chair of the committee. I would like to acknowledge my fellow committee members that are present today: Ms Melina Bath, Mrs Bev McArthur, Ms Harriet Shing and Mr Andy Meddick.

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

All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following this hearing. Ultimately transcripts will be made public and put on the committee website.

We welcome your opening comments but ask that they be kept to a maximum of 10 minutes to ensure we have plenty of time for discussion. Could you please begin by just stating your name for the benefit of Hansard. Over to you, Mr Wasiukiewicz.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: My name is Anthony Wasiukiewicz.

The CHAIR: Wasiukiewicz. Okay. Sorry for the pronunciation.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: That is fine.

The CHAIR: Anthony, would you like to get started and just give us an overview of your submission?

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: Yes, that is fine. Thank you for the opportunity to speak at the inquiry. I have included some pictures in annexure 1 and some further information in annexure 2. Apologies, I cannot provide the pictures over the video today.

As a background, I have been involved in grassroots community affairs in a volunteer capacity since 2010, mainly in my home town of Yallourn North in Latrobe Valley, which is directly across the river from the Yallourn W power station. For full disclosure, my father finished his apprenticeship at Yallourn C station and then moved over to W station as it was commissioned, staying there until he retired. I grew up in Yallourn North and moved to Melbourne in 2000 as a young adult after the perils of privatisation left little opportunities for me here. I then came back by chance and have been involved in the community ever since, serving in varying capacities.

Melina was right in calling for this inquiry. There are a lot of things that cannot be left to chance. However, my interest is less so for the power station worker and more so for the Joe Bloggs average resident who continually misses out on opportunities that we could otherwise assist with. In my submission to the inquiry back in August 2021 I covered numerous points whereby jobs can be and could have been created locally, but instead they have been continually overlooked and drowned out by power station chatter.

To start today, I would like to elaborate on the items that surround me in my home town of Yallourn North, and to do that I am going to take you for a bit of verbal walk. First we must understand that Latrobe Valley has a two-speed economy. It consists of well-paid power station workers, but there are short-term workers which form part of that, and then there are the rest of us. The home where I live is on the main stretch just out of town. I am directly between two mobile towers, so mobile coverage is fickle, as you may find out today. I am 700 metres from the NBN node in town but about 300 metres past the cut-off point for connection. To pay for

an extension is cost prohibitive, and the fickleness of fixed wireless is not very helpful either. Every bit of research I do involves the internet, yet I feel like I am living in the outback digitally. If I need capacity, I drive into Moe to use the internet at the library or elsewhere. While it is not a state-based issue, it is imperative to mention it nonetheless in these digital times. Communication is the foundation of democracy, so telecommunications are paramount to all else and keeping our society functioning effectively—ergo jobs for telecommunications technicians et cetera.

Directly opposite me is bushland, which then heads to the sporting oval, which is somewhat geographically removed from the town. For as long as I can remember, on a daily basis people walk past my front yard either to go to school, go for a walk, walk the dog or go to the oval, but there is no walking path or track. There has never been one. I raised the matter of creating a multipurpose park back in 2010, which landed me in the community volunteer sphere. Twelve years later we have seen little to no traction on this from the council or the state, because while other municipalities got on with it, our headlines consisted of power generation and coal week after week after week. There are paths and roads in some spots already that could be repurposed and utilised for this and could easily connect to the Moe–Yallourn Rail Trail, which would take visitors to Moe and back. A pedestrian bridge would be required at the river; that is jobs for engineers, fabricators and civil construction. Such a path would pass the oldest natural draft cooling tower in the country, yet there are no plans to preserve such an icon when Yallourn W closes. It would serve as a perfect viewing platform for tourists.

Again just up the road from me, to the west is one of the roads that leads to Lake Narracan, formerly known as Yallourn Storage Dam. The facility is home to one of the best waterski slalom courses in the country, as well as the Victorian chapter of the Australian Hovercraft Association. There has been no assurance that the man-made lake will be preserved once the power station is closed, and the council, as far as I can ascertain, have washed their hands of it. On this main road, which is home to a high volume of passing traffic every weekend, including caravans, motorbikes, car clubs and cyclists, there is no sign at the turnoff, as in no street sign, that states a lake can be accessed if they make a turn—none. I have asked council for 12 long years, but a simple sign seems to be out of their remit. They are more concerned with the latest coal-to-gold fad that will get them a photo in the paper. To add injury to insult, the toilets available on the north shore of the lake are permanently closed. The position of the lake is imperative for firefighting capacity for nearby timber plantations. So that is to the west of me.

