

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

Ballarat — 17 July 2013

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Dr H. Thomson, director, and

Ms G. Carr-MacFie, manager, Central Highlands Digital Enterprise program, Centre for eCommerce and Communications, University of Ballarat.

The CHAIR — I welcome Dr Helen Thomson and Gerrie Carr-MacFie to the Rural and Regional Committee of the Parliament of Victoria'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 relevant Australian law. I also advise that any comments made outside the hearing may not be afforded the same privilege. Could you please both state your full name and address for the benefit of Hansard?

Dr THOMSON — I am Helen Thomson, University of Ballarat, University Drive, Mount Helen.

Ms CARR-MacFIE — Gerrie Carr-MacFie, University of Ballarat, Mount Helen Drive, Mount Helen.

The CHAIR — Would you like to give a presentation and take questions at the end or would you prefer questions as we go?

Dr THOMSON — Probably just a conversation, not so much a presentation. We have thought about a few questions and we are happy to have a discussion as we go — whichever way works for you.

The CHAIR — We might allow you to make a few opening comments to start with.

Dr THOMSON — In terms of background I have been in the university IT sector for probably more than 15 years now. It is interesting because when I first came into this sector I came from an accounting and finance background, which had nothing to do with technology. I just happened to be studying here at the university and ended up taking a short-term job. But it was at the time when dial-up internet was being rolled out in our region. It is sometimes interesting to reflect on both the change and some of the opportunities that have not yet been fully realised. I see telecommuting and e-business opportunities as never having really been at the level of potential they are currently.

The centre which I lead is called — and it is probably historical from that time — the Centre for eCommerce and Communications. In a whole range of areas I think the 'e' only needs to stay there until the practice has been modernised. Business is e-business, e-research is research and best practice and so on. I have organisational responsibility for e-research and digital futures. The centre I lead is very much involved in activating communities, organisations and businesses around next generation broadband in all its forms — so the NBN, mobile communications and so on.

In the context of flexible work arrangements there is potential not just for us in the regions and our more rural neighbours to have opportunity; there is also opportunity for us to access skills and capabilities from the metros back into regions — or from anywhere for that matter. People in the cities can be employed with regional companies and vice versa. I think it can extend and complement local skills and increase employment opportunities for small towns and regional communities. In some of those small towns and communities it does not have to be a large change to make a big difference. Even a small percentage of residential and business activations will make a significant difference to resident engagement in community activities, lifestyle benefits and tapping into resident skills and expertise that might be hidden to the community when those people leave town to head off for an hour, an hour and a half or whatever the commute might be to access traditional employment opportunities.

Thinking about today I thought about some of the great examples I have seen. I remember the *Landline* program that was on earlier in the year about going bush; I think it was broadcast in April. It focused on the growing number of tree-changers and the information they needed to make a successful move to regional Victoria. In that program I saw a colleague from the technology park here, Cameron Woolfe, who works for IBM. I had not ever seen his wife before but learnt through that program that she was employed with Mars. They have established a stud for breeding Wiltshire horn sheep and belted galloways. They have planted trees, they have bred rare chickens and they show and sell their produce and their cattle. They cannot keep up with the demand. When you see people working for global companies in a regional context and having the family and lifestyle benefits of not having a massive commute yet still having the proximity and access to cities, that is a great example of growing regions and growing rural areas around major regions.

When I think about things like e-business, the potential is expanding exponentially. Both enhanced broadband connectivity and the tools, in terms of the technologies and apps, are combining to lower the barriers to entry for e-business. Gerrie and I and a number of others from the University of Ballarat recently attended the Digital Rural Futures Conference — Smart Farms, Smart Regions in Armidale. The University of Ballarat together with the Regional Universities Network were partners in that first conference of its kind. At that conference we saw a range of examples where individuals were establishing their own businesses online rapidly or they were linking to virtual hubs or virtual business gateways of various different sorts. Australia Post would have presented on the Digital Mailbox, their My Shop in a Box and Farmhouse Direct, which extends the concept of a farmers market to online. They talked about end-to-end logistics monitoring for suppliers and consumers, so I have the confidence if I am a buyer that my product has been sent, it is now here and I will receive it in a timely way and a supplier is able to know that the consignment has been received and therefore their part of the transaction has now been completed.

The CHAIR — We have heard before about hubs where people go in regional areas. They might have a hub in Ballarat where people can go and work. So a virtual hub, what does that look like?

