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

Melbourne — 28 October 2013

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Mr B. Wynter, council organisational improvement manager, City of Whittlesea.

The CHAIR — Welcome 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 such privilege. For the benefit of Hansard could you give your name and business address, please.

Mr WYNTER — My name is Brad Wynter, from the City of Whittlesea. Our business address is 25 Ferres Boulevard, South Morang.

The CHAIR — With your presentation, would you like questions as you go or at the end?

Mr WYNTER — I would prefer to be interactive and give you guys an opportunity to question.

The CHAIR — You might lead off with a bit about what you do and how you see things, and we might ask some questions as you go.

Mr WYNTER — Certainly. First of all, my role at the City of Whittlesea is probably unique for local government in that I am like an innovation manager within local government. We established that in 1998. There were two of us. We have now grown that, and currently we have, I think, 15 staff in this particular area within the City of Whittlesea.

As you would probably be aware, the City of Whittlesea is a growth council. It is one of the fastest growing areas in Australia at the moment. Wyndham is probably the highest growth area in Australia at the moment, but Whittlesea is not far behind. I think we add about 8500 people per year to our population, and I think our current population from the last census was about 176 000. We have had some growth since then, so we are probably around 180 000 people within the municipality.

Working in innovation, one of the things that we have used heavily is technology as a driver of improvement within our council. As part of that process, we have found that a lot of the work that we do is not relevant to just the city of Whittlesea but on many occasions right across the local government sector. I will give you an example of that so that it will give you an idea of just some of the things that we do.

You are probably aware that in 1997 the state government changed the Food Act 1984 to look at food handling businesses because there had been a spate of food poisonings around the state. One of the changes to the Food Act was establishing a requirements for businesses to develop a food safety program with business categories broken up into different categories of high risk, medium risk and low risk. A compliance timetable was set for those businesses to comply with the new food safety program requirements. The process meant that a lot of businesses that previously had not been covered by the Food Act were now covered by the Food Act. Some of the examples would be child-care centres, because the people there cut up the fruit for the kiddies for morning tea; and aged services, which again were a high-risk group because food poisoning very much affects that particular demographic.

The changes meant that the whole system was not really very well thought through from a pragmatic perspective. At the first compliance date in March 1999 fewer than 50 per cent of the businesses had complied by developing a food safety program and having it approved through local government. We looked at that and found that the big impact on local government was that our environmental health officers had to do the desktop check of the food safety programs, and then they would follow that up with the inspection process at the premises.

We decided that there would be a better way of doing that, so we developed an online expert system where businesses could come in and answer simple questions about how they bought food, how they stored it, how they served it, how they reheated it et cetera. While they were answering those simple questions, it was joined to a HACCP, Hazard and Critical Control Points, database and it was automatically pulling together best practice stuff, based on their answers. They got through the questionnaire process, and then it would develop a full food safety program for their business and allow them to email that to their council. We worked with Food Safety — the state government department responsible — and that particular website still works based on the same principle. They have done a little bit more work around establishing these as templates. FoodSmart was the first template they signed off, and that system is still in place now. We did that with the state government on the basis that all local councils would get the benefit. That is the work that we do.

The CHAIR — I see on the notes that you are compiling a coworking centre. Can you describe that a bit?

Mr WYNTER — I will talk a little bit about where that came from. In a lot of the new growth parts they are rolling out new suburbs, converting farmland into urban land. Being a growth area, the thing we found was that a lot of residents were coming to council and complaining about the quality of the telecommunications infrastructure, so we had a look at this. People were buying a beautiful new home in a beautiful new community, and then they were getting dial-up capability. I am talking about 1999 here. That is when council said, 'No, we've got to do something about this. It's not right. We should really have good-quality — at least equivalent if not better quality telecommunications'.

We had a look at what was happening overseas, and we identified that in other places around the world councils were picking up on this issue and using their planning powers to get better outcomes for the local community. We changed our planning scheme in 2001 and required that in all new greenfield development the developer had to put in a conduit network that was suitable for optic fibre at the time of construction and hand that over to council as a council asset. Then we worked with developers. We did a whole range of things, but that is too long a list for this discussion. Basically our aim was to get advanced broadband infrastructure in place in the new greenfield suburbs.