To the east, 100 metres from my home, there is a former water tower that hosts all sorts of radio repeaters, yet not mobile and not NBN. Next to it is one of three town entry signs. The wooden structure is rotten at the foundations, and the gardens are unkempt. I prune them on occasion of my own volition, as if I do not, it does not get done and it looks horrible. Just inside the township between the suburban houses at the top of the hill there is a reserve which has the potential to be a nice meeting and respite spot for folks walking up the hill in Yallourn North. There sits a bus shelter that can only be described as not far removed from a chook shed. The foundations are rusted through, literally, yet it has not been addressed by the council, despite numerous requests. Yallourn North has a design theme of bus stops which aligns with the other small towns locally, and which could be fabricated locally by local workers—jobs. Without consultation, the town bus stop design was changed to a modern rendition which aligns with the design the state government has manufactured in Geelong. Local fabricators could do the task, but they are denied the opportunity. A park bench sat at the reserve when I was a child and was removed and has never returned. A local fabricator or carpenter could build a suitable bench. At this reserve the gardens are full of weeds and the edging has been in disrepair for the 12 years in my witness.

Directly to the south on the road verge are invasive weeds. Now, remember at this reserve we are only a few hundred metres from my house just inside town. A little more down the main road you will find a lump in the road from several botched road repairs. The main road is home to heavy articulated traffic, and the residents in the homes nearby have to hear the ‘thump, thump’ from pre-dawn to post-dusk of the road traffic because no-one wants to fix the road properly. We keep heading east and get down to Baillie Street—the street I grew up in—where the NBN node is. Directly opposite is the site of the old Scout hall. It has room for adequate parking and can be repurposed to a meeting ground for the interconnecting walking track that I talked about. Again, it is full of weeds. We turn into Baillie Street. It is a split-level street that reflects the hilly nature of the township. Every year residents and farmers complain to me personally about the council telling them to manicure their yard and verge; however, the grass in the council verge between the split road will grow to over a metre in height every summer, every year, causing a potential hazard for road users, when it could be home to low-lying

native decorative gardens—jobs for horticulturalists. Council mows it about a week before they send out the compliance letters to residents.

We turn east down Kelso Road, a very steep and undulating road which succumbs to water seepage that can only be described as horrific. The sludge covers the footpaths and makes them slippery, dangerous and unusable every time there is rain. It has been this way since I was a child in the 1980s and no-one has ever bothered to put in adequate drainage to fix it—jobs for civil construction.

Every street verge is home to asbestos telecom pits. Some have asbestos pillars. Many are redundant, but there is no program to remove them. There is one outside of the old butcher shop with a busted lid, which Google Street View tells me has been present since 2008 at least—14 years later, and no fix.

Into town on Reserve Street we have Lions Park. The central, most prominent feature of this central park is a power pole with several wires running in several directions. No-one has even given thought to putting it underground to beautify the area—jobs for the linesmen and power workers that we apparently want to look after.

Across the road is the town hall. It is on Crown land and managed by DELWP and a volunteer committee, not council. This brings pros and cons. The floor is past its use-by date; the brick facade is cracked; the lintels are excessively rusted; the windows are single glazed, with cracks that let all the road noise in, which drowns out our community performances; the roof leaks; and as well the lighting could use an upgrade—all out of the budget of the volunteers who manage it. There are jobs all around on that one.

The original town oval is at this location and is used by the cricket club and the junior footy. It has drainage issues that have been present since I was going to school. Again, I am 40 and no-one has addressed them. There are jobs for civil construction and plumbers et cetera.

So many driveway crossovers in town are still gravel. There are jobs for concreters.

Then there is the pool. The solar heating was installed in the 1980s, and it leaks like a sprinkler every summer.

The school, I must admit, is new and fresh, but it was built in Bendigo in kit form when there was enough land to build from scratch on the existing site.

Back over the main road at the supermarket, people illegally park out front every day. Again, there is no road sign to say otherwise. Out the front of the pub there is no wheelchair park or ramp despite adequate room. Again, it gets overlooked for reasons I cannot comprehend.

That is just a snapshot of town. I could literally speak for hours on every issue and every facet where jobs could be created.