Dr THOMSON — You may have heard of things like Aussie Farmers Direct. It is a gateway to products and services, so I will give an example — Larissa Patton. We first came across Larissa when she was working with Birchip Property Group. There is an extension office of the Birchip Property Group. Lots of people we have known at Birchip over the years have ended up marrying a farmer. Her family settled in St Arnaud. Larissa first came to the support of Birchip Property Group with their website in the early days of online communications, but she took those skills and her passion for creating fashion for little people online. We worked with her to establish the Bear and the Whale website for her own business, but I have watched her use vlogs, video and Facebook, and I have also seen her join specialist sites that are around bringing a broader market to what she was able to access from going to local markets and promoting that she had a website and saying ‘If I collect your details, I can let you know when there are specials’ and all of those sorts of things. She has also placed her products within some of these virtual hubs, which are sales platforms that might be able to attract a broader market than your own individual website might be able to attract. You go where the buyers might be, and that is why people can start by establishing a Facebook page.

Gerrie, you might like to say a little bit about how the digital enterprise program links in to some of that business skilling.

Ms CARR-MacFIE — Sure. The Digital Enterprise project is funded largely by the Australian government. It is a million-dollar project over two years to provide businesses with opportunities to leverage off the national broadband network. The state government is a contributor partner, and it facilitated \$55 000 worth of funding to the budget. Local government in Hepburn, the Pyrenees, the City of Ballarat and Golden Plains shire are all participants in that project. Through CECC and the University of Ballarat we are providing training for micro, SME and sophisticated businesses across that region to increase their online capacity. What I have found in undertaking that project is that a large percentage of the people who are attracted to that training come from the micro sector and are actually using telecommute and e-commerce practices in a very rural location to work from home. We have a vast majority of business participants. We commenced delivery in September 2012, and to date we have put 1050 participants through that program — 496 individual enterprises and community groups — so it is quite a broad sample group.

Mr TREZISE — So, Gerrie, when you are talking about the micro sector you are essentially talking about individuals working from a remote location, probably home.

Ms CARR-MacFIE — I am. In that sector also the ABS definition is nought to five employees, so some of them may have employees and they may be remotely talking to each other by telecommunication. Your staff members may not be within your home premises; they may be spread across the region or in different locations. That could be for all sorts of businesses, from professional services, accounting and graphic design through to products such as Helen was describing with Larissa’s example. They are small

businesses, they use telecommute for their staff and they use online as their main platform to grow their business.

I will go to an issue that was raised by Stuart in his presentation earlier when he talked about the sophisticated users, the mature businesses and digital champions. One way of progressing people's ability to telecommute and do e-commerce is to look at the champions. They are not always big businesses: they are the Larissas and the small micros. I also noted that Stuart commented upon what I see as the digital divide, and rural communities — particularly in some of the areas that I am dealing with here that have limited mobile phone coverage and limited access to good reliable broadband — are severely restricted in their capacity to grow their businesses beyond the farm gate or beyond the local community by that lack of infrastructure. That is creating a digital divide. That is what needs to be addressed, and that is what the national broadband network infrastructure is addressing.

Our program is addressing the social and the learning needs that are attached to that digital divide. They are extremely important, because if we do not address that, the benefits of telecommuting and e-commerce will only apply to a small percentage of rural communities, when in fact it could be broadened. We will have people who are excluded from communities, from business and from work because of their lack of digital skills and their lack of literacy.

The CHAIR — When we get the pipeline there, what does your program do?

Ms CARR-MacFIE — Our program only lasts for two years, so it closes in June 2014. That will be an issue, because it is an extended rollout, and it is necessary to have a look at what the long-term learning needs are of the cohort that we are addressing, and that is particularly the micro and the low digital literacy type of community.

The CHAIR — What does your program do to help those people?

Ms CARR-MacFIE — We offer free training and mentoring. This is key to the success of this program. I have worked in rural and regional development and business development for 25 years. This program does not just provide a workshop experience or a group learning or information experience; it provides one-on-one mentoring, which is the difference. For example, we have social media for tourism businesses, social media for not-for-profits and social media for small business programs operating to increase people's marketing capacity and get them understanding that. The appetite for that has been huge across the region, but it is not just a workshop. People, after they have had that group learning experience, have a person come into their place of business, sit down with them and make sure they have a practical outcome — that is, that they have actually got their social media presence up and operating. If they are an advanced user, we have a masterclass where they then get even further into how to actually leverage financial benefit from that particular product.