What that then alerted us to, was that there is no point in just having the infrastructure in place. To get benefit out of it, businesses and the local community had to really exploit the benefits of this type of infrastructure. At the time we developed a strategy called a multimedia strategy. I think at the time the state government also had a multimedia strategy. We updated that last year to what we call an intelligent community strategy. Intelligent communities are communities that are effectively using broadband as an enabler for their local communities and also for local business. As part of that strategy we identified some key projects that could actually assist us to maximise the benefit of broadband.

Since that time in 2001 I think we have close to 15 000 premises with optic fibre out of the 60 000, so a quarter of our community has optic fibre. The majority of the rest has ADSL-type technology, advanced broadband infrastructure.

Mr HOWARD — With the developers, was there any initial kickback against this?

Mr WYNTER — There was huge kickback. You can imagine that they were kicking and screaming because of the additional cost. Interestingly, that sort of changed around the 2005–06 period because then they saw it as a marketing advantage. They were getting people wanting to come to live in their estates because they had advanced infrastructure in them. Then a number of developers took that outside the city of Whittlesea, doing that as a matter of course across the different new estates that they were delivering.

Mr DRUM — When it goes in with some of the other services, would you have any idea of what it would cost a developer?

Mr WYNTER — It really depends. In those days it was about $400 to $1000. The key issue is around the amount of rock that is in the ground, because most of the cost is in the civil works. If there is a lot of rock in the ground they either have to blast or, as is the case in our municipality where we have a lot of rock in the ground, instead of digging a narrow trench they dig a 1.5-metre-wide trench with an excavator and lift the rocks out, because it is cheaper than blasting them. As you can imagine, in that sort of the terrain it is a lot more expensive to deliver that sort of infrastructure.

Mr DRUM — Just on that, do they co-locate the fibre with other water pipes?

Mr WYNTER — Other infrastructure? Yes, they do, most of the time. It is not a requirement under the federal Telecommunications Act, but there is a suggestion that it is good to do that. Most of the developers do, because of the reduced costs. You are probably aware, especially for telecommunications, Telstra would never pay for that. It was always the developer that had to pay for those civil works. They would then notify Telstra, if they were the provider, and Telstra would come in and put in their conduit and infrastructure afterwards. The developers' subcontractors would then backfill and redo the surface. That was a pretty effective mechanism.

In 2012 we built an intelligent community strategy. We have been watching the intelligent community space for quite a while. The Intelligent Community Forum in New York basically rates communities around the world on

their use of broadband, and we were named in their top 21 international communities in 2007 and again this year. Just last week we were named in the Smart21 for 2014.

We have a lot of the infrastructure in place. How do we get some real benefit out of it? How does our community improve their social amenity? How do our businesses get competitive advantage? That strategy outlined a whole range of projects which we are now conducting. The coworking centre is one of those, and I will talk about that one.

The CHAIR — Can you describe it?

Mr WYNTER — The coworking centre was looking at what sorts of opportunities are there. One of the key issues we have at the moment is road infrastructure; it is not keeping up with our rapidly growing community. In the morning, if you have to drive into the city or somewhere else where you are working, it is a nightmare getting out of the suburbs, because most of the roads have not been duplicated. They are really struggling to do it. One of the things we looked at was establishing telework centres, and we are quite keen on the concept of teleworking. There is a range of inhibitors, but one of the big inhibitors to teleworking is broadband capability. If you do not have the broadband capability, there is no point teleworking. It is a terrible experience dealing with really slow infrastructure. It is a prerequisite; if you do not have it, then forget it.

Secondly, we looked at some of the other issues around teleworking and found OHS to be a big issue. Social isolation is another issue — people being home by themselves. If there are any risks, the employer is still responsible for those things. We looked at telework centres and identified that there are a number of people around the world who are using teleworking centres effectively. You can control some of the key elements of having enterprise-type broadband connectivity and OHS-compliant seating and spaces. Also the issue around social isolation is solved when you have people from their local community working in a telework-type centre.