Then we look into other towns. On the way into and all throughout our town and city the weeds continue. On road verges managed by council and VicRoads, along the river, on the power station-leased Crown land and surrounding Lake Narracan you will find ragwort, agapanthus, arum lily, blackberries, cleavers, mullein, thistles, wild watsonia, montbretia, hemlock, sweet pittosporum, willow and even non-plantation pine trees. Significant jobs could be created removing the pine trees and rehabilitating the area with native species. This does not get a shoo-in because coal drowns it out. Residents and farmers get hassled about weeds on their property, but council, VicRoads and power companies get free rein. What ever happened to leading by example?

In my submission I referenced the Morwell GovHub facade built in Ballarat. In Moe there is a playground manufactured in Finland. There is a lack of online content for the city's attributes, a lack of adequate upgrade to Moe rail, botanical gardens that are not even botanical in Moe and new drinking fountains installed that are not all-abilities and wheelchair compliant. Historical attractions, tourism, truck stops and simple things like road signs and road repair could be undertaken to create jobs. Monash Road in Newborough has five different styles of bus stop shelters.

We could talk about the Yallourn TAFE site, which is in Newborough, and has had three name changes in my lifetime, yet no-one in the community knows if it is staying or going. If it is going to go, it needs to be relocated to Churchill or Morwell. If it is going to stay, it needs a significant upgrade, but we need the certainty.

To add insult to injury, in the discussions taking place with regard to compensation or funding to the Yallourn North and wider community as part of a closure package from Energy Australia when Yallourn W power station is retired it appears the community has been excluded for various reasons from any consultation with regard to any amounts or where they believe the funding should be distributed. I have spent 12 years at the grassroots level within the community and I am only aware it is taking place because I have little birds who have given me the heads-up.

One power station worker I know that has helped out in the community in a volunteer capacity describes himself as 'Just a grunk'. It was elaborated on to explain they were just working with the coal purveyors. They have the double-storey house, which is very uncommon in town, the brand-new expensive four-wheel drive, the new and equally expensive sports car, and a home pool, which again is uncommon in town, while everyone else would just like the opportunity to build a bench or a bridge, upgrade a wall, fix a footpath, install some windows, build a walking trail, install some drainage, remove some weeds, plant some natives or even just fabricate and put up a couple of road signs. There is an opportunity for jobs all around us, yet for 12 years in my presence these employment opportunities for locals are continually overlooked and unheard by the bodies that are well paid to provide us the high-quality service and infrastructure we deserve. Thank you for the time and for inviting me here to share my concerns.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Anthony. You provided us with quite an intimate description of where you live and the power plants and your lived experience as well growing up in the region—and you have got a family connection to the power plants as well through your father and obviously you growing up—and how it is a two-speed economy between the highly paid plant workers and others that are not so lucky. You have raised a number of issues that do cut across what I would say are local, state and federal government issues, from roads, footpaths and parks through all the way to digital connectivity, such as the NBN, and obviously VicRoads along the way. It is quite a broad range of issues. We really appreciate your feedback as a resident with those concerns. I might pass over to Ms Bath to ask the first couple of questions. Ms Bath.

Ms BATH: Thanks, Chair, and thank you, Anthony. The intense and significant work you have gone through to present that clear picture for us is really appreciated by the committee. You live in your town and you love your place, and we really respect that. And it is a no holds barred conversation, which I think is really refreshing. Part of the terms of reference, Anthony, are about the Latrobe Valley Authority, and I would like your feedback. I did see in your community *Yallourn North Connection* a little while ago you talked about the Latrobe Valley Authority installing playground equipment from Finland. I guess it raises questions around local procurement, and you talked about that in your discussion for us. Could you unpack what you would like to see happen going forward in terms of government investment and if we, say, slash the Latrobe Valley Authority?

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: Well, obviously we know the industry workers need to be looked after; there is no dispute there. What is lacking are the grassroots things that are covered by those broad bodies: there is a lack of oversight, a lack of funding or a lack of direction for these bodies to do what is required to get things literally up to par. We are not talking about high-class stuff here, we are talking very, very basic infrastructure. With regard to the playground, for example, when I found out it was made in Finland I was horrified. It was not advertised as such; it was just a little bit of research on my behalf. In Morwell we have a playground that was built a few decades ago that was made out of timber. It met compliance at the time it was built. There is no reason we could not have done the same in this instance. Whether it be out of timber or out of plastics or out of steel, we have the skills here to do that. The fact is that four bodies—the LVA missed it, the council missed it, the local community groups missed it and obviously anyone else involved missed it—missed that this was built in Finland. We are sending money overseas that should be dedicated to our local community and could otherwise be spent locally.