Unlike many of the workshops that your state government and the federal government put through in other programs, this one, by having that additional one-on-one mentoring, is providing some true learning and true transfer of skills in a very practical and immediate sense. I think that is a real credit to this program. After 2014 I think state government and federal government should look at the way they deliver their training and the learning outcomes and take a lesson from this particular program. It is actually providing some meaningful outcomes.

The CHAIR — So I suppose the question then is: how would you see that we should deliver after 2014?

Ms CARR-MacFIE — I believe that we should be looking at community-based learning, ensure that we are using the resources within the local community like our ACFE-funded program delivery providers and also provide that one-on-one, hands-on assistance. The federal government previously did it when the GST was introduced. They had advisory officers who provided one on one, and this program is a flagship for that provision of one on one, in a widespread sense.

Some of the programs that state and federal governments offer in the manufacturing industry have one on one — a facilitator going in, hands on — but the large group training programs that we generally put out do not, to me, have that practical outcome always attached to it. This model is superior. So having a look at the model of delivery that is available through the various programs that you offer for business development through your current arms would be something I would recommend.

Dr THOMSON — Can I just add, Gerrie, that as George said, we have worked with lots of different communities and they all aspire to have the best broadband and the best mobile communications possible as soon as possible, but one of the things that has surprised us in coming back to this space — which is the space I would have been in in 1999 in some ways, when I first joined the university, which was activating communities around what was broadband around that time — is that many of the businesses and community organisations have not progressed as far as you might think and only some communities in Australia have benefited.

We are very fortunate in the Central Highlands, and it was great to see Bendigo recently attracting funding through the digital enterprise program, but we know that there is broader demand outside of those first 40 communities that were to benefit from the national broadband network, and that has been expanded a little beyond there, so I think some of the experience we are having in this region is indicative of the potential skills gaps in other regions.

I would just like to add, too, that the diversity goes way beyond social media in terms of the types of learning opportunities and the way of engaging — so anything from e-health to teleworkers focus and to working with the arts community on promoting their events, their products and their talents and building collaboration in that sector. We also have workshops with the South West Integrated Flora and Fauna Team coming up, which are to engage natural resource management professionals, volunteers and farmers in rural communities. We have also had initiatives around working with sports clubs, so I think from my perspective one of the real successes of that program has been the ability to value-add to what tourism in Ballarat or a local neighbourhood house or the Ballarat arts alliance is already doing, but extending what they have planned in terms of a priority for their sector and deepening that training experience.

Ms CARR-MacFIE — I think one of the strengths of our project and why we have been successful in bringing people in to undertake the training — because to get businesses to learn is like pulling teeth sometimes; the smile is worth it but it takes a lot, and there is a bit of pain there — is that we have not had a generic product that is just top-down delivered. We have worked with — and Geoff will understand — the LEAP project here in Ballarat. It was a state government-funded local government initiative to engage the arts community and increase their skill level, and they were putting together a portal-to-market product.

Digital enterprise, using largely the federal government funding, went behind that to actually provide training to artists on how to upload images, how to write for the web and how to actually engage with that particular project in a meaningful way. So it actually builds sustainable capacity rather than just being a generic workshop on iCloud or 'What is a portal' or 'What is the web?'. It is that ability to tap into local projects and add value, that flexibility in the program, that is highly successful, but so many of the programs we get delivered out of state and federal government are top-down delivered without being flexible about how to tap into the various sectors. Even with the tourism sector here we did a workshop on how to get your ratings up on Urban Spoon. It was very practical; they went away and they did it. They did not just hear about what is e-marketing — they actually delivered products. So that has been extremely important.

Dr THOMSON — The other thing I think in that program is the development of the micros and SMEs who are in that technology sector, as facilitators, as subject matter experts, who can work with those other micros and small businesses and community organisations. So the university has not adopted an approach that we deliver the training; we have adopted an approach where we find the match, starting from the local government area. We ask: who is in the local government area that has skills that they can transfer to local businesses and community groups? We think that that will build the capacity of that sector, it will build their market beyond the digital enterprise program seed funding and hopefully it will mean that some of that activity will be sustained through for-profit business activities post that seed funding.

Dr THOMSON — Gerrie, as part of your program you also said you address the issue of social needs. When you say ‘social needs’, do you mean the personal needs of, for example, the people who are working remotely in those micro organisations?