We also saw there was an opportunity for community development. In a lot of our new communities it is a real issue. If you throw a few thousand people together in the one location and say, 'Go and make friends', it is a pretty difficult process. Generally you can measure its effectiveness by how many community groups are established over a period of time, and it takes a long time for that to occur in these greenfield areas. We looked at telework centres and then we identified that there was a new, evolving capability called coworking centres. Coworking centres are very much aimed at collaboration. That was the key around them. There are two main models: there is a closed model — that is, a membership-based model. I do not know if you have had a look at Hub Melbourne.

Mr HOWARD — Yes.

Mr WYNTER — That is a closed model. You can only go in there if you have a membership. Basically the focus of a lot of those is on being a fully commercial operation. It is also about establishing collaboration, especially for bigger businesses that find it difficult to establish collaboration and innovation within their own workforce, because the bigger you get the more bureaucratic you get and the harder it is to be innovative in those spaces.

Brad Krauskopf from Hub Melbourne has done a fantastic job in setting up a fully commercial operation there. That is probably more difficult to manage in a more remote location or in an outer suburban, rural or regional area, so we looked at a model that is coming out of Holland called Seats2Meet. The focus is again on collaboration, but it is about getting social entrepreneurs together in their local location. It is a low-cost model. Generally they are run in Holland by the libraries and other community organisations, so they are in effect cross subsidised in terms of the way they operate. The focus is very much on getting people from their own community to work together on innovative-type projects in their local community, whether that be heritage or improvement of their local communities or whatever it might be. That is the model that we really like, and it is probably more suited to our location. It ticks a number of other boxes too.

We basically have a community activities centre, so it is an existing building which has structured cabling through it. It has little flaps in the floor that you can lift up and get access to data and power.

Mr HOWARD — What was the building before it became a coworking centre?

Mr WYNTER — It is a community activities centre with an emphasis on sustainability. When we build new communities, one of the things we do is build community facilities, and these community activities centres are generally multifunction centres. They are probably a little bit like the neighbourhood houses but are a little bit larger because they are situated in growing communities. They run a whole range of programs; the particular one we have been talking about has a community garden, for example, to get people to come in to do community garden-type work.

There are a whole range of groups that use that centre: different community groups use that as a facility to organise and run their own programs. Council uses it as a maternal and child health centre. We have a maternal and child health nurse go out there two days a week and operate from one of the rooms. As a community centre what we have done is say, 'Here is an additional use, and we are going to pilot that for the next 12 months'. That is the process we are in at the moment. We are updating some of the technology there so that they can do things like videoconferencing, but it is an existing building just repurposed for this type of function.

The CHAIR — How is it funded? Is it fee for service or break even, or does the council subsidise it?

Mr WYNTER — The council runs these facilities anyway. The centre has a local community of management, and they actually have a room hire policy, so they basically charge a low rate for the room that covers things like power and water and those sorts of things. For this coworking room they are looking at charging approximately $20 a day per participant to use the coworking facility.

Mr HOWARD — Is it functioning now?

Mr WYNTER — No, not yet; we are in the planning stage at the moment. We have reached agreement with the management committee of the centre. I am pulling together now a seeding grant to set the centre up for coworking. That is going to be about $17 000. They have fibre to the building, so they have an advanced broadband network. Some of the seed money will go into raising the capacity of that optic fibre. I think they currently have 25 down and 5 up. We will move that to 100 megabits down and 40 up, and that will then cater for enterprise-type speeds for people who are using their laptops in the centre.

We are also upgrading the wi-fi. A lot of people bring their laptops in. I think we are spending around about $3000 to $4000 on advanced wi-fi so they will get really good speeds within the coworking centre. The aim is for the pilot to go for 12 months.

Mr HOWARD — How will you get people in? Do you have people ready to go in, or how will you attract people to go in?

