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# Commonwealth Games 2026: An Event Industry Perspective

Submission to the  
Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid

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## INTRODUCTION

The reason why this Inquiry is happening is because the Victorian government didn't value, respect or properly utilise the unique skills, experience and capabilities that Victoria's event industry has. The very things that built Victoria's reputation as a place that consistently delivers world class events.

It is also very telling because in mid-2021 there was a Legislative Council inquiry to look into the Event Industry because the Victorian government didn't value, respect or properly utilise the unique skills, experience and capabilities that Victoria's event industry has.

Had the Victorian government listened to the 2021 Inquiry - and the good work a number of its own MLCs did on that Inquiry - then it is unlikely that there would be a need for an Inquiry today. Had it listened to the 2021 Inquiry and learnt from it, it would have understood the role that the Event Industry and experienced events professionals should play on major events like the Commonwealth Games.

Sadly this did not happen and many of the same mistakes were repeated again - resulting in what is arguably the largest debacle in the long history of events in Australia. The Victorian government suddenly walking away from the 2026 Commonwealth Games. Not even being able to get a viable plan for the event together.

I write this submission as someone who has very proudly worked in Victoria's Event Industry for over four decades. After all that our Event Industry has gone through over the last few years, it is upsetting to be writing this.

Over the years I have organised and produced a vast range of events, as well as having consulted on large government projects and to major event companies and entertainment promoters - so I have a very comprehensive and detailed understanding of events and Victoria's Event Industry.

This submission is also based on my experience of being a part of Save Victorian Events - a group of very experienced event people who were very concerned about what was happening to our industry because of the Covid pandemic. Our work began in mid 2020 and ended up involving over 2,000 people from more than 900 businesses from right across Victoria's Event Industry.

This included doing a number of very detailed surveys of the Event Industry to quantify the impact on the pandemic so we could inform governments and the media to push for change for our industry.

In my role coordinating the campaign, I heard the stories of hundreds of people from right across the Event Industry - many of whom I knew personally. There were so many heartbreaking stories as people were losing everything they had worked for. Victoria's Event Industry had been left for dead by government. There is still no real policy for events or to support Victoria's Event Industry as it rebuilds from the pandemic.

Hence I feel compelled to speak up as it is the very same attitude and approach by government that caused so much unnecessary damage to our industry and the people and businesses within it that has led to the Commonwealth Games debacle.

Time and time again, we saw senior people in government with little to no real event experience - let alone major event experience - decide that they knew far better than the Event Industry, and be totally unwilling to listen to or learn from the highly experienced people in the Event Industry.

Our industry was not even viewed as an industry. Our vast skills and experience were not recognised, valued, or even called upon.

With the Commonwealth Games they ignored even the most basic principles of event management.

Sadly, because of all of this, the Commonwealth Games were always going to end in tears.

This document outlines:

- What the Event Industry is.
- The impact of the Covid pandemic on the Event Industry.
- What the involvement of the Event Industry would have been with the Games.
- The causes of the Commonwealth Games debacle.

It is scandalous that it could be that Victoria has gone from being known around the world as a place with an excellent reputation for consistently delivering very successful major events - including one of the most successful Commonwealth Games ever - to being one of the only places in the world to have ever walked away from a Games. And walked away not because of an external circumstance beyond its control, but simply due to very poor management.

However, it is a decline that has actually happened over many years - with a near complete lack of event policy or support for our industry, and the relevant government department and agency being missing in action all along. The Commonwealth Games debacle is the end result of all of this.

## THE EVENT INDUSTRY IN VICTORIA

At well over \$15 billion in terms of direct spend in Victoria (prior to Covid), the Event Industry is in economic terms a larger industry than the whole sporting sector, a few times larger than the performing arts, over seven times larger than the music industry, and is worth well over one third of what is considered to be Victoria's 'visitor economy'. It is a large industry that touches the lives of nearly all Victoria's on a regular basis and in many ways.

### WHAT IS THE EVENT INDUSTRY?

Victoria's Event Industry is the people and businesses involved in the professional creation and management of special events in and from Victoria.

### TYPES OF EVENTS

The Event Industry covers many types of events, but some of the main categories include:

- **Business Events** - including business meetings, product launches, conferences, exhibitions, expos, incentives, brand activations - for the government, not-for-profit and corporate sectors
- **Public and Community Events** - from the simplest community events up to the likes of St Kilda Festival
- **Charity Events** - such as funding dinners, concerts, and galas, etc...
- **Festivals** - such as music festivals, the Fashion Festival or Rising
- **Major Events** - such as the Australian Open or the Commonwealth Games, which in turn comprise many smaller events and experiences within them or relating to them including business events, brand activations and experiences, public events, community events, etc...
- **Mass Participation Events** - such as fun runs and triathlons
- **Professional Weddings** - professionally run weddings and similar gatherings

Events range from simple community events with a few dozen people up to major events with tens of thousands of people. From very modest budgets up to multi-million dollar budgets.

While much of the media attention is on the really large public events, it is the 120,000+ other events that have by far the most impact on the lives of Victorians and that provide the vast majority of the economic benefit and employment. As an example, business events alone are worth more than \$12 billion in terms of direct spend in Victoria.

### PURPOSE

It is important to understand the real purpose of events. And this is particularly important in the context of the Commonwealth Games as it involved most of these things:

- Often business events will be about bringing an organisation's stakeholders together to inform them, to build teams, to change the culture of an organisation, to raise moral, or to get engagement on major change. Increasingly they are about embracing creativity and innovation,

and new technologies, business models and approaches. They can also be about promoting their products and services to new or existing clients or markets.

- For a not-for-profit it can be to promote their cause, to educate their members, to raise funds for their work. More many charities, it is their only sources of income.
- For a community event it can be to build the sense of community, to connect people, to enable greater social cohesion, or just to raise the spirits of the community. Events help build the social fabric of the community. Fed Square provides a great example of this.
- Mass participation events inspire involvement and encourage people to lead more active and healthy lives.
- Some events are about marketing and tourism. The F1 Grand Prix is an example of an event held in Victoria with the express purpose of marketing Victoria and of bringing people to Victoria.

There has never been a time when events have been more needed or more valuable than now - coming out of a pandemic that has had such a huge impact on the whole community.

## MAIN ROLES WITHIN THE EVENT INDUSTRY

The Event Industry comprises a vast range of people and businesses. These include:

- **Event Organisers:** event companies, professional conference organisers, creative event agencies, experiential agencies, exhibition organisers, etc...
- **Suppliers:** audio-visual, theming, stand builders, expo rental, lighting, audio, rigging, staging, guest management, content creation, presenters, entertainment, amusements, etc....
- **Professional Services:** environment designers, producers, creative producers, screen content designers, stage managers, show directors, editors, graphic designers, production designers, animators, site managers, risk managers, production managers, MCs, facilitators, speakers, musicians, etc.....
- **Venues and Caterers:** conference centres, caterers, convention centres, hotel convention centres, and so on.

The vast majority of the economic activity and employment is by small businesses. These range from highly skilled freelancers and contractors (the professional service providers) up to larger supplier businesses.

## AS AN EXPORT INDUSTRY

The Event Industry is often viewed as just being about tourism. About helping to deliver hotel room nights and side trips to the penguins. But that is just a modest byproduct of events and not the purpose of most.

While the Tourism Industry is solely about bringing people to Victoria, the Event Industry is not.

A large proportion of Victorian Event Industry businesses export their events, products and services right around Australia. And while the final event might be held in another state, a lot of the employment and economic benefit will still happen in Victoria.

A lot of the economic benefit happens in the location that the event is organised from as well as in the location where the event is held. So when Victorian event companies hold an event in another state, it is still bringing very considerable economic, and other, benefit to Victoria. The same with the Victorian event industry businesses that provide their services around Australia and overseas.

## THE VICTORIAN EVENT INDUSTRY BY THE NUMBERS

There has been much conjecture about what the Event Industry is and the relative sizes of different parts of the Event Industry and of other industries that sometimes get viewed as being part of the Event Industry.

