

# CORRECTED VERSION

## RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the opportunities for people to use telecommuting and e-business to work remotely in rural and regional Victoria

Horsham — 31 July 2013

#### Members

Mr D. Drum  
Mr G. Howard  
Mr A. Katos

Mr I. Trezise  
Mr P. Weller

Chair: Mr P. Weller  
Deputy Chair: Mr G. Howard

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms L. Topic  
Research Officer: Mr P. O'Brien

#### Witness

Mr B. R. Gosling, owner, Gosling Design.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome to the public hearings of the Rural and Regional Committee's inquiry into the opportunities for people to use telecommuting and e-business to work remotely in rural and regional Victoria. I hereby advise that all evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided under the relevant Australian law. I also advise that any comments made outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. Ben, for the benefit of Hansard, would you state your name and address, please?

**Mr GOSLING** — Benjamin Robert Gosling, 17 Sanders Street, Rainbow.

**The CHAIR** — Can you tell us a bit about your business and how you work it and use telecommuting and e-business to help your business?

**Mr GOSLING** — There are two parts to my life, I guess. I moved back to the family farm after working in a graphic design studio, probably six years ago. So I split my business path between being at the farm and also doing freelance design work from home. I guess being in Rainbow communication is integral and crucial to my being able to do my business. I obviously could not do it without it. It is mostly well and good, although I have had a couple of issues, which you are aware of. I have two jobs that basically rely on communication, I guess.

**The CHAIR** — Where are your clients?

**Mr GOSLING** — Everywhere — Melbourne, New South Wales, a fair few in Bendigo, where I used to work, and Canberra. They are fairly well spread out. I have not met a lot of them; they are pretty wide reaching.

**Mr HOWARD** — How have your clients found you?

**Mr GOSLING** — I made the initial contacts when I was working in Bendigo, I guess, and rightly or wrongly a few people looked me up after I left Bendigo and I did a bit of work for them, and then just word of mouth. I have never had to advertise for any work. They might think you do a good job or something. It is all in the one area; it is all in the natural resource management area, which suits me, because we farm around the national park, so I have kind of grown up with that way of thinking as well. Work gets circulated around that NRM kind of sector, and it is just word of mouth, pretty well.

**The CHAIR** — How often do you contact your clients through your business?

**Mr GOSLING** — While I am working for them, it is daily. I do not have constant jobs for every client at all times. I might do a few or a couple of projects for them and then I might not hear from them for a month or two, but it is daily while I am talking to them, mostly via email, but via mobile phone as well. There is daily contact with different clients every day. Rarely a working day would go past when I am not rung up or have to send off multiple emails to clients.

**The CHAIR** — What could the government do to assist your business, other than what you have already pointed out in your articles, when it comes to infrastructure, like programs to make people aware?

**Mr GOSLING** — I have been to a couple of things in Rainbow where they do business training, but I did not find them useful. I just find that my business runs itself. I do not know if I just want to keep on top of things. There is a lot to running a business, but I do not find it hard, so I do not think it is training. It is not a government thing, but I probably get a bit out of the loop with things, working from home. I do not get down to the training things and things like that, which I used to in Melbourne, where we used to go for software training, but I probably need to show my own initiative, I guess, to keep up with that. I would not really see that being a government thing.

**The CHAIR** — What can the government do, whether it is training or awareness programs, so that we have more people like you using technology to run businesses and to work from rural and regional Victoria?

**Mr GOSLING** — Sorry. What is the question?

**The CHAIR** — Should there be awareness programs so that people understand that they could actually utilise these technologies to run their businesses?

**Mr GOSLING** — I certainly think that most people in my position would realise that you would use technology, but I guess it is always good to put it out there. I mean, my business is no different from what it was

when I was working in Bendigo or Melbourne. It is irrelevant where I am, really. You do not very often meet with clients when they are in the same town as you, or if you do you are only wasting time going out for coffee with them, anyway. So I think you can run not all businesses, but for mine — I guess I am fortunate, but I chose it on purpose for this very reason — I only need my computer.

I guess what did work well for me was that I set up a big network of people like printers and illustrators and photographers while I was in a larger centre, and I still rely on those people because I fully trust them. I do not need to look at the work they are doing; I just send my stuff off to print and I know the job is done properly. So I guess that network of people is kind of important to me, and you could not do that just by telephone. You kind of need to meet with people and build up a relationship with people. There are probably no real short cuts on that.

**Mr HOWARD** — In terms of Gosling Design, how much of your week is spent on Gosling Design and how much is spent in farming, on a general basis — and how do you keep the balance working?

**Mr GOSLING** — More so now, the balance is probably determined by how busy I am at the farm, whereas five years ago I did as much design work as I could, just to sort of get the business going. There are times of the year when I put in the crop and during harvest later in the year when it is all farm and I struggle to get much work done on the computer at all — I check my emails — but I have good understanding from clients, so they do not hassle me too much in those times.