Mr WYNTER — They advertise it through their normal marketing. There is a part-time coordinator at that centre. Fortunately the reason we picked this particular centre is that the coordinator there is actually a member of Hub Melbourne and understands how the hubs should work. The concept of a host within the centre is really important for these types of coworking centres. She will play that role, and she is training all the volunteers in how to be hosts. For example, Andrew might not know Paul, but Andrew is working on something that would be of real interest to Paul. The host would know this and would introduce them and say, 'Look, this is an area that you might be interested in working together on'. To give a rural example, Andrew might be a farmer and he might be doing some experimentation around crop rotation, and Paul might be more of a traditional farmer. They would be introduced so one could say to the other, 'This is what I am doing. Are you interested in looking at some of the rotation stuff?'.

It is really those sorts of things that the hosts do. That is what their role is. Volunteers are being trained to do that work. At the moment we are looking at the pilot. We will probably run three days a week, not the full week. We know that most people teleworking will not work five days a week offsite. They will generally work 1, 2 or at most 3 days at the coworking centre rather than in at work. There has been a big debate by some of the tech companies that building teams and maintaining teams is very difficult to do remotely. Generally most people will work 1, 2 or possibly 3 days a week in a coworking centre.

The other advantage that we have is that a lot of the people in our new communities have paid quite a bit of money for their new home/land package and they may have only one car. Generally the working person will take the car during the day for the five days a week, and we have issues around social isolation for a lot of the people there. We have poor public transport, so people are feeling trapped in these suburbs. So again the other

advantage we see is that it frees up the car for the non-working partner so they can go and do some of the things they want to do. We can see that has a range of benefits.

We are looking at a similar sort of concept on a smaller scale within our library network. We have one library at the moment, the Mill Park library, which we have connected to fibre. We are running a program called Digital Hub, which is doing a number of things. It is funded by the federal government, but it is raising awareness about the opportunities that broadband has to bring to local people. I was there this morning, and they are doing a whole range of things around raising people's awareness. They are also doing one-on-one training in dealing with these sorts of things.

But also they have open tech sessions, where you can bring in your wireless router — because when they get internet these days a lot of people have the wireless router to spread it around the home — and they will show you how to set it up and explain to you all the settings and what you need to do so that you can go home and plug it in and it will work. They are the sorts of things that the library is now doing in order to support people with this type of technology. A lot of this stuff is pretty inaccessible for people who have not come from a background of using technology. That is the coworking project. Are there any other questions about coworking?

Mr DRUM — Do you mainly use your Netherlands example to set it up?

Mr WYNTER — Seats2meet, yes.

Mr DRUM — And a little bit of help from, maybe, certain parts of the hub as well?

Mr WYNTER — Yes.

Mr DRUM — You mentioned that your main target would be social entrepreneurs.

Mr WYNTER — Yes. Because they are new communities a lot of the people in that particular area do not know each other. We really want to give an opportunity to the people who are interested in, for example, cleaning up the local creek and establishing an environmental group, to meet other people and start to form those sorts of groups. We see this as really the hub of that sort of activity.

The CHAIR — So it is more a hub of community activity rather than people going there and trying to grow businesses or starting their little entrepreneurial business?

Mr WYNTER — Yes. There will be some of that. We know from the library experience that because there is free wi-fi in the libraries a lot of local businesses use them. It is interesting, I was talking to the Telstra Shop owners/franchisees a couple of weeks ago and they said that before they had a shop in the main shopping centre they were actually working and running their business out of the library because of the free wi-fi. We have not measured it but we know anecdotally that a number of smaller microbusinesses are doing that. They are using the library as their base because it has really good broadband connectivity, it is generally a pretty welcoming space and there are other people there. It is not like the old days when you had to be quiet all the time. They are quite noisy and active spaces now. So we are finding the libraries are again another good spot for this sort of activity to occur.

Mr DRUM — Just moving slightly off that topic, we are asking some of our witnesses about their experience once they get just outside of their particular township. If you go 15 kilometres out into some of the hills around Whittlesea, do you find that you get very poor connectivity out there?