Below is a summary of the direct spends of some of the main parts of the Victoria's Event Industry (prior to Covid). It was compiled by Save Victorian Events and is largely based on two Ernst Young studies of some of the main parts of the Event Industry as well as on data from representative groups from specific parts of the Event Industry.

Noting that this is based on direct spend and not on the various 'economic multipliers' that often get touted and have little basis in fact. These numbers will come as no surprise to those who work across much of the Event Industry but may be surprising to people outside of the Event Industry.

## VICTORIAN EVENT INDUSTRY

Type of Event	Direct Spend	% of Total
• Business Events	\$12.9b	79.3%
• Major Events	\$0.84b	5.2%
• Festivals and Concerts	\$0.83b	5.1%
• Community and Public Events	\$0.60b	3.7%
• Professional Weddings	\$1.10b	6.8%
<b>Total Event Industry</b>	<b>\$16.27b</b>	

### NOTES:

Business Events figures drawn from EY study for BECA 2015 and 2019 update. Update total direct spend for business events in Australia \$35.7b and using Victorian market share of 36% from 2015 study.

Major Events, Festivals and Concerts, Professional Sport and Venue Based Live Music from EY study for LEIF 2021. It is assumed - based on other sources - that Victoria's market share is 28%. And estimate partially based on data from AFA that this is fairly evenly split between concerts/festivals and other parts of 'live performance'.

Sadly no studies have been done on Community and Public events and other events. This is an estimate based on direct industry knowledge and data about agricultural shows and the like.

Professional Weddings is from industry data provided to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Support for the Tourism and Events Sectors.

## EVENTS BEING VALUED FOR WHAT THEY REALLY DO

While the economics are important, events need to be valued for what they really do. And valued for the very broad and important contributions that they may make to Victoria and Australia in so many different ways. And this is very relevant when thinking about the overall benefits of the Commonwealth Games.

To date in government policy, events have only been valued as either being part of the Arts (a small proportion) or in terms of the tourists they might bring to a destination (a modest proportion). While some events are part of the Arts and some events do bring some tourists to destinations, the vast majority of event's aren't or don't and actually primarily give many other very significant benefits.

Even with events that do bring tourists to a destination, the real benefits of the events go far beyond just hotel room nights and side trips to the penguins. These much larger primary benefits need to be valued.

Similarly, the extraordinary and unique skills and experience of the Event Industry and its many people and businesses need to be recognised and valued. The Event Industry has an extraordinary amount of capability in design and creative development, strategy, complex logistics, project management, site infrastructure and management, contingency planning, risk management, and the like. All things that were very relevant and were needed in dealing with the Covid crisis. And all relevant for delivering a major event like the Commonwealth Games.

The value of events can be broken up into a few different areas:

### COMMUNITY

Events play an important role in bringing communities together, in overcoming isolation and loneliness, in building a sense of community, and getting people working together.

Events also play a key role in helping not-for-profits and charities to promote their work, to involve people in their work, and to raise the funds for their operations.

Events help to teach and educate. A huge number of events and conferences are primarily about sharing knowledge and educating people.

Mass participation events - such as fun runs and the like - provide a good example of events that actively contribute to the overall health and wellbeing of the community as well as bringing people together.

### ECONOMIC

Events in Victoria are responsible for a direct spent of over \$15 billion a year. The Event Industry employs over 70,000 people. The exporting of event services right around Australian, and overseas, brings considerable money back to Victoria - in turn generating more employment and prosperity. This should be all be valued.

Events play a critical role in driving creativity, innovation, change and the transition to a digital economy.

Business events play a key role in helping organisations to grow, to embrace and go through major changes, to innovate and learn, and support their employees and stakeholders.

They play an essential role in the professional development of people in all kinds of professions and industries. They promote research. They encourage innovation. They encourage creativity.

More broadly, they play an incredibly important role in building confidence in the economy and in the state.

## **POSITIONING AND PROMOTING VICTORIA**

Events play a very key role in how Victoria is viewed around Australia and how Australia is viewed around the world. This goes far beyond just attracting tourists or the like. They play a key role in showing that Victoria is innovative, in showing that Victoria is a great place to work and live, and in promoting Victoria's industries and businesses.

The many people and businesses from Victoria's Event Industry that export their products, services and events around Australia, and around the world, play a very practical role in representing and promoting Victoria and what is great about it.

## THE IMPACT OF THE COVID PANDEMIC ON VICTORIA'S EVENT INDUSTRY

Victoria's Event Industry is a large, well established industry that - prior to the pandemic - organised [more than 120,000 events a year](#) that were worth well [in excess of \\$15 billion in terms of direct spend](#), and employed [over 70,000 people](#).

During the pandemic, more than 100,000 events worth well over \$10 billion in Victoria were lost. And these numbers are very conservative as for quite a while nearly all events were cancelled.

Most Event Industry businesses lost of the majority of their income. The results from the Save Victorian Events February 2021 survey (included in Appendix A) showed that [only 27% who were working full time in the Event Industry at the beginning of this crisis were still working full time](#). Many businesses closed and a vast number of jobs were lost.

Save Victorian Events' survey results that were released on August 30 2021 (during the sixth lockdown), showed that [34% of businesses had had all their events cancelled until the end of the year and 61% had had most cancelled](#).

[At that time, only 27% of event businesses thought they were likely to survive until the end of the year.](#)

(Noting that it is understood that Visit Victoria started actively pursuing the 2026 Commonwealth Games soon after this in September 2021.)

In late 2021 it was estimated that [about three quarters of people from the technical side of our industry had left the industry](#). Sadly, many still haven't returned.

The Save Victorian Events January 18 2022 survey of the Victorian Event Industry - which was during the Omicron outbreak - (also included in Appendix A) had similarly grim results.

Event industry businesses earned income of [just 19% of their normal income for the period of April 2020 to August 2021](#), and [only 34% of their normal income for the period of September to December 2021](#). And that due to the Omicron outbreak [the majority of events for the first quarter of 2022 were cancelled or postponed](#).

(The Victorian Government announce soon after this that they were going to try to win the 2026 Commonwealth Games, and soon after confirmed they had reached agreement for an exclusive bidding period.)

These results showed the devastating impact of the pandemic on the Event Industry and that rebuilding the industry will take a long time. But the impact went far beyond just numbers. The personal toll on many event people was immense - with many still dealing with mental health issues from the experience. Many businesses face a very long road to rebuilding to where they were before the pandemic.

Most Victorian Event Industry businesses received no targeted federal or Victorian government financial support. This is in stark difference to the support given to the Arts, tourism, sport and other industries.

## VICTORIAN PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO SUPPORT FOR THE EVENTS AND TOURISM SECTORS

Following the work of the Save Victorian Events campaign that was supported by [over 2,000 people from more than 900 organisations right across the Event Industry](#), the Victorian Legislative Council set up an Inquiry into Support for the Events and Tourism Sectors. It began its public hearings in April 2021 and released its final report in August 2021.

This was a landmark Inquiry as we understand that it was the first parliament inquiry in Australia into the Event Industry, and probably the first one to properly include the Event Industry.

[The Inquiry's final report left no doubt that the Event Industry is an industry in its own right, has a vast number of highly skilled and specialised event people, and is an industry that makes a huge contribution to life in Victoria.](#)

I would hope that the committee has made itself aware of this 2021 Inquiry as it provides an insight into the Event Industry and the situation in the Event Industry during the Covid pandemic.

Here is a link to the Inquiry - including the submissions, transcripts of hearing, and final report:

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/eic-lc/contact/1010-eic-lc/inquiry-into-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-the-tourism-and-events-sectors>

Save Victorian Events made a submission to the Inquiry on behalf of the Event Industry that contained many detailed recommendations about how the Event Industry could be supported, how Victoria could develop its Event Industry, and how Victoria could again be the preeminent event state and take a leading role with a forward thinking event policy.