Ms CARR-MacFIE — We have had some high-level workshops in this room on telework and we have had some assistance through the federal government — their NBN broadband champion in that field. It is more promoting, through our program, better practice across the board in business delivery, OHS issues and whatever it may be, so we have had some generic mentors who have the capacity not only to sit down and talk about a particular subject area but to actually look at the whole of the business. So some of our business mentors might look at that issue of ‘You’ve got telework staff’ or ‘You, yourself; how are you working within your home office?’. So I guess telework is a bit different to the e-commerce stuff we are doing, but there is that capacity to have a look at those issues.

That is a whole different subject issue, I suppose, but we also are looking at community groups. This program is not just for businesses, it is for not-for-profits and community organisations. So in answer to the issue about the social side, we are doing some work with community groups which may not be workforce related but are actually related to people outside the workforce and building their capacity for volunteerism within their local community, from genealogical societies doing a wiki to preserve their history and understand how to actually do that online to working in with sports clubs about building membership through social media.

Mr KATOS — Earlier it was said that Ballarat has had reasonable internet connectivity compared to other parts of regional Victoria, and I would assume some of the surrounding district would have had better connectivity. As a result of that have you seen perhaps someone who grew up in Ballarat, who has been working in Melbourne and who has come back perhaps to telework or establish their own business, or even someone who has that tree change aspect who holidayed here as a kid, who loves the district and who has actually come and teleworked or established a business?

Dr THOMSON — I am sure there are plenty of examples. I only have to look at the CVs of some of our own staff who have studied at the University of Ballarat, who have then gone and worked in Melbourne or travelled overseas but who have decided that when they have returned after a period of time Ballarat was the place to come back to. If you talk to IBM, they see CVs from people returning to IBM who have had that experience where they have been able to combine their undergraduate degree with an earn-as-you-learn type of thing or other paid employment with a global company here in Ballarat, and they can take those skills and apply them anywhere in the world. Not only do you hear that from this precinct but if you talk to someone from Ballarat Health Services or whatever, they will say the same thing.

George Fong was here before. He was an academic at the University of Ballarat when he, along with another two or three academics, discovered the internet, and that is where many entrepreneurial businesses have occurred. Obviously NetConnect was the first regional ISP to deliver internet into communities like Ararat, but it was the pioneering work of people who spotted the opportunity here and grew their own businesses. We see spin-off companies from Mars that have established operations here in the technology park because they have spotted a niche in design or branding or marketing or all sorts of examples. I only have to look at the train; I look along the train platform and I see so many of my colleagues here and so many people from up the Western Highway. They could be council staff in the Pyrenees. You just see the increased frequency, and the reliability of regional rail has changed how people work.

When I talk about remote working I probably would like to think more broadly than working from home or remote work. I think of supporting mobility anywhere, anytime, and making travel time productive time. That is always-on wi-fi or whatever the solution is — I do not mind what the technology is — on public transport, starting with regional rail.

I think the enterprise centres and the collaboration hubs — these IT platforms that support like-minded people in coming together in virtual environments, and I am not talking about Second Life or anything like that, although maybe that is going to come as well — are all about innovation around work spaces and work practices and business development and competitiveness, together with collaboration when it makes

sense and learning and knowledge transfer. I think the tech park activities, which I am sure you will hear about in terms of central Ballarat activities, provide a fantastic opportunity for the university to reach much more directly and connect with the community in central Ballarat. I think the collaboration hub conversation with arts and creative people that started in Ballarat is happening in other regional communities as well, and I just think it is really exciting. It would not be possible without connectivity. It is like the oil in the engine; it is just going to make stuff run so much better.

I think in terms of some of the blockers, some organisations, like ours, have great policies around work-life balance already; tweaking them to make telework a visible opportunity for people is not difficult, and some jobs lend themselves more to 'Anywhere, anytime' than others. I think it still goes back to some of the cultural things; it still goes back to management practices and the old ways of working, which is a cultural change, and it needs investment as well.

We had Bruce Winzar here yesterday for breakfast — about 60 people in this room — and he was talking about the build of the new hospital at Bendigo. He was coming at it very much from the technologies that are going to be fundamental to that new building, and it is going to change everything. He was talking about some of the US examples where the change management budget is as much of the budget as the physical infrastructure, and he is striking for about 30 per cent for change management. He does not know whether we will get that far, but that is just putting a pipe in — and I am a recipient, out at my partner's farm, of the interim satellite service. Jeez, that has made a difference. I do not care whether it is satellite, I do not care whether it is wireless or fibre — obviously everybody wants fibre if they can get it — but connectivity makes a difference.