Mr WYNTER — Yes. We are doing some work at the moment around mobile connectivity, because again that is another one that just does not keep pace with the requirements. I do not know if you know the area, but the city of Whittlesea is about 500 square kilometres; it is quite a large municipality. The bottom third is very urbanised and the top two-thirds of the area is very rural. Right at the top we are looking at the Great Divide. Kinglake West is part of our municipality. Humevale and those sorts of areas are about the same. It is quite remote. Getting coverage has been an ongoing issue. We are not so much worried about the fixed line service; we are more concerned about the mobile coverage. What we have mainly done there is that we basically have a broadband register where people can say they have been seeking broadband but cannot get it for a range of reasons. We have been maintaining that register since about 2002. What we do is aggregate those comments per one area and then we advocate to the major carriers for connectivity for those areas.

Mr DRUM — As in a tower?

Mr WYNTER — Yes. Generally what happens is that they get them in dribs and drabs, just one or two people, and it just does not make a business case for them to do it. But if we can aggregate 10 or 20 then it is starting to get viable for them. We have done a fair bit of that, and we are looking at doing some more work on it probably early next year.

Mr DRUM — Anecdotally, Brad, do you know of many people who are in fact running substantial businesses from home?

Mr WYNTER — Lots. You may or may not be aware, but South Morang was a second-release site for the NBN. We have examples of businesses that have sold up in other parts of Melbourne and moved to South Morang in order to get the optic fibre. I will give you one example of an organisation called MoIP run by a guy called Anthony Overmars. He was running a home business from Kew providing voiceover IP types of services to the local community. He was paying $12 000 a month for his broadband connection in order to provide commercial grade backhaul for his VoIP solution.

He sold up and moved out to South Morang. He has four domestic fibre services coming in. He is paying $320 a month and he is saying the capacity is so much larger than what he had in Kew. The issue is that it is not a commercial grade service, so contention ratios could be an issue. But the pipe into his premises is so big now that he does not care; he could manage that because he has four domestic services that easily exceed what he had in Kew. He is really happy in that he has phenomenally lowered the cost of running his business. He has been really good with council because he is seeing that there are other opportunities to provide some of the mobile coverage. He also developed a VoIP solution for mobile. I think he has patented that; I think some of the other providers are now offering that. But he sees that there is a real market in that space as well.

Mr HOWARD — Is this project that you are doing part of the RDA — the what-do-you-call-it?

Mr WYNTER — ICT scorecard.

Mr HOWARD — Yes. What is that? Tell us a bit about that.

Mr WYNTER — That project is really about how you can effectively provide ICT assistance for micro and small businesses. For large and medium-sized businesses it is not a problem because they generally get consultants to come in and sort them out. But specifically microbusinesses do not have access; they are generally flat out running their businesses, and they do not have an opportunity to get their heads around this space.

We developed this concept of a self-report ICT survey to these businesses. They fill out the survey, which talks about how they use ICT. It also asks them to rate their local ICT providers/suppliers. The reason that is important is that we know from research that most of these micro and small businesses will buy or purchase ICT from local providers, because if something goes wrong they can knock on the door and say, 'Come around and fix it; it's broken', whereas they do not like buying from the big players, because generally they will get a call centre and they will not necessarily be able to get their problem fixed quickly.

They filled in the survey and sent it into us; we have got 1527 surveys in. We have been using a consultant who has had a benchmark survey study for a number of years in this place. He assesses each business against his benchmark study, and he can tell them how well they are performing for their sector — say it is the retail sector — compared to, on average, the rest of the country in the retail sector. Then we send a scorecard back to the business saying, 'This is how you compare to the rest of your sector, and these are some of the technologies that some of the best-practice people in businesses within your sector are using that you should have a look at, because it can help you make your business more competitive'. Those scorecards have now gone back to the businesses.

The other piece of work we have done is contacted the best rated ICT suppliers and said to them, 'What we want to do is match you to the areas that are in most need'. If it is the retail sector, we have identified they are not using voice over IP effectively or not at all. We are looking at a best-practice VOIP supplier to run workshops for the retail sector in that particular area. Instead of us running those sorts of economic development programs, all we are doing is brokering where the need is and where the best providers are.