Here is a link to the Save Victorian Events submission:

[https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCEI/COVID-19\\_Tourism/Submissions/S007\\_Save\\_Victorian\\_Events\\_Redacted.pdf](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCEI/COVID-19_Tourism/Submissions/S007_Save_Victorian_Events_Redacted.pdf)

It should be noted that the work of the Event Industry working together as the Save Victorian Events campaign did have some impact. It got the \$20 million Victorian Event Support Package in place. It helped get the jointly Victorian and Federally funded Business Costs Assistance Program grants extended to non-employing businesses and to some sole traders, as well as getting the higher two tiers of the grants added. And finally, the \$230 million Covid cancel event insurance fund (which sadly up and running just as the lockdowns finished).

Save Victorian Events strongly advocated that events, and the Event Industry, could and should play a critically important role in helping drive Victoria's recovery and return to prosperity. And certainly pushed for an event led recovering for Victoria.

Noting that support was specifically sought for small and medium sized events - and not for major events - as these more modest events involve far more people and businesses from right across the Event Industry. (Refer to Appendix B.) And, they have much shorter lead times so the benefit would get to people and businesses much faster that it would with major events that can have lead times of years.



The Save Victorian Events campaign all along pushed for the creation of a dedicated Events Victoria unit - just as there is Creative Victoria for the Arts, Sport & Recreation Victoria for sport, Visit Victoria for tourism, etc...

The aim for Events Victoria was for the Victorian Government to finally have an area dedicated to supporting and developing Victoria's Event Industry that employed people who had real experience of the Event Industry and a real understanding of how to support the Event Industry to rebuild and to help rebuild Victoria's capability and reputation as a leading event state.

The government still doesn't have an area dedicated to the Event Industry and still doesn't have a strategy for the Event Industry. All there is for the Event Industry is a mere few paragraphs in the state's tourism strategy.

The Commonwealth Games was announced by the Victorian Government as its main support for the Event Industry following the pandemic. This has been repeated many times - including in the lead up to the 2022 election.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE EVENT INDUSTRY

Fortunes within the Event Industry have been mixed over the last year and a bit since there was confirmation that there would be no more lockdowns.

Many event businesses have been doing well. But others have had a much harder time.

Tier 1 events have been doing very well. But once you get to tier 2 and 3 events the results are more mixed. Especially now as people are getting more nervous about the economic situation and are being more careful with their spending.

There are still serious struggles with resources as the Event Industry slowly works to rebuild its skills base - as many highly skilled people haven't returned to our industry. There are still shortages of many items leading to significant cost increases across the industry at a time when overall budgets haven't been increasing.

Regional events have also been very challenging. Over the last year - and especially over the summer - many events were postponed or cancelled due to the very long periods of adverse weather and the flooding. As well as the direct affects, this further dampened consumer confidence and made consumers even less willing to purchase tickets in advance of events. Hence a lot of events were lost.

The recent Creative Australia audience outlook survey showed that since the pandemic people buy tickets to events much later than before. It showed that 50% of people now don't buy their tickets until less than two weeks out of the event, and 35% until less than a week before the event. This means that organisers are now having to take huge risks on whether people will buy tickets.

Hence the Commonwealth Games really was seen as a positive and as a morale booster for many regional event people. It was something they could look forward to and work towards.

It will take years for Victoria's Event Industry to fully rebuild after the Covid pandemic.

## **EVENT INDUSTRY VIEWS ON THE COMMONWEALTH GAMES**

### **DIFFERING VIEWS ON BIDDING**

When it was announced in February 2022 that the Victorian Government was bidding for the Commonwealth Games, there were differing views in Victoria's Event Industry.

Some thought it was a good thing as it would generate work for their part of the industry.

Others thought it wouldn't be a good thing as Melbourne 2006 had displaced many other events - so causing a loss of work for some in the Event Industry.

Others thought that the money could be far better spent supporting small and medium sized events - which would have gotten money to much more of the event industry and much quicker.

Noting that a large proportion of the spending on the Commonwealth Games that relates to the Event Industry would not have been until late 2025 / early 2026 - so four years after the initial announcement. Whereas the need for support for our industry was immediate and would continue to a few years. Just as the need for events to support communities, organisations and industry as they recover and rebuild following the worst of the pandemic was more immediate.

And, that it is better to be investing in events that Victoria can own and can keep happening - instead of on a one off event.

Save Victorian Events did push for an events led recovering for Victoria (see Appendix B) as well as in its submission to the parliamentary inquiry. However, this quite specifically said that it was small to medium sized events that should be the focus on and not the major events

### **CONSISTENT VIEWS ABOUT CANCELLING**

While there may have been differing views about bidding for the Commonwealth Games, the views about the sudden cancellation of the Games are quite consistent in the Event Industry.

Suddenly walking away from an event goes against everything that event people and the Event Industry stands for. Our industry is about making things happen successfully even when there are serious challenges.

We do often have huge challenges on our events. So our industry's approach is always to continue to work to find solutions to problems. In this case there is no doubt that the Commonwealth Games could have been reconfigured to largely using existing venues and infrastructure, and at a cost not too dissimilar to the Gold Coast 2018 games.

The sudden cancellation of the Games does significantly impact Victoria's hard earned reputation as a place that consistently delivers excellent event and major events. We are already getting this feedback from people involved with securing major business events, for example. This reputation was gained on the hard work and investment of a vast number of Victorian event people and businesses over many decades. Hence the anger and frustration that Victoria's reputation as a place that can deliver events has been tarnished.

It was not a great surprise that the feedback from across the Event Industry after the announcement that the Games had been cancelled due to costs was that they haven't even been asked for budget costs for the Games. And, that they had never been asked about different ways that things could have been done to make the Games vastly more economical.

Obviously, the Event Industry has a vast amount of experience in taking lateral approaches to planning and building temporary event infrastructure - as our industry does it all the time.

There are many events in a normal year in Australia that are done on green fields sites and cater to 50,000 to 150,000+ people - i.e. events that require the building of complete site infrastructure, large security operations, traffic and transport operations, first aid and medical operations, etc... Many of these events are built in just a few weeks, though some like the Grand Prix take a number of months.

So there is a lot of major event expertise in Australia.

Just as there are many Australian event people who have built temporary event facilities and run major events all around the world.

## VICTORIAN EVENT INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT IN THE GAMES

Unsurprisingly, the Event Industry does play an integral role in so many parts of the delivery of a major event like the Commonwealth Games.

A project like this does also involve a significant construction component. Just as it involves a significant sport component.

Industry veteran Howard Freeman told the Victorian Parliamentary inquiry back in April 2021, that when you go to a large concert and see five people on stage performing there will be another 1,000 people who will have made it happen. This is generally not understood except by those who work on the coal face of the Event Industry. This gives a clue to the vast number of event people involved with a major event like the Commonwealth Games - especially when spread over a vast number of geographic locations.

On an event like the Commonwealth Games which effectively had a four and a half year lead time - from initial work on the proposal in September 2021 to delivery in March 2026 - (though noting that the winding down after the event will also take many months) different types of people and businesses will be involved for different periods of time.

Many involved with the creation, planning and management of the event would be involved for up to a few years. The other extreme is some of those working on site who might only be involved in the very final lead up. Then, there would be a lot that were recently bidding for tenders or gearing up to be able to bid for tenders or to make their businesses ready for the Games.

The people and businesses involved can be broken into a number of different areas, including:

### EVENT PEOPLE DIRECTLY ENGAGED

People directly employed by the Commonwealth Games or related organisations with event skill sets such as event management, infrastructure planning, traffic and transport, security, etc... They are involved in the overall planning and management of the event as well as the management and operation of all the different event precincts.

A good number of the 150 people who were until recently employed by the Games would fall into this category. Sadly, event industry recruitment people have been inundated with calls from them as they now try to find new jobs.

Noting also that some specialist event companies with these skill sets would also likely to have been engaged. Companies that provide these event management and consulting services to other major events in Australia and around the world.

### OPENING AND CLOSING CEREMONIES

The tender process for an event company to produce the opening and closing ceremonies was well down the track at the time the Games were cancelled. The company - or consortium of companies - that would have performed this role would directly employ and contract in a vast array of event specialists including: executive producers, event producers, creative directors, production

designers, technical directors, directors, production managers, site managers, stage managers, animators, content producers, etc...