It is unfortunate that these sorts of things are happening. As I said with the bus stops, a lot were trucked in from Geelong. We had a design that could easily be fabricated locally. I spoke to local fabricators, and they were cost competitive with Melbourne suppliers. Why they were overlooked—maybe it was a discussion problem, maybe there is a problem in the procurement processes that some of the local fabricators need a better discussion to lift their game, for example. They might need a bit of assistance to say, 'Hey, look, to achieve this outcome you've got to meet X, Y and Z criteria, so let's help you achieve that so we don't have to send those jobs to Melbourne or to Bendigo or to Ballarat or Finland'.

Ms BATH: Thank you. On that point, the whole idea of local procurement is I think essential—‘Let’s build it locally, grow it locally and keep jobs local’. But in terms of contracts, what is your opinion on the need or otherwise for local industries—and we will say local engineering or manufacturing—to be able to be given a pathway for local contracts? I will give you an example. Kiel Industries in Morwell make playground equipment, and when you raised that—and it is in your paper—I am interested to know your thoughts around what additional facilitation can there be through government, through LVA, about local procurement policy?

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: Well, it is clear that there is a disconnect between the head office that makes these decisions or makes the purchases and what we have on the ground here locally. Now, as I said, there is the possibility that some of the local manufacturers may have to lift their game, speaking frankly, but in the same respect, if the governing bodies do not understand what we have here, these sorts of opportunities get missed. So there really needs to be a better discussion, a better understanding, as in coming to the community and actually driving around, talking to people. Most of the stuff that I have learnt I have learnt through just chatting to people. I deliver the newsletter, so it gives me the opportunity to chat to people, and they tell me, ‘What about this?’, ‘What about that?’. It is that sort of grassroots connection that will fix these things. It cannot be far removed in an office in Melbourne and disconnected from the local community. So there needs to be more of a grassroots approach and an understanding of what the local community can actually do and where they can maybe step up a bit to have better opportunities for themselves.

Ms BATH: And finally, Chair—thank you—I have got lots of questions, because you raise so many issues, but I certainly understand the need to tip around the room. Solar Victoria is based in the GovHub. When I was there a little while ago and looked into their advertising for staff, the ad said you can work either in the Latrobe Valley, based in the GovHub there, or you can work in Melbourne, so there were flexible operations for where you can work—and I am happy to provide that ad to the committee. What is your opinion of that local working and that local focus?

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: Government departments are a tricky one. We know that Solar Victoria was actually on the other side of the tracks, so really it was just a relocation, as I understand it anyway, from one side of the tracks to the other. The construction of the GovHub, you know, was fantastic, but obviously the facade was built in Ballarat. I am not sure why a facade needed to be built in Ballarat. Like, it is a pretty facade, but surely a local fabricator could build a facade. I am not sure, but to the best of my understanding they can.

Well, even just to take the GovHub, for example, there is a coffee shop in the GovHub. Now, there are coffee shops all around that GovHub, and the GovHub is not a 10-storey building in Queen Street in Melbourne, so it did not really necessitate its own coffee shop. Now, hindsight being 20/20, in my opinion it would have been better to exclude the coffee shop and just encourage people to walk literally 50 metres up the road and grab a coffee. So there are these sorts of things. Wherever there is an opportunity for local workers it should be given precedence. Now, I am not saying that everything will fall into that bucket, because we obviously cannot do everything, but every single incident should be, ‘How can we create jobs locally?’. I hope that answers your question.

Ms BATH: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I might pass over to Ms Shing.

Ms SHING: Thanks very much for your materials and submission, Anthony, and also for the work that you do locally. Just by way of disclosure, I note that you are at the helm of the newsletter, and I will also just confirm for the record that I advertise in and have provided content and copy to that particular newsletter in exchange for a fee, as has Melina as well. So we just put that on the record.

Let us start where you finished off, with the coffee shop in the GovHub. One of the things that I just want to take you back to is the importance that you have placed on local support and resources going back into the community. That coffee shop, as you would be aware, A Kinder Cup, is in fact a social enterprise which ensures that a portion of proceeds from every purchase goes directly to the Morwell neighbourhood house to make sure that staff and volunteers can support local communities with their important work. And that is one of the examples of, I think, what the Latrobe Valley Authority has been part of in driving locally based initiatives to address the very issue that you said at the start of your presentation. It went past the two-speed economy, and

you said there was nothing for Mr or Mrs Local in terms of the ongoing work to transition and develop the valley.