At other times I might do 100 per cent design. From now for the next month or so, I might spend the majority of my time on the computer doing work. So it is very seasonal, I guess, based on the farming season. I guess finding the balance works well, in that an inside job sometimes is very handy. When it is too hot or wet outside, an inside job is very handy to be able to fit in. I guess you have to work night-times as well, when you are busy in both things. I guess it is not ideal, but you cannot have it both ways; you cannot run two businesses and not have to work some longer hours at times.

**The CHAIR** — In your business you are self-employed, so you are your own boss. Your clients get you to do piecework, do they, when they pay you to design something?

**Mr GOSLING** — Yes, pretty well. They will send me a brief of the job they want done and I just do it. I am my own boss. I design, and with the farm I work with my brother and my dad, who has retired.

**The CHAIR** — When they send you that piece of work, you would agree on a price and then however long it takes, you get paid for that?

**Mr GOSLING** — Pretty well. If it is a bigger job, I have to quote on it. I used to have to quote on every job, but now I think most clients I have realise I am more than competitive. I guess my hourly rate is lower because I am not paying a receptionist or office rent. I still think my hourly rate is too high — I mean, I do not think it is too high, but it is too high compared to what other people around here get — but it is a lot lower than they would pay someone in the city. With most jobs I just add up my hours at the end of the job if I have not quoted at the start and it is good. I do not mind quoting on jobs, but it is a lot easier if you can just add up the hours at the end. Providing they are happy, I just send an invoice in at the end of the job.

**Mr HOWARD** — If you did not have Gosling Design income and the work associated with that, how would farming on its own be for you?

**Mr GOSLING** — In the last couple of years it would have been fine. In the first four or five years I was home, I was not being paid from the farm, put it that way. There just was not the money to go around. Mum and Dad were getting income off the farm then and there was nothing left over; we were not making money. In the good years, farming obviously has a huge income coming in, but the good years are few and far between.

**Mr HOWARD** — So this helps, in a way, to provide a secure income in those bad years for you?

**Mr GOSLING** — Yes, and the beauty of it is — everything gets back to farming eventually — that it is completely independent of farming, whereas you might have another job around, like my neighbour who is a builder. In the years when the money is tight, farmers are not spending money getting stuff built either, so with his job he gets a bit quiet on both fronts, whereas with mine you would never say it is irrelevant, because a

drought affects everybody, but it does not really go up and down with the conditions as much. The work is just there; certain jobs need to be done, regardless of what the farming weather is like. It is just good off-farm income. It is kind of my money, too. I do not have to think about whether I should be putting it back into the farm. It is separate; it is mine. So it has been fantastic, it really has.

The biggest trouble for me is that mobile phone service is near non-existent out at our farm at Yaapect. I have had you guys try to call me a few times today and not get through. In the end I just get home and I just get messages come through, and that really holds me back a lot. Even with farming, I have an iPhone, which is fantastic, because I can check grain prices and do all farming business from my phone on the tractor, but I cannot get phone service or I have to park on a hill and wait there while I have a conversation, which is just not productive. The biggest problem, even more than ADSL internet connection in town here, which has been another debacle, is that mobile phone service, and everyone around Yaapect will agree.

All the things on offer that we should be able to do with buying and selling grain are all different now. You do not just sell it to the silo; you sell all year round. A deal can be open for half an hour during the day, you will get a phone call and you will not get the message until that evening, and that might have cost you \$10 000 for the day. That really is something. I know we have had them up here before and they have looked at that. I understand that they cannot put a tower everywhere, because there are not a lot of people up there, but we are businesspeople too. That really is hard going, and it is also a safety thing, too. I mean, you are pretty isolated. If you have no phone service and not many people around, you could get yourself pretty stuck, if you are not careful.

**The CHAIR** — Do you have any final comments you would like to make, Ben?

**Mr GOSLING** — No. Overall I am very positive about what you can do in a rural town — apart from not being able to get ADSL connection, but I have calmed down about that; I am not even going to get started about that. I think there should be nothing stopping people running e-businesses from small towns. There are a few little things you need to overcome, but overall it works really well. I cannot think of much else at all. Obviously you are kind of on your own here. You just need to have a network of people — in my case, printers — in bigger centres. You can do anything from a small town, if you want to.

**The CHAIR** — Very good, Ben. Thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule today to speak to us.

**Mr GOSLING** — I appreciate your letting me do it over the phone. It is an hour and a half from the farm to Horsham, and it would have meant that I would have had to knock off a long time ago and it is just a little bit difficult.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much. I remind you that this has been recorded by Hansard. In about a fortnight you will get a draft copy of the transcript. You can make corrections to obvious errors, but other than that it will be as it is. Once again, thank you very much for taking the time today to speak to us about your experiences.

**Mr GOSLING** — I appreciate it. Just briefly, what is the purpose? What are you trying to get out of this? What is this going towards?

**The CHAIR** — We are trying to get more people employed in rural and regional Victoria, using telecommuting to work or even e-commerce, so that some people might start up new businesses.

**Mr GOSLING** — It is just infrastructure. They have to get the infrastructure sorted out and then there is nothing stopping it. Thanks, gentlemen, and all the best.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Ben.

**Committee adjourned.**