They would also engage a vast array of production and site infrastructure suppliers which are outlined below.

It was puzzling that this tender came under the category of "Film and theater production support services". It seemed that there was no category for event services or similar event related categories with the Victorian Government tendering system for the Games.

The tender documents clearly showed that those who had written the documents had little idea of what they needed or wanted.

## **FESTIVALS AND LIVE SITES**

Another area that had just been released for tender was for event companies to produce the cultural festivals and live sites for all of the different locations that the Games would be held in.

Again these companies would directly employ and contract in a vast array of event specialists including: executive producers, event producers, creative directors, production designers, technical directors, directors, production managers, site managers, stage managers, etc...

These companies would also engage a vast array of production and site infrastructure suppliers which are outlined below.

## **SPORTS PRESENTATIONS**

Another specialist area is the event company, or companies, to produce all of the sports presentations. So all of the medal presentations and the like that happen for every sport and in every venue at the Games.

Again, this involves a specialised version many of the skill sets mentioned in the last two areas and a similar array of production suppliers.

## **CORPORATE HOSPITALITY**

There is normally a large corporate hospitality and event program as part of the Commonwealth Games involving sponsors and other official partners.

This normally involves event managers and many other event people and businesses.

## **RELATED BUSINESS EVENTS**

There will always be many business events held as part of the Commonwealth Games. In 2006, for example, there were a number of large business events - including meetings, conferences and exhibitions - organised to coincide with the Games.

As well as many business events that are run quite separately to the Games but to coincide with the Games. Whether these are held by Games sponsors or just other organisations that want to capitalise of people being here, or bringing people here, for the Games.

These business events involve most of the types of event people and businesses mentioned in the previous few areas.

## **BRAND ACTIVATIONS**

Nowadays brand activations and brand experiences are a huge part of all major events. Some of these activations and experiences will be located within the Games sites, and some will be run separately from the Games but be held in the same cities and towns as the Games events.

These event companies and experiential agencies directly employ and contract in producers, creative directors, production managers, site managers, etc...; as well as set and exhibition builders, production suppliers and the like.

Brand activations and brand experiences are a huge part of the Event Industry nowadays though often not well understood.

## **COMMUNITY EVENTS**

There are also normally a vast range of community events linked to the Games. And this would have been especially the case with the regional areas - so that they can further involve their communities and leverage the tourism opportunities of the Games.

Again, they involve a full range of event people and businesses for their planning and delivery.

## **LEAD UP EVENTS**

While much of the focus is on what happens at the time of the Games, there is always a lot of event activity in the lead up to a major event like the Games. In regional areas many were starting their build up to involve and to leverage the potential tourism opportunities. It had certainly been flagged that there would be support for a range of lead up events.

## **PRODUCTION**

Many, many components of the Games - including both those directly organised by the Games and those linking in in an informal way - will involve a wide range of production suppliers and personnel. This includes the opening and closing ceremonies, presentations and other activities in all venues, festivals, live sites, and other related events.

It should be noted that while a modest amount of this production could have come from regional areas, a majority would have come from Melbourne.

In many cases these suppliers would have to invest in considerable additional equipment and personnel to be able to cater for the Games. This is especially true after the huge loss of skilled personnel during the pandemic. As well as the loss of equipment from the Event Industry.

These production suppliers will include:

- Audio
- Lighting
- Rigging

- Aerial rigging
- Staging
- Backline
- Video screens
- Video production
- Talkback and communication
- Projection
- Set design and theming
- Costuming

## **SITE INFRASTRUCTURE**

Similarly, all of these components will also need a vast array of temporary site infrastructure. Again, a lot of this will be specialist event site infrastructure that comes from Event Industry suppliers.

These event site infrastructure suppliers include:

- Event power systems - including generators, distribution boards, cabling, cable covers, etc...
- Marquees and temporary structures
- Crowd control barriers
- Two way radio networks
- Furniture
- Portable buildings
- Toilet facilities

## **BROADCAST**

The Games also involve a large amount of television production. While one could argue that this is really the television industry, with outside broadcasts there is always a huge involvement of Event Industry production and site infrastructure suppliers to make them happen - especially in a case like this where there is a vast media component with media companies from around the world requiring production and site infrastructure support.

## **TALENT**

There is also a vast number of performing talent. From people to MC components to a huge array of performers.

## **SERVICES**

And finally, all of these components will require a broad array of event services.

These event services include:

- Production crew
- Site crew
- Catering
- Security
- Crowd management

- Venue management
- Cleaning
- Risk management
- First aid and medical

## TEMPORARY INFRASTRUCTURE EXAMPLE



The Bjork concert that was part of the Perth Festival earlier this year provides a good example of the type of temporary infrastructure the Event Industry has in Australia nowadays. It was the first outing for Stagekings' Irmarfer Wave55 structure.

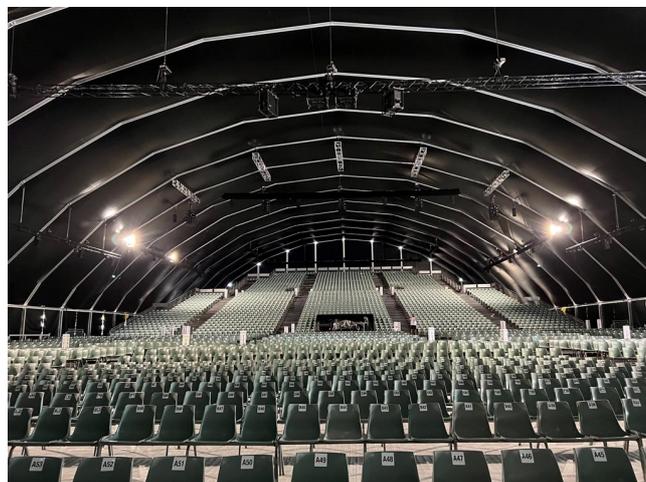
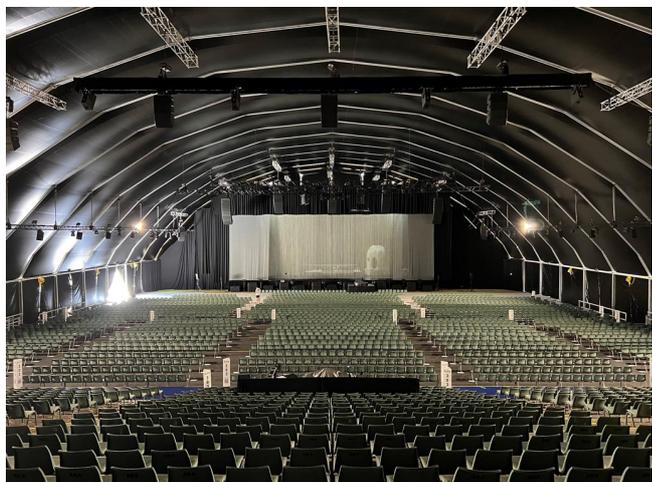
The Wave55 is a freestanding structure that is 100 metres long, 55 metres wide and 18 metres high. So a total of 5,500 square metres.

It can be build on a flat surface - like in this case on grass in Langley Park. The whole thing travels in five 40 foot

shipping containers and can be **set up in less than two weeks**. Its structure has the weight capacity to easily hold concert audio, lighting and video rigs. And then adding in a modular floor and seating - which are also standard rental items.

To put this in perspective, that is larger than the area required for the main Games media centre - and, I understand, in this case was set up as a 5,000 seat theatre.

At the Rio Olympics, Irmarfer structures up to 300 metres long and 75 metres wide - i.e. 22,500 square metres - were used.



Note: these photos are from the Bjork set up at Perth Festival in Langley Park.

Again, the Event Industry are the experts in finding lateral and cost effective approaches to site infrastructure for major events. It is what our industry does year in and year out.

## THE IMPACT OF CANCELLATION

In summary, the planning, management and delivery of the Commonwealth Games in Victoria would have involved a vast number of people and businesses from right across Victoria's Event Industry.