You have talked about a number of issues that sit with the council, so I think it is really important that we can put them to the side to the extent that they have not gotten through council's budget process and submissions to the state for funding. But we have seen the Yallourn North Bowling Club get \$243 000. We have seen playground equipment installed, including as it went through the construction supply register. The Yallourn and Yallourn North football netball clubs got the \$386 899 to improve facilities. They have all happened through the LVA. And then the school at Yallourn North, so the primary school, you had actually outlined very briefly that there was \$1.923 million to replace the buildings at the school. Then further back toward Moe we have the Old Gippsdown funding for upgrades. We have got the GARDS, the Gippsland asbestos-related diseases facility upgrades; EV charging stations; Moe primary upgrade, South Street; the football and netball club upgrades; and the centre for cricket excellence, amongst other things.

So there is a lot happening here. But in terms of local content, are you aware of the construction supply register and the campaign that was undertaken to get companies to sign up to that? Because that is a really key part of making sure that companies can actually tender for and get government work.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: Yes. Look, I will not say I know the specifics of the detail of that. I do understand there is a process. I am not suggesting that no good things are happening. There are definitely good things happening. With, for example the bowling club—full disclosure—I helped them with that submission. I basically told them, I said, 'They've got money. You're mad if you don't try to leverage some out of the government'. You know, they have got—

Ms SHING: Yes. You and I were there together meeting with the club at the time we put that case together.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: Yes. The further part of that is in the LVA at the time staff were seconded from other departments. The case worker that we had on that, in a very short time frame, went on long service leave. So we went from having one case worker to all of a sudden having another one. We were told that we had to meet a certain amount of requirements, and then when we met these requirements there was all of a sudden all this other stuff that we had to provide.

Now, we could argue some of that might have been teething problems—the LVA was well established by that stage—but it did get quite very difficult for us to do that. Not pulling my own chain here, but the club would have struggled without me, without having that experience of dealing with this sort of stuff. We had emails referring to us as the Yinnar bowling club, and they were not quite sure who they were dealing with. So we had a lot of problems that really should not have existed. But of course we are grateful for the funding that was—

Ms SHING: But you got the funding, and the upgrade was completed.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: That is right. I said it was a very arduous process, but we did get there. And the guys did an amazing job of spending the money well. With regard to the football club, when we were applying for the money at the bowling club, I actually thought the football club was more deserving. Now, we have had a lot of upgrades to the netball court and facilities, but at that time there was a big hole in the wall in the trophy section at the football club. That was mould. What I did not understand was why it was not just a matter of process for this club getting upgraded. You know, I have referenced the town hall. These are town community facilities. They need, like, a steady process. And whether that is orchestrated through council or through the LVA is really moot, irrelevant. It needs to be—

Ms SHING: Well, it is not moot for the purpose of this inquiry, though, Anthony.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: No. So it is a matter of this funding needing to go where it is needed. When you have got a football club with literally a football-sized hole of mould in the wall that is hidden by a flag and it is just, 'Oh. Well, we're going to give you a netball court', well, hang on, there are lots of other issues around the region that really need to be addressed.

Ms SHING: Now, just on that—sorry, I have got a very brief amount of time—I just want to talk about the definition of 'local' within the procurement guidelines. We have, and I am sure you would accept this, numerous workers who work from home from Gippsland who are then based in Melbourne. We have seen

changes to real estate. We have seen population decentralisation and communities growing. Do you accept that people can indeed log on and work in Melbourne or in Pakenham or indeed come from Pakenham to Moe or to the valley, and that is part of the way in which people live and work now?

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: I think there is that element. It is definitely more prevalent now since the pandemic. It definitely sped up the process. You are right in that it goes under many umbrellas: VicRoads is a state thing, Crown land is a state thing. There are a lot of issues that are still being overlooked, because there is this, 'Oh look, new and shiny'. It is my understanding that the air conditioning in Yallourn North Primary School—and I am happy to get confirmation on this—stopped working after a short period of time. Because these buildings were prefabricated, they could not actually remove them and had to install new ones. I am happy to take that on notice and get further confirmation, but these sorts of issues should not be prevalent. It is not like we have been building school buildings the first year.

Ms SHING: One of the things that I want you to focus on, though, Anthony, is the work of the LVA. When we look at the PGA tournament and the upgrade of the golfing facilities just down the road, when we look at the way in which the LVA has been part of community-based spending and facilities, I would like you to focus on the work which the LVA has done to address that Mr and Mrs—what did you call them?—member of the public.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: Joe Bloggs.