Last week we went through a process where we got the best-practice suppliers to come in, and we videoed them. We gave them 10 to 15 minutes to talk about some of these topics at a very basic level. Of the couple that I saw last week, one was talking about voice over IP and using very non-technical language to explain what it is and what the benefits of this type of technology are. They are not allowed to sell; they are just providing information. We will vodcast those and put them on a portal site, which we will then point the businesses to.

In November we are running the first of our workshops. We will get in a group of businesses, and we will show a specific technology that they can take advantage of. The idea is very much around matching need to expertise.

Mr HOWARD — When you said, 'We will provide the workshop', is that the City of Whittlesea, the RDA or who is doing that?

Mr WYNTER — The RDA Northern Melbourne is running the project. Each of the councils will run different workshops, and we are splitting that up at the moment. This particular initiative has got a fair bit of coverage, so much so that the three other RDA regions around Melbourne have also joined, and they are now getting involved in the process. The concept has been picked up by three RDA regions in Western Australia. The ACT picked it up last week, and there are three areas in Queensland that are now taking this sort of approach.

The attractiveness of this is that in the past a lot of these sorts of awareness-raising and training sessions were very generalist. They just invited people and hoped they would come. Generally the number of people has dropped off over time, because it has not been specific to their needs, whereas we think this approach is probably a little different. We will tell you next year whether it works, because we will have been through the process by then, and if we think it works effectively we will continue to run it in the future. We will probably do the surveys every two years. We are already getting quite a few suggestions from the ICT providers that they are prepared to stick their hands in their pockets and help fund this.

Instead of having a blanket market, they can now market to sectors that need their services, so it is a really effective tool for them. We provide the aggregated survey information as well so that even outside this program they can use that information to plan how they are going to reach particular sectors and sell their services.

Mr HOWARD — Have there been any regional RDAs taking this up —

Mr WYNTER — Not yet.

Mr HOWARD — or have applicability in regions just as much?

Mr WYNTER — Very much so, I think. We have had a little bit of interest from Ballarat; one of the members from the Ballarat RDA rang us about this. We had a session probably about three weeks ago where we talked to councils about how they might use this and incorporate it into their economic development programs. A number of other areas around Victoria picked this up and said, 'Can we come along?'; and we said, 'Yes, that's fine, but we are not running the program in your particular area; but certainly it would be of value if you are interested in running this sort of program'. The idea is a good idea and it could be replicated anywhere. There is not an issue with it from that perspective.

Mr HOWARD — When will you be ready to provide the feedback, or when will the first stage be completed?

Mr WYNTER — The survey has been completed, so we have got a report now.

Mr HOWARD — The workshops I suppose are.

Mr WYNTER — Yes. We have got a report now with all the survey data. I can provide a copy to this committee if it is interested.

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr WYNTER — With the workshops, we are going to run a pilot in November just to see how well it works, and then the program is going to be run from February to June next year. It is probably now going to be all over Melbourne, because the other RDA regions want to have specific workshops in their particular areas.

Mr KATOS — Brad, when you are looking at the Seats2meet pilot, when are you looking at getting that off the ground — hopefully?

Mr WYNTER — It is ready to go now. My big issue is that I do not have the money. I have got to fund the community activity centre. I talked about the conduit model that the City of Whittlesea has applied now, and we have got about 14 000 premises with a conduit past them. It is a long story, but I am selling some of our conduit to Telstra. As soon as that comes through, I will get the money then to fund the coworking trial. We have been through all of the work in the coworking trial; they are waiting on me now to get the money, the $17 000 to upgrade some of their facility to run it. But they are ready and raring to go. They have even done their advertising and all the rest, so the community knows it is coming. I am the thing that is holding it up at the moment. Until I get the money from one area and then funnel it into the other area I cannot run the program. There is nothing stopping it, except for me at the moment — and getting this Telstra deal through..

Mr DRUM — Brad, are there many examples at your council of where you have people working from home?

Mr WYNTER — Yes, there are. There was a trial run by Melbourne University. The University of Melbourne did an investigation on teleworking for last year's telework week, and we were one of the government participants. We are not named in the report, but we were one of the government participants in that. We identified quite a number of people who are teleworking, but we do not have a formal structure within the City of Whittlesea. It seems that the way these things are run is that they have an agreement between the line manager and their employee. What we are looking at doing now is putting in a corporate approach with some corporate policy behind it and some better requirements. While we have had things like OH&S checks — you cannot work from home unless you have had an OH&S check of your home environment — —

Mr DRUM — How do you feel about that, Brad?