The CHAIR — And that is what our inquiry is about: the change management. It is not so much about the price; it is about the change management.

Mr DRUM — I think if we leave the shift to more flexible workplace arrangements to its own devices, it is going to take a lot of time before management feels comfortable letting people work from home.

Dr THOMSON — Yes.

Mr DRUM — The first question is: can government assist in that shift and make that happen, maybe by introducing more flexible workplaces in their departments or something like that?

Dr THOMSON — Absolutely, yes.

Mr DRUM — Secondly, I am interested to know in a technical sense how much knowledge I have as an employer about what my people are doing remotely. Can I go online and see that they are actively working — that they not only have the computer turned on but are liaising with their clients and productively working? Can I go and see that at all times, and do I get a true sense of the productivity of my staff?

Dr THOMSON — They are two very good questions. With the first one, I think at a federal government level we have seen targets actually set for federal government departments to achieve telework outcomes, and I think there has to be some of that. If it is not measured, if it does not get monitored, it possibly does not get changed. It falls to those who are comfortable with that approach. I have teleworked whenever I can. I have brought up three kids mainly independently, and it worked for me to have jobs where I did not have to be physically present. It still works for me. It worked for my managers over all those times because they were happy to manage on the basis of performance — not micromanaging but setting shared goals for what is going to be achieved and making sure they know what is happening.

Can the technologies help you to know what is going on? Absolutely, if they are the right technologies. Again, I will use the University of Ballarat as an example. Again, rolling out to a new unified communications platform and a whole range of other things has just meant that it really does not matter. I can access my contacts and my mail. My computer becomes my phone. If I have volume on now, it will follow me. This is everything, but it could equally be my phone or an iPad, if I had one, or whatever. All of those systems and my interaction with them can be monitored. Whether or not our organisation is doing

that, we click every time we go into the internet account on a particular screen that tells us about some of our responsibilities, and there are all sorts of policies and procedures that would cover both flexible working arrangements and usage systems and all those sorts of things. So, yes, I think the technology can, but it depends on what you have deployed and it takes investment.

I still think that the culture needs to be moving from micromanagement, with some of those safety guards and checks and balances in place. In a big organisation you are not actually popping your head into everybody's door every day anyway. Again, I will take an example from Bruce's presentation yesterday. You have to monitor performance in all sorts of areas, and he said on an average shift a nursing member of staff spends 23 minutes looking for stuff — a wheelchair or something — that they need to move forward with their tasks. So there are productivity opportunities in the work we do in our traditional work practices and there are productivity benefits and risks in new modes of working, but I think it is about monitoring.

Ms CARR-MacFIE — Just on that — and I am coming from another learning perspective — I have been the CEO of a small business that had a large telecommute workforce across Australia. Prior to that I was the CEO of a regional company, and I allowed flexible work conditions, including telecommute for a number of staff to accommodate their family needs. But it needs a different style of management, and it goes to that issue of monitoring and performance. If you have staff who think 'I've got to do this school run today or I've got this other issue, so I'll work tonight at 3.00 a.m.', that is not good for OHS. The company may also be client-based, and your clients are not working at 3.00 a.m. As a manager I had to learn on the job what techniques to use to manage my staff to telecommute in a way that was acceptable but also allowed performance.

I also noted that in some instances it was inefficient because at one stage I had a large premises where there would only be two people using the heating and cooling, so I actually created a situation where we closed one day a week. Coming into that organisation we reorganised the work schedule, and that made enormous savings on our energy costs and utilities. That was a good thing. But what I did find is that when you introduce it too quickly staff lose the capacity to create and innovate because they are not communicating with each other as they used to, so it does depend on the sort of work they are doing. Even with backfilling — say if the receptionist is away at lunchtime, you might have a CEO taking delivery from Toll because there is no-one else around — that can be inefficient.

What I am coming to is that the government has some fabulous websites that are used to assist businesses, but on Victorian government state sites there is not a lot about teleworking. There is not a lot about management or protocols from either the employer or employee perspective. I think it would be worthwhile if some thought went into developing templates and guides that are a bit more than just the generic 'This is a good thing but these are some issues'.