Event recruitment companies have already reported being inundated by people who had been working on the Games but have now lost their jobs.

Many Event Industry businesses were in the process of bidding for major Games projects. And certainly many were starting to gear up to be able to cater for the Games.

It should also be noted that particularly in regional Victoria - where the Event Industry had been particularly hard hit - the Games was giving them inspiration and encouragement to rebuild their businesses and again and to bet on their futures.

Having the certainty of work for a large 2026 event would have given many people and businesses the certainty they need to be able to invest in additional equipment and to invest in engaging and training up new people.

All of this has now evaporated.

[The total economic loss for the Event Industry will be in the hundreds of million of dollars.](#)

Again, noting that the Commonwealth Games was long touted by the Victorian Government as their main form of support for the Event Industry to help it to recover from the devastating pandemic.

There has yet to be any real support for Victoria's Event Industry announced since the cancellation. In fact, the Event Industry has hardly rated a mention.

It is a large setback after a few very difficult years.

## LONGER TERM IMPACTS

Then there is the reputational damage to Victoria as a place to hold larger events.

The Victorian Government is involved with the bidding for many larger events - including sporting events and business events such as conferences and exhibitions - as are many other organisations.

The cancellation of the Games, and the very sudden way that it was done, will certainly affect how the Victorian Government is viewed as a potential partner for larger events that would be considering coming to Victoria.

The feedback we are getting is that this is already affecting how Victoria is viewed as a potential destination for some very large business events. These events have a lot of choice as to their destinations, and will always be very risk adverse - i.e. in terms of potential financial risk or reputational risk. The Commonwealth Games debacle makes Victoria a less safe, or more risky, choice.

It is noted that New South Wales just hosted a lot of the FIFA Women's World Cup very, very successfully. And Queensland very successfully hosted the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games. So the comparison with what happened with Vic2026 is stark.

## **THE EVENT INDUSTRY'S EXPERIENCE OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS**

What we have seen with the Commonwealth Games is consistent with what we have experienced as an Event Industry right through the Covid pandemic up until today. And that is our industry's unique skill sets and capabilities not being understood, valued or utilised by the Victorian Government - even when they have been really needed.

Skill sets that should have been very, very useful during a crisis like we've had over the last few years. But instead the Event Industry was not called upon - even for areas where it was uniquely well qualified to help.

This has remained puzzling. Especially in a state that has long touted itself as being the premier event state. And despite it having been our Event Industry's unique skill sets and capabilities that earned originally the state its reputation as a leading event state worldwide.

The Event Industry was the first industry to come to a complete halt during the Covid pandemic. On March 13 2020 when the Australian Grand Prix was cancelled it triggered the cancellation of nearly all other events in Victoria.

Suddenly there was a vast pool of incredibly skilled people without work or anything to do. A group of people who's core skill set was solving difficult problems, very quickly adapting, and making a lot happen successfully and extremely quickly. Surely these were the very skill sets needed to help deal with such a crisis.

However, this proved not to be the case. And not through lack of offering.

We had to sit and watch as others - without event experience - tried to do what we do. Often with results that ranged from poor to quite literally disastrous.

### **HOTEL QUARANTINE**

At the time the hotel quarantine program was being set up in March 2020, the whole of the Event Industry had come to a stop. The vast majority of our industry's resources were available.

Planning and managing the movement of large numbers of people from airplane flights, getting them safely transferred from airports to hotels. Dealing with all the vagaries of airline travel - including delays and rescheduling. Using existing specialist event software to match people to available hotel rooms and facilities - ensuring that dietary, religious, health, security and other important requirements were catered for. Staying in touch with all those staying in the hotels to ensure that they had all that they needed. And so on. This is the normal, day to day work of professional conference organisers. This is what they excel at. They are used to dealing with many thousands of people. And, with rapidly changing situations - as is the nature of large events.

Similarly there are many event people who specialise in planning and managing complex security operations. This can be from one days events or live in festivals. They have an integral knowledge and understanding of how the security industry works, and how to successfully plan and manager

security operations despite the very well known challenges inherent with parts of the security industry.

Puzzlingly, DJPR (the Victorian Department of Job, Precincts and Regions - now known as DJSIR) - despite being the government department that oversees and liaises with the Event Industry - didn't call on expertise from the event industry to help manage the logistical side of the hotel quarantine program that DJPR was responsible for. Further noting, that parts of DJPR like Global Victoria - which played a key role in the hotel quarantine program - have very extensive dealings with the Event Industry in its normal work.

What made it even more extraordinary - as documents tendered to the inquiry into the hotel quarantine program showed - was that they spent a lot of money engaging all sorts of consultants from some of the big four consultancies through to customer experience consultants. They just didn't seem to engage people from the Event Industry who specialise in doing the core tasks that were actually needed.

It is a matter of public record that this had dreadful consequences.

This ranges from the most basic stuff such as people not getting food in keeping with their dietary or religious requirements to people being completely lost in the system and forgotten. All stuff that is event management 101. Some of the most basic stuff that is dealt with well in the Event Industry every day.

And then there was the completely naive approach to the whole security operation that had truly disastrous results - which ended up affecting all Victorians.

DJPR - despite having extensive dealings with our industry and being responsible for Event Industry policy - just didn't value what the Event Industry does. They thought they could do what we do. But proved that they could not.

## **FLEMINGTON TOWERS**

The Flemington Towers lockdown provides another good example. While we understand that this was managed more by Department of Health than DJPR, the two departments worked incredibly closely together all through the pandemic - including at the most senior levels.

With the sudden locking down of the Flemington towers there was an urgent need for a considerable amount of site infrastructure and support.

We all watched it pan out on the news each night and it seemed to take about three days to get basic site infrastructure - e.g. power, fencing, toilets, marquees, etc.... - in place. The fire brigade was eventually brought in to help distribute food to the people there.

An experienced event site manager could have gotten all the trucks rolling with all the needed infrastructure within hours. Experienced event managers and PCOs could have had all the systems in place to liaise with the residents within a short space of time. Event caterers could have had a food operation in place just a quickly. And noting that event caterers are used to the complex dietary requirements of multicultural communities.

Again, its core stuff our Event Industry does. And, can do extremely quickly and very well.

Again, we weren't used.

## TESTING AND VACCINATION CENTRES

From very early on it was assumed in our industry that there would be a need for temporary centres to be set up for testing and vaccination and the like. So a group of the country's most experienced festival site managers got together and sent an email to the relevant government ministers in each state to offer their services to design, build and run the infrastructure for these centres - as there was every likelihood that it would be using the very same sort of site infrastructure that they used to build festival sites - something they had done very efficiently and cost effectively for decades.

They never even got a response!

In Victoria, the government again decided to set up all the testing sites, and then vaccination centres, themselves instead of engaging any of the event companies that specialise in managing temporary site infrastructure.

While the government did engage event industry suppliers such as marquee companies, power companies, etc...; not having experienced management in place meant that the process was messy, and certainly not cost effective.

Again, the Event Industry was uniquely well qualified to help as it was stuff that was our core business, but the government decided they knew better than us.

As well as having a much better and more cost effective result for the state, involving the Event Industry would have provided much need work for Event Industry professionals - to help them survive the pandemic. Many of these people had to leave our industry and sadly have never returned. Some, in part, due to how completely abandoned they felt.

It was very hard for us to watch all this happen for two years. We were in what had always been viewed, and promoted, as the leading event state; yet the government didn't value the event people, businesses and skill sets that had made Victoria a great event state.

It was a case of very senior government people - predominantly from DJPR and Health) who thought they knew better than us. People who didn't value or respect what our industry did. They thought it was all so easy that they could do it themselves. Time and time again they proved that what we do is a lot harder than it looks.

In the Event Industry we've all seen people think what we do is easy and try to do it themselves with very poor outcomes as they learn what we do is harder than it looks.

Maybe it is because we make what we do look so easy. When in fact a lot of what we do is very complex. Stuff that we have learnt over decades. Learnings that the more experienced event people have continued to teach the newer event people over generations.