Mr WYNTER — That is fine. Employers have a duty of care to their employees. We are looking at introducing taking photos of where they are going to work and provide that back to our OH&S guys, and we will check it out and make sure it is suitable. If it is at the kitchen table, we are going to say, 'No, that is not a good thing', but if it is an ergonomic chair in a separate office space, yes, that is no problem.

The biggest impediment around telework is management's ability to be comfortable with it. Again, we are looking at a management-by-objectives approach not just for people who are teleworking but also for people at work as well. Presenteeism is one of the big issues they are facing now in HR, where people have actually come to work physically but are daydreaming and not focusing on what they are doing. At the moment that is probably just as big a problem — actually more so — than teleworking, because we know from the research that people who telework generally are a lot more productive than they are when they are at work, because they do not have distractions et cetera. So on average you are better off teleworking from a productivity point of view.

From that research paper the University of Melbourne did we identified a range of issues. We did not come up really well; we were one of the lowest in capability in terms of teleworking, but we are now working to improve that within the organisation. It was done very informally, and in some areas the management were really good. They would actually get people teleconferencing each day and having meetings — some people on site and some people off site — via teleconferencing. Others just said, 'Go home and bring the work back tomorrow'. So it was very varied. Again, part of that is around management training and getting a certain standard in terms of management.

Mr HOWARD — I was just going to follow up in regard to the surveys you did of the local microbusinesses. Are the sorts of things they are saying they want in terms of IT assistance the sorts of things you would have expected, or were there some surprises in there?

Mr WYNTER — There were not really any surprises there. I think the issue is that they are looking for target information, and generally they do not want it in print. They prefer it in a workshop environment, but they want something that is specific to their particular needs. That is the feedback that has been coming back. That is why we have designed it around the workshop-type approach. Often with the general information they just do not have time to read a lot of stuff; they are out there busy running the businesses. So it is really the targeted

stuff. The scorecard was really effective in that it actually gave some tips about where they might look to improve their business.

As I said, we will see how the workshops go and whether they actually meet their needs. The way we are doing it at the moment is that we are building a set of very introductory-type workshops and then some more in-depth stuff that is very specific and niche. Again, we will not be running them; the ICT suppliers will be running those. Again, it is different, and because they are highly rated ICT suppliers we expect that it will improve their businesses and that they will get some work out of it as well.

The CHAIR — Do you have any final comments you would like to leave us with, Brad?

Mr WYNTER — I think, for rural and regional areas one of the things is to make use of existing facilities you have there. A lot of these programs build new buildings and all the rest, and I think often it is better to use existing centres, whether they are neighbourhood houses, community centres, libraries or whatever they might be, and make sure they have the prerequisites in place, like broadband. If you do not have broadband there, it is really difficult to do this stuff. People will not do it. So it is around making sure that those facilities are well equipped. Then I think the other thing is to make sure that you have the supports in place — the people supports — whether it is awareness raising or training.

Again, I have worked a fair bit with the libraries and the library association of Victoria and also ALIA at the Australian level. I think there are real opportunities because libraries are really going through a transition process at the moment. They were instituted when everyone was uneducated and books were scarce. Now we are awash with information, and people are looking for quite specific guidance and assistance. I think libraries are having to reinvent themselves in this space. Having said that, I think libraries are starting to do that very effectively, but they need those sorts of supports in order to make that transition from the old style to the new style.

The CHAIR — Right. Very good. Thanks very much for making time to come and give the presentation, Brad. It has been very informative and very helpful to our committee. In about 14 days time you get a copy of the Hansard transcript from Lilian. You will be able to make corrections to obvious errors, but other than that it will be as it is.

Mr WYNTER — Okay.

The CHAIR — Once again, thank you very much, and all the best with your endeavours with your coworking space.

Witness withdrew.