Ms SHING: Yes, Joe Bloggs, Joanna Bloggs—however you want to call him, her, they—around being a local. The evidence actually suggests there has been a lot of investment that goes precisely to that part of the community, not just on transition but on development of the region as a whole—the positive changes that you have seen since we saw that local money for sports and community infrastructure, for schools, for TAFE and also for broader programs that help to lift the region overall in light of that record funding that we have received, including through the LVA.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: As I said, there is no argument that good things have not happened. The issue is when a playground gets purchased from Finland and it does not ring alarm bells with any of the many tiers that deal with the program, and no-one goes, 'Oh, hang on, this is probably a bit silly'. It is these sorts of things that are getting overlooked. As I said, the items that I have touched base within my statement, I am literally just scratching the surface. I encourage members of Parliament and this committee to come through, drive through every street in town. If you want me to come with you, I will, and I will point out every single issue where you just sit there and go, 'How is this still an issue decades later?'. So if the LVA can—

Ms SHING: Do you appreciate that if this is a 12-year process, it is going to take a long time post privatisation for us to actually not just undo the decline that has occurred but then to turn it around as part of broader development? If you do it in one day, it is not durable.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: That is a perfect example. We had the bush crew that went through the botanical gardens in Moe. That was sort of a rushed job. All the weeds were ripped out on the riverbanks and then plants were thrown in. If you walk through now, 90 per cent of the plants are dead, and the staff that worked on that are quite disappointed because it was not orchestrated well. Whether that funding came under LVA, I honestly do not know, but that is just an example of how things get missed and overlooked.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that.

Ms SHING: All right. Great. Thank you very much, Anthony.

The CHAIR: I will pass over to Mr Meddick, then Mrs McArthur. So, Mr Meddick, do you have a couple of questions?

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Anthony. Look, just by way of comment to begin with, I admire your passion and your clear concern for your community, and if every community around Victoria had someone like you, I think we would be in a far better position. Your advocacy is across a broad range of subjects and your observations are just remarkable, so thank you for that.

Again, it may form into a question as I go, but just by way of observation too, in prior lifetimes of mine I did fly-in fly-out work on different mine sites around the country—some of those close to communities and some not. But the experience that I had with that is that there are a number of industries that actually spring up around those sites which support that, and I believe in the Latrobe Valley it is no different. There are fabrication companies. There are all sorts of supply companies that have really made a living out of targeting their work around the support of the power stations. Now, in some ways I would think, perhaps by way of explanation, that on some of those things that you are talking about in procurement—where they have gone to Geelong or they have gone to Ballarat or Bendigo—it might well be that those local suppliers are simply just not tooled up to be able to do that or that they are currently geared up in a way so that what is being asked to be supplied is just not within the realms of them being able to do so or monetarily viable for them to do so. That also does occur. I am not saying that is what has occurred here, but it is a possible explanation.

The only thing that I can offer up around the purchasing of playground equipment from Finland is that that would clearly be a monetary decision. I mean, clearly someone has looked at that and gone, ‘Where’s the cheapest place we can buy from, and let’s get it’, and they have just looked elsewhere. I often think in terms of local procurement that there is far more to be gained in terms of social cohesion within a community, within reason, regardless of cost if you get that locally. So I fully believe and I am in your court on that one. A finished set of playground equipment does not quite look to meet the bill, does it, when perhaps you could look at the design and just go, ‘Righto, well, we’ve got these guys who can do it here’. That is what I say. There is no real question from me there. I just wanted to offer those things up perhaps as an explanation of what might have occurred in your situation there.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: Yes. If I may, with regard to the design, that is a very pivotal point. If the design does not suit the local workers, it may be that the design needs to be revisited. Now, I concede that takes time and that may even take money, but these sorts of things need to be looked at. Hindsight—we will forget about that, but moving forward, we need to say, ‘Well, hang on, does this design maximumly help the local suppliers? If the design cannot be built locally, is there a design that can be built locally?’.

Mr MEDDICK: Yes, I agree. I believe that amongst all of this, and Ms Shing highlighted it too, the work of the LVA is pivotal. I continue to watch what that work will be and see the evolution of it. She also pointed out that this is a 12-year project, and we are going to need to see—and I appreciate that the issues that you raise have been going on for a long time—a lot of resolution of this over the not too distant future for you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mrs McArthur.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you very much, Chair. Look, on this rare occasion, Mr Meddick and I are on a unity ticket in congratulating you on your amazing advocacy for your local community. So well done.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: Thank you.