## EVENT INDUSTRY SUPPORT POLICY

And then the final area where the government thought they knew better than the Event Industry was with policy for supporting Victoria's Event Industry. For most of the pandemic there was no policy

and no support for the Event Industry. Noting also that there has been no real policy for events or the Event Industry for many years prior to the pandemic.

At one large Teams meeting in November 2020 that was attended by a couple of hundred people from right across the Event Industry, the Arts, Sport, etc...; the Deputy Secretary of DJPR responsible for all of these areas was asked why the Event Industry hadn't received financial support like the Arts, sport and tourism industries had received. The response was very simple. **"The Event Industry hasn't received any financial support because it is not a real industry."**

This was pretty shocking, that we were in Victoria - long touted as the premier event state - and being told that our industry wasn't a real industry. And that we didn't deserve financial support.

Soon after in this same meeting the DJPR Executive Director responsible for liaising with the Department of Health regarding restrictions for these areas was asked why there weren't separate restrictions for business events. Their response was simply: **"Because business events aren't a real type of event."**

Business events in Australia were - prior to the pandemic - worth \$35.7 billion a year in direct spend nationally with over 400,000 business events being held a year. This was according to the studies EY did for the Business Events Council of Australia. DJPR certainly had these studies, as did the Executive Director.

In one on one conversations with some of the most senior DJPR people the view was expressed that as they had attended events it meant that they understood what was involved with organising events. This was extraordinarily naive as you can attend hundreds of events and never see or get to understand what actually happens behind the scenes to make the events happen.

It also showed a level of arrogance that I have never experienced before. They were completely unwilling to learn as they thought that they knew better than all of us - even though many of us had many decades of experience in successfully delivering events and they had next to none.

Through the course of much of the pandemic, this attitude had a significant impact on the health restrictions for our industry - and hence our ability to operate - as well as on targeted financial support and the near complete lack of it; and resulted in a huge amount of unnecessary damage to Victoria's Event Industry industry and the people and businesses within it. Damage that will continue to affect our Event Industry for years to come.

## 'NOT A REAL INDUSTRY'

For a long time, the most senior DJPR staff would state - or effectively state - that the Event Industry wasn't an industry. This included in briefings to Ministers and a submission to a parliamentary inquiry. Obviously the Event Industry was very much an industry and we were working together as an industry to change our situation. These statements were false, and knowingly false. They seem to have been made to justify the lack of support that the Event Industry had received.

They would try to say that all of the Arts, sport, etc... were the 'event industry' - when in fact they were all quite different and separate industries. They would add up all the financial support they had given to the Arts, sport, etc... and say that was their support for the 'event industry' and hence

we didn't need any more support - when the reality was that the Event Industry hadn't received any targeted support at all at that stage.

In fact, through the whole pandemic the only targeted support for the Event Industry was the \$20 million Victorian Events Support Package the acting Premier announced in May 2021. And even then, about half of the funds were diverted to the Arts.

It ended up taking many, many months and a parliamentary inquiry to finally get the most senior people in DJPR to concede that the Event Industry really was an industry. An industry that had been worth \$15 billion, and one that was integral to Victoria's brand.

And, about a year to convince DJPR that business events were indeed a real type of event, and quite different to band gigs in pubs or the like. And that they needed to be properly included in the health restrictions. Up until that point they were not specifically mentioned in the health restrictions so it was a very grey area as to what restrictions actually applied to business events. This killed confidence in the marketplace as no one was sure about what they could or couldn't do. This had huge financial impact.

In mid 2021 when things had started to open up, there was the bizarre situation where under the health restrictions one could only have 300 people for a exhibition in a large exhibition centre, but they were allowing tens of thousands of people for football games at the MCG. From an event risk management perspective - and event people are quite expert in risk management as it is a huge part of our work - this made zero sense.

We were advised by both the most senior people in DJPR and in Health that the reason for the difference was that football games at the MCG were outdoors whereas business events were indoors. We countered that this was not the case. That the major Covid risks of football games at the MCG were from the fact that the attendees had to spend quite a lot of time indoors while they were at the MCG. The entrance turnstiles, escalators, elevators, bathroom facilities, catering facilities, bars and the like were all in indoor areas at the MCG. And, from experience, all quite crowded indoor areas at the MCG.

We warned the most senior people in DJPR that this was actually a huge health risk but we were fobbed off. And again told that business events are held indoors and football games are outdoors - so it is safe to have 30,000 people at them.

A short period of time later - on July 15 2021 - it was announced that there had been an outbreak of Covid that had been tracked back to the very same indoor areas at the MCG that we had warned about. Sadly we were right yet again. Melbourne went into lockdowns five and six. This three months of lockdowns was truly devastating for our industry. Save Victorian Events' August 30 2021 Event Industry survey results showed that only 27% of event businesses through they'd survive until the end of the year.

This typifies our experience the whole way through. The most senior people in DJPR and Health were never in the slightest bit interested in learning from the Event Industry. They didn't believe we had skills or experience of value. Time and time again this unwillingness to listen or to learn from people with real expertise had devastation results.

Senior public servants with little or no real major event, or event industry, experience deciding that they could do everything themselves. That they didn't need the expert input from highly experienced specialists from the Event Industry.

Seeing people with little or no knowledge of events try to do event it is something that as event people we see with chronic regularity. And often with very poor results. This was no different.

It is important to note that Visit Victoria - despite sometimes being referred to as the agency responsible for events - was largely missing in action through all of this even though they knew that Victoria's Event Industry was being decimated. At the many DJPR 'consultation' meetings held over an eighteen month period during the worst of the pandemic the Visit Victoria representative would invariably pipe up to say that 'the outlook in six months time is looking really positive'.

## **COMMONWEALTH GAMES REPEATING THE MISTAKES**

And then the bid for the Commonwealth Games was announced. Sadly, the Commonwealth Games episode seems to have involved a repeat of all the previous mistakes.

We were quite shocked to learn in very early 2022 that a number of the most senior people in DJPR that we had dealt with had moved on to some of the most senior roles with securing and the running the 2026 Commonwealth Games. Heading areas such as Strategy, Delivery Coordination, Planning, Governance, Ceremonies, Culture, Festivals and Legacy.

Similarly it was very surprising that the CEO didn't have a major events background.

Combining the above the complete unwillingness to learn from the Event Industry that we had seen for the previous two years, we had very serious concerns about how the Commonwealth Games would pan out. We assumed that the Games would end in tears - as had so many other things.

## CAUSES OF THE COMMONWEALTH GAMES DEBACLE

While there are a number of factors that are likely to have caused the current debacle, this document will focus on the ones that relate directly to the experience of Victoria's Event Industry.

Others will be better placed to advise whether it was still possible for all the venues and infrastructure to be built, commissioned and up and fully running in the two and a half years that were remaining prior to the Games. Noting that it would be record time to get a major convention centre like the Geelong Convention Centre built and operation in just two and a half years based on my experience with major construction projects.

Similarly, others will be far better placed to talk about the huge impact on the many athletes who will be badly affect by the cancellation of the Games.

## NOT HAVING EXPERIENCED EVENT PEOPLE LEAD THE PROJECT

Large event projects need to be led by people with serious large event experience to be successful. This should be stating the obvious, but it was not the case with Vic2026. It has been proven time and time again.

At the November 2020 Teams meeting mentioned earlier, the person who said that "The event industry hasn't received financial support because it is not a real industry." was Andrew Abbott - Deputy Secretary, Creative, Sport and Visitor Economy at DJPR.

The person who said "Because business events aren't a real type of event." was Bridie O'Donnell - Executive Director, Public Events.

The two DJPR Deputy Secretaries who we understand in early 2022 were seconded to set up the Office of Commonwealth Games and help secure the Games and get the planning underway were Andrew Abbott and Jim Round - who was Deputy Secretary, Industry Coordination and Recovery. Soon joined by Bridie O'Donnell and Kate Matson - who was Deputy Secretary, Intelligence, Case Contact & Outbreak Management in the Department of Health (working under COVID Response Commander Jeroen Weimar).