When you introduce anything that is new, it is a slow learning curve. We could actually hasten the learning curve and the efficiency of organisations. Telework is not for everybody; it is not for every worker. Monitoring can be an issue. OHS can certainly be an issue and also taking advantage — cost shifting: I am saving on utilities in my office, but I have an office worker at home who has got the heater on during the day when it normally would not be. I do not know whether we have really come to grips with the cost-shifting issue.

Mr HOWARD — You have certainly covered a fair bit of what I wanted to raise. I wanted to tease out the teleworking issue and what the hold-backs are for employers. Following on from what you are saying I presume a lot of it is changing from the concept that we measure work in a day by the hours that you work — whether it is 9 to 5. We really need to change the whole concept of what it is you are actually delivering and how we measure that to ensure that we get that ongoing productivity, which is not necessarily measured in hours. Is that one of the key things that really needs to be worked through with employers?

Ms CARR-MacFIE — I absolutely agree, Geoff, it is one of the key things, and there is also how it is put. It is not just hours; it is outcomes, but there is a balance. If you can actually achieve your work outcomes in a number of hours but there is still the capacity to do more, do you just close down? There is

that trust issue that comes with employees. There is a whole range of management strategies and issues that do require further investigation to really have a look at it.

Government is a leader on this issue, not just in getting it out there but in actually introducing good practice within its workforce. I really think that local government should be brought in more to do that, in partnership with state government, so that targets, systems and pilot programs are introduced, and that they are analysed, in all fairness, to see the efficiencies and the inefficiencies that occur so that we get some really good practice coming out of this. Overall this is the way of the future, but isolated people in isolated communities, not interacting, may actually stifle innovation and productivity in the long term if we do not get to grips with it.

Dr THOMSON — Again I think that is where collaborative software technologies are emerging. They are here in lots of places. It is the video, the telephone; it is the supporting teamwork, and it is the troubleshooting via screen sharing. Technology can enable all these sorts of things. You still have to manage a team no matter where they are located, and you still have to include, involve and communicate across that team. If you do not think about that, some of your workers could feel like they are not as connected. But technology can help. SMEs can also tap into these cloud technologies. I think Stuart mentioned MYOB. They have moved to our model as well now. Xero accounting is another example. More recently they have developed Xero payroll, which recently took out the Victorian iAwards in the financial category. You can also look at Dropbox and at Skype as broadband connectivity expands. Again that is where a lot of organisations of different sizes, even the big ones, do not know what they do not know. If government is leading at a local, state and federal level in its interactions in terms of using these tools, technologies and approaches as if they are business as usual, then as a consumer, resident and citizen that is where I am interacting and learning from you, and I think that is really powerful.

Ms CARR-MacFIE — Posting your internal training programs on YouTube, for instance, as a government, is terrific. The Department of Justice has its social media policy for staff on YouTube. I direct many small businesses to that because with a small adaptation their staff get the idea. It is very clear. You sharing your resources in a better way is another way — —

Dr THOMSON — Yes, do it once and share it properly.

Ms CARR-MacFIE — Duplication of resources is an enormous thing.

The CHAIR — Do you have any final comments?

Ms CARR-MacFIE — I think to actually spread the benefits of telework and e-commerce, continue the commitment that you already have to business development training programs but also to make sure that they are responsive to the needs and have the capacity to work from the ground up, not from top-down, would be a terrific outcome of this particular inquiry. It would also be good for the inquiry to look at ways of further championing the issue of telework, because for family situations, for child rearing, for looking after elderly parents, the ability to work from another location other than a centralised office is something that will bring huge social benefits. I think everyone agrees on the environmental benefit. It will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and our reliance on heating and cooling in office blocks that is just wasted.

Mr HOWARD — And construction of new motorways.

Ms CARR-MacFIE — Yes, and tunnels and demolition of heritage homes — oh dear, I should not have said that. There are so many benefits, and I think this is a great opportunity to put them on the table.

Dr THOMSON — I congratulate you. It is fabulous to see a focus on effective use, on change management and on investment beyond infrastructure, because they are complementary. We need both. It will be really interesting to see the outcomes of this inquiry.

The CHAIR — Good. Thank you very much, Helen and Gerrie. I remind you both that you will receive a copy of the transcript from Hansard in about a fortnight. Corrections to obvious errors of fact will

be allowed but matters of substance will not be. Changes will be subject to the committee's approval. Once again thank you very much for your valuable contribution here today.

Dr THOMSON — Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.