Mrs McARTHUR: Ms Shing has mentioned the Latrobe Valley Authority, and I am most interested in this quango. I understand it started off with \$288 million in initial funding, and the—

Ms SHING: It is not a quango. It is the state government.

Mrs McARTHUR: Oh isn’t it, Harriet? It is a wonderful government authority.

Ms SHING: I just need to clarify that. It is not a non-government organisation.

Mrs McARTHUR: Do not interrupt me, Ms Shing. I did not interrupt you.

The \$29 million funding will run out in June of this year, and I understand that \$13.5 million has been spent on project grants. But \$13.5 million, the other half of that \$29 million, goes on salaries. Now, I am wondering what you think of the expenditure in relation to this authority. I understand also that their Morwell office has been refitted three times in the time they have been operating. I do not know whether local craftsmen have been involved in that refit. Perhaps they did not manage to tick the box with probably the government’s social procurement policy, which is no doubt an issue of how some of your local suppliers you mentioned have not been able to build playgrounds and therefore they have got to be imported from Finland. I hope they managed to comply with our social procurement policy.

I just want your opinion on whether this Latrobe Valley Authority is actually fit for purpose. Is everybody living and working locally in Morwell in this authority or are they working from home from Melbourne, for a start? Is this money well spent? Do we have an outcomes column with this Latrobe Valley Authority? Exactly what have they achieved? Because it seems to me that if half their budget goes on salaries and half on project grants, as you suggest—while I am more than happy for the suppliers to come from my wonderful electorate of Ballarat and Geelong; no doubt we are very competent at completing the paperwork required to get a government project—it is important, if we are talking about relocating workers from power stations, that these jobs be found locally. So can you just comment on the efficiency in expenditure and use of taxpayers dollars of the Latrobe Valley Authority?

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: I cannot speak for the specifics of the dollar value, but you have obviously provided me with the information that I was not aware of. I can see that being an accurate reflection. I have seen the LVA office expand. It went from a smaller site, and it overtook the other half of the building. Whoever was in there, they relocated or whatever.

But there is definitely—I could give you an example. There is a business by the name of Trisled in Morwell who moved from Melbourne way as part of the LVA package. Now, I chat with the chap who owns it. He makes what they call recumbent bicycles, and he again explained that the process was quite arduous for him. Now, he is quite an intellectual fellow. Everything he does is down to the math. He drives an electric van because the maths stacks up, so he is a fairly intellectual chap and he still had dramas getting the funding and assistance to relocate his business. Now, he is quite happy being in Morwell. He knows that there are suppliers locally that can supply his business, and he ships online across the world, so we are more than happy to have him. But if these processes are so—I do not want to use the term ‘bureaucratic’—arduous that excess funding is being burnt up in undue process and inefficiencies, well, that is something the government really needs to look at and just say, ‘All right, where can we improve these things? Where can we streamline these things? Where can we cut red tape?’

You know, there is my example of having someone seconded into the department and then after a short period of time, ‘Oh, we’re going on long service leave’. Well, why was that person chosen? To me that person would not have been a good fit, especially when you are dealing with something as pivotal as transition.

So in my opinion there is definitely room for improvement. I think we need certainty. I think others have raised the point of long-term funding, because this is—as Harriet has pointed out—a very long-term thing, so we need long-term funding. It cannot be just, ‘Oh, hang on, just before an election here is an extra bundle of money’. It needs to be really well thought out and really well procured and really well executed and streamlined.

Mrs McARTHUR: Well, that is right. It would be interesting if you could provide examples of the local businesses that have failed to get work, and also if they have been able to receive any assistance from the Latrobe Valley Authority in helping procure local jobs and local government expenditure, to the committee, because it would be interesting to compare exactly why some businesses got work and other locals did not. So if you are able to provide us with any of that information, I am sure we would be very grateful, Anthony.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: Well, I cannot give you too many specifics, but what I can say is we have got companies like Allform Industries, JBI industries, Romlik—they all do fabrication, for example. There are some other smaller ones, there may be some bigger ones that I am not aware of, so we do have a large pool of choice. Now, as I said before, if the design is such that it cannot be built locally for a facade, we sit there and say, ‘Well, okay, Ballarat would like the money’, but maybe we should sit there and see whether we change the design.