The roles they finally ended up in with the Games were:

- Jeroen Weimar - CEO
- Andrew Abbott - Chief of Culture and Ceremonies
- Jim Round - Chief of Planning and Governance (until March 2023)
- Bridie O'Donnell - Chief - Strategy and Delivery Coordination
- Kate Matson - Chief - Games Services

That they are all from DJPR or Health is notable as the Event Industry had a lot of dealings with both departments during the pandemic. Our dealings with both departments were characterised by an unwillingness to listen or learn and an attitude that they knew better than us. Certainly not good traits for major events where the willingness to listen and learn and to value everyone's knowledge is essential for delivering successful events.

It was confounding that with there being so many Australian event people with very serious major event experience - including on Olympic, Commonwealth and other games both in Australian and

around the world - that so many of the people in the most critical roles had little to no real operational experience with major events.

It is important to note that there is a huge difference between having been involved with providing funding for events to understanding and being actively involved in the detailed planning and delivery of events.

## **WHAT MAKES EVENT PEOPLE SO DIFFERENT TO PEOPLE FROM OTHER INDUSTRIES**

A few people have suggested to me that having a background involving public transport might be a good background for running major events. And a couple of the senior people do have some background in public transport. It is worth explaining why this is far from the case.

Most public transport systems have operated for very long time. Most train networks, for example, have operated for over a century. While they do involve a lot of logistics, this has all been built up over many decades, so those working there are generally only involved in incremental changes to long standing systems and processes. And when changes do happen, there is generally long periods of time to gradually test the changes before they become operational.

With larger events it is a completely different situation. They are generally starting from a blank sheet of paper. You have to build the entire event organisation - and by this I mean those directly employed, as well as all the suppliers, contractors, volunteers, and related stakeholders - from scratch. This includes creating all of the systems and processes. It ends up being a huge organisation and all done in a relatively short period of time.

So it is a completely different challenge and requires a completely different approach.

As already mentioned, with something like a transport network, change is incremental and there is plenty of time to gradually test and implement new things - and this can be over months. If something doesn't work first time you can adjust it and try again. This is the same in a lot of industries.

With events it is the exact opposite. In many cases the entire operation is to make something happen on just one day (or maybe a small number of days), but that one time has to be perfect.

An event like an Opening Ceremony provides a good example.

The only time that the whole operation happens is for the actual event. While it might be possible to test some discrete parts of the operation - e.g. rehearsals of the show elements - it is never possible to test the entire operation. And by this I mean the entire performance, production, site infrastructure, competitor involvement, VIP operation, traffic and transport operation, security operation, etc.... - and with the public there.

To be able to get such a large and complex project right the very first time - regardless of the challenges and complexities that may pop up - is something quite unique to the Event Industry. It requires a very particular type of person, a very particular mindset, and a vast amount of skills and experience. It also requires a very different planning process.

A lot of people are not cut out for events. A lot try it and soon realise that it isn't for them.

It takes a very special type of person to be able to consistently deliver events time and time again. Event people are not like people from other industries. And it also requires a very serious amount of specialist skills and experience - developed over many years.

But it also requires the right approach from the very beginning of the project to be able to create a successful event.

The selection of so many of the people for the most senior roles for the Commonwealth Games showed that there wasn't the most basic understanding of the Event Industry, major events, and what it actually takes to successfully deliver major events.

It is perplexing that this could have been the case in Victoria after the success of Melbourne 2006 and many other major events.

Sadly, this was very consistent with our dealings with the most senior people in DJPR (and Health) - some of whom did go on to the most senior roles in the Commonwealth Games. They just didn't value what event people and the Event Industry does, and were not interested in learning as they thought they knew better than us all.

## **MELBOURNE 2006 STAFF**

It is worth noting as comparison that the CEO of the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games was John Harnden. He came to the role having very extensive major event experience. A trained civil engineer who had worked on the Australian Grand Prix in Adelaide and other major event infrastructure projects around the world before coming to Melbourne to work on the Australian Grand Prix. He ended up as CEO very successfully running the Australian Grand Prix for a number of years.

Ron Walker - who was the Chair of the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games had also had very serious major event experience - including having taken a very hands on role with the Australian Grand Prix for many years.

They both brought real major event knowledge, experience and understanding with them. They are both quite formidable characters - a quality that is essential for being able to keep large event projects on track, and to avoid the project moving away from its core purpose.

They immediately brought in many people who had had very serious major event experience - such as on the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.

Hence it was not a surprise that the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games was very professionally run, very successful, and came in under budget.

It is safe to say that there is an absolute wealth of people in Australia with serious major event experience from the largest of major events in Australia and around the world. Hence it is even more surprising that they weren't bought in from the very beginning of the Games project.

As Victoria had successfully organised the 2006 Commonwealth Games there would have also been a vast amount of the documentation and knowledge from that event that could be drawn on.

Noting also that John Harnden is currently the CEO of Melbourne and Olympic Park - a Victorian government venue. Again, a great potential resource.

## REGIONAL CHALLENGES

It is understood that people with quite serious major event experience were eventually brought on - with many only being brought on earlier this year.

However, by this time, the concept for the event had grown from the fairly modest concept which we understand was put together by EKS and Visit Victoria in the latter part of 2021 with the Games spread across largely existing venues in Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo.

Noting that EKS - [www.eks.com](http://www.eks.com) - have had vast experience on Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games and many other types of major events. The EKS founders cut their teeth on the 2000 Sydney Olympics and grew from there.

The event had grown to be spread across a vast number of individual locations across regional Victoria and many very large temporary venues.

Anyone who has worked on events of any size in regional Victoria - including those who worked on the regional components of the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games - knows that there are many challenges with them.

One of the challenges is that a lot of the people, production, site infrastructure and services end up needing to come from Melbourne as even the largest of the regional centres have very modest capacity of their own.

They also know that the more locations you have, the more supporting infrastructure and resources you need as you need to replicate it in every location.

Going back to the mention earlier on by Howard Freeman of the 1,000 people involved in putting on a concert which might only have five people on the stage, you quickly realise that a truly vast number of people and amount of resources would have been required for so many locations spread right across much of Victoria.

Those of us that have worked on the traffic and transport planning for large venues - for example the 50,000 pax Marvel Stadium - understand the huge operation and resources required just to get people to and from such a venue, let alone looking after them while they are there or accommodating them.

## A FLAWED BUSINESS CASE

While the business case looks like quite a thick document, once you read it - and discount the duplication and the fluff - it is actually a fairly modest document in size.

After reading it, it is hard to have any confidence that those involved in creating the business case really understood what was involved with organising such a large event, and organising it across many locations in regional Victoria.

Any experienced event person would be able to see the major flaws in the business case from one quick read.

The document seemed to have been based on the event being held in a location like the Gold Coast - where the 2018 Commonwealth Games had been held - and not in regional Victoria. These locations are fundamentally different in so many ways - as anyone who has done events in both locations would know.

The following touches on just some aspects of the business case:

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

In the business case's risk assessment the lack of time to prepare for Vic2026 was listed as a high risk. In part the risk management strategy for this was to "Resource key positions with people with a demonstrable track record at delivering mega events.". Noting that this was in the January 2022 business case.

Yet many of the people engaged to perform the most senior roles on the Games had little to no real operational experience on 'mega events'. It is noted that some people with serious major event experience were brought in but this was well down the track.

Other items mentioned in the risk assessment get mentioned further on.

## **RESOURCING**

While potential resourcing for the construction of key infrastructure was viewed as a significant risk that needed to be managed, there is no mention in the risk assessment of the risks relating to not having the needed skilled event personnel available - which is surprising considering the impact of the COVID pandemic on the Event Industry.

The business case states:

"The planning and delivery of the Games is proposed to be predominantly led by Victorian workforce with local resources training in event delivery to grow the skills in regional Victoria."

"This will ensure the event responds to regional needs and retains the capability to host sport, entertainment and cultural events into the future."

"Resources in regional Victoria will be trained to deliver the event. This will ensure that skills in major event delivery are retained in regional Victoria, growing the capability to host major events in the future."