I got Allform to get me a quote for the bus stops. They could easily do them, truck them out and install them for a competitive price compared to what I can purchase online via one of the street furniture providers. So is there a problem with the information being conveyed by LVA? Do people misunderstand that they can apply? If they are applying, is it too bureaucratic, too hard for them? Are they sitting there going, ‘Well, this is just impossible?’. These sorts of questions need to be looked at and answered so that our local providers can provide local things.

Mrs McARTHUR: Well, Anthony, do we even really need the Latrobe Valley Authority?

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: That is an interesting question. I think it is definitely beneficial. There are a lot of problems. You know, there were some teething issues at the start. That is just normal. I think it is beneficial overall, but maybe there might be a revision of the terms of reference or the orchestrating guidelines of how the organisation operates. Maybe that needs to be reviewed and we say, 'Well, hang on, are we really as efficient as we need to be?'. And, look, maybe they need to work better with councils to say, 'Look, maybe we can provide councils with a more streamlined stream of funding to address some of these other issues that are being overlooked'. When you have got a footy club with a hole in the wall as big as a football, you know, we have got problems here. I understand that takes time, but any help is definitely beneficial.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. Thank you, Mrs McArthur.

Mrs McARTHUR: I am finished, Chair, am I?

The CHAIR: Yes, yes.

Mrs McARTHUR: Oh, what a shame.

The CHAIR: We can keep some questions on notice. I am sure Anthony is happy to assist. I did have a question, but I was actually going to give my time to Ms Shing just to ask a couple of quick questions. Ms Shing.

Ms SHING: Thank you very much, Chair. Thanks, Anthony. I am going to put something to you about the Latrobe Valley Authority: that its role is to set up the conditions in the community for continued growth and sustainability with a strong system that will be able to continue to adjust, innovate and grow, and that business and government, research and education institutions and community groups work together in an integrated and collaborative way, and if that is able to be achieved and built into the DNA of communities, then that is a success measure for the LVA. What do you think about that?

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: I think, as a statement, yes, it is fantastic. What we need to see is on the ground. I know there have been concerns about the longevity of the funding. So if there is no secure funding, as in it comes last-minute, well, that statement becomes null and void because people are sitting there saying, 'Well, that's an interesting statement, but you've got to have a funding supply to deliver that'.

Ms SHING: Yes. So the funding is really important, but that statement in fact actually comes from, verbatim, the LVA around its objectives. What I want to do is to just pad out the fact that you are talking about the implementation on the ground. Mrs McArthur has talked about small amounts of money that have been expended, apart from salaries, and salaries are going to Gippslanders who work at the LVA for Gippsland, so that creates jobs in the terms that you have talked about. But the Worker Transition Service, transfer scheme, the Back To Work Scheme, community forums, the Community and Facility Fund, sports infrastructure upgrades that we have talked about, sports events and community outreach, supply chain transition, home energy upgrades, the Good Money outlet, the Growing Regional Opportunities for Work, GROW People, Access New Industries, the Ladder Step Up program, the jobs hub, Latrobe Youth Space, *New Energy Jobs and Investment Prospectus*, Business Support Service, smart specialisation, health and community sectors workforce development, internationalising education, industry education partnerships, the Hi-Tech Precinct and the Latrobe government hub.

Ms BATH: Chair, if Ms Shing could just table the document.

Ms SHING: Well, it has been tabled, Ms Bath.

The CHAIR: Could we not have interjections.

Ms SHING: These are the things that the LVA does. What is your view on the things that the LVA does that I have just listed and what they are doing to achieve those ends that I have outlined?

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: Me?

Ms SHING: Yes.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: As I said, it is a noble goal. I think the LVA definitely has some space in the Latrobe Valley. I want to clarify Latrobe Valley as in not Dandenong, Latrobe Valley as in not Ballarat and Latrobe Valley as in not Geelong and Bendigo. We are talking about 100 years of industry that is going to be disrupted in a very short time, so every inch of energy and funding needs to be directed to the people who are here that have been powering the state for 100 years.

Ms SHING: Just like the ones who work at the LVA. All right. Thank you very much, Anthony; appreciate it.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Anthony. It was great to get a local perspective, someone with lived experience in the region, who has been working through the community groups very honourably and passionately. So thank you, Anthony.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: Thank you for the opportunity.

The CHAIR: As you can see, the committee members thoroughly enjoyed the discussion.

Mrs McARTHUR: Many thanks, Anthony. Well done.

Mr WASIUKIEWICZ: Thank you.

The CHAIR: On that note, we will take a short break before our next witnesses. Thank you.

Witness withdrew.