This is certainly very well meaning and could be done to a pretty modest degree. However, it shows that they don't understand the level of skills, training and experience needed for so many different event roles on an event like the Games. Again, it is this seems to come back to the flawed view that there is nothing special about what event people do.

Secondly, the lack of available workers in regional Victoria is very well known. So where were the countless thousands of people going to come from in these regional centres? One would easily assume that existing regional businesses would be fully utilising the existing regional workforce to meet the demands on them during the Games period.

Resourcing the Commonwealth Games was already going to be a big challenge as the Event Industry was decimated during the COVID pandemic. Prior to the business case being written, Save Victorian Events had shared the results of a number of Event Industry surveys with the key people at DJPR, Visit Victoria, Treasury and DPC. The survey results were very well known.

The August 30 2021 Event Industry survey results, for example, showed that:

- Only 40% of permanent staff were still employed.
- Only 16% of the highly skilled freelancers, contractors and casuals were still employed.
- Businesses thought they would only have 52% of their pre-pandemic capability and capacity to delivery events by the end of the year.

A more anecdotal result - based on direct conversations with many businesses - that we also shared with them all was that three quarters of the Event Industry's technical people had left the industry.

These results - and the ones from earlier Event Industry surveys - showed that the Event Industry had lost a huge amount of its skill base and hence that it would be a long road to rebuild its skills base and capability to deliver events. Most agreed that this would take years.

Hence it is surprising that the potential lack of skilled event people to delivery the Games was not listed as a potential risk to the project. And nor was there mention of ways to rebuild the skills base of event people in Victoria.

Despite asking to help to rebuild our industry all through the pandemic, we are still not aware of any initiatives of any great scale to help train a new generation of event people.

As always, the Event Industry is expected to rebuild itself and be available and deliver when we are needed.

## ACCOMMODATION

The business case on page 45 stated that there would be a need for 2,155 beds for media, contractors, etc..... which they could all find themselves. (This was in addition to the 7,432 for athletes and officials.) This number of 2,155 seemed impossibly low - as there would be a vast number of people working on the Games that would need to be accommodated in the regional locations. Noting that people always tend to forget about accommodation for staff on regional events.

The 2019 report about a potential regional Games (2030 Greater Victoria Commonwealth Games Feasibility Study Final Report) on pages 5, 22 and 23 estimated that 42,000 beds would be needed for athletes, officials, media, contractors and other staff. This was based on there being 60,000 credentialed personnel (out of a total of 75,000 personnel) on the 2018 Commonwealth Games and that at least 70% of them would need regional accommodation.

That report concluded that there was nowhere near enough accommodation in the regional areas even for just the personnel working on the Games - let alone members of the public wanting to attend. This is one reason why they recommended not trying to hold a regional Games until 2034.

Because of the distributed nature of Vic2026 and the additional sports there would have needed to be significantly more personnel than GC2018 had - so it is very likely that the 42,000 bed estimate would have been on the low side.

An article in The Age on September 3 2023 (included in Appendix D) talked about negotiations the government allegedly had with the Caravan industry over the last eight months (i.e. since the election and a year after signing the exclusive negotiation period agreement) to find an accommodation solution for 50,000 people who would be working on the Games - i.e. 50,000 beds - with negotiations about getting 10,000 caravans.

The cost and logistics of 10,000 caravans would have been huge. Power, water and services to 10,000 sites. And then all the supporting facilities - bathrooms, catering, cleaning, transport, etc....

The accommodation estimates in the 2019 report about doing the Games in the regions seemed to fairly accurately predict the amount of accommodation needed. Whereas the business case seemed to be out by more than an order of magnitude. There didn't seem to be a line item in the business case budget for accommodation for the broader Games workforce.

What makes all of this this even more surprising is that the business case's risk assessment identifies "Risk that there is not enough accommodation" as a very high risk.

It would seem that those who put together the business case hadn't read the 2019 report.

It would also seem that the issue of accommodation was never solved and hence that there wasn't a viable plan for regional accommodation for those working on the Games or those wanting to visit the Games. A huge issue.

## TRANSPORT

The transport section of the business case seemed quite naive - and presumably was based more on a location like the Gold Coast than the realities of regional Victorian cities. It is largely basic principles rather than providing any detail on what the transport plan would entail.

Key statements in the business case include:

"This will incorporate existing and planned road and rail networks across Victoria. No additional transport overlay will be required for the Games."

"High priority will be placed on the efficient use of public roads including the use of existing roads and rail networks, prioritising public transport on roads and promotion cycling and walking."

"Public transport will be the dominant means of accessing the Games events for spectators, volunteers and staff. This will consist of rail and dedicated bus network."

"There will be no provision for private car access to major venues with the key Games hubs."

All well meaning statements, but not taking into account the realities of the locations where the Games was going to be held, and what is involved with getting tens of thousands of people to and from venues in locations with limited public transport (and very limited accommodation).

Furthermore, the business case seemed to put the responsibility back on local councils to do all of the local traffic management as part of their support for the Games. In some cases this would be a huge task and cost.

While councils are always involved in the development of traffic and transport plans for events within their jurisdictions, they are not normally responsible for actually organising the traffic management operations. This is normally done by the event organiser. Noting also, that this would involve many state government controlled roads over which local councils have no jurisdiction.

Knowing what is involved with getting people to and from a major venue like Docklands stadium (which is very well serviced by public transport) as well as other large events in areas with far less public transport, it is hard to understand how the above could be achieved.

Most of the public transport to these regional areas is modest. Many of the venues are not adjacent to main railway stations. If all the main venues are to be car free precincts, that would mean a huge reliance on buses, and a truly massive bus network, to move most of the attendees to and from the venues.

There would also need to be shuttle services to transport the vast army of people working on the event between accommodation and the venues and other facilities.

**TRAVEL TIMES**

Further down the track, there was talk that the government would actually encourage people to make day trips to the Games events rather than stay in the regional locations. Presumably this would have been because by this time it had finally been realised that there wasn't enough accommodation in the regional locations for those working on the Games, so effectively none for the public.

A really boring thing we always look at at the very early stage of planning events is how long it will take the attendees to get to the event. This will certainly help guide how likely people are to travel to the event or need to stay at the event location. While far from perfect, Google Maps provides a rough idea of likely travel times. One can spend much more time getting more accurate estimates.

The following times are pretty much best case scenarios for round trips - i.e. both to and from the location - assuming modest traffic and not allowing time for parking or to use a park and ride service.

**Location                      By Car      By Public Transport**

(from Box Hill - being near the effective centre of much of Melbourne's population)

• Armstrong Creek	3h 20m	5h 40m
• Kardinia Park	3h 0m	4h 10m
• Ballarat	3h 40m	5h 30m
• Bendigo	4h 20m	5h 50m
• Shepparton	4h 30m	8h 0m

(from Footscray - being to the west of Melbourne)

- Traralgon                      4h 10m                      6h 30m

The need to use a park and ride service from a parking location to a venue and back could easily add an hour or more to the travel times, as would heavier traffic - which would be fairly likely as there would be many more people travelling to these regional locations and within these regional locations than normal.

Conversely though, it is assumed that for the Games there would have been any additional services and links between services to increase the numbers of people that could be transported and to help reduce the likely travel times.

A day trip by car to some of these locations would be a very, very long day.

It is safe to say that existing public transport would not be viable for day trips from Melbourne to Games event locations for many people.

Hence there are real question marks about the business case's traffic and transport strategy and its viability.

## BUDGET

The budget summary on pages 14 and 15 of the business case is a very quick cut and paste from pages 265 and 266 of the GC2018 Post Games Report (which are included in Appendix C). The line items are virtually identical.

Noting that some of the totals on pages 14 and 15 of the business case have been redacted. However they are not redacted on page 70 of the business case.

Here is a table that includes all the budget items from the business case with an additional column added to show the actual figure from the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games, and then columns to show the percentage difference from GC2018 to the worst and best case estimates for Vic2026. It is useful to compare the numbers for the two Games.

Noting that the two Games are eight years apart so one would expect costs to rise during that period to rise by at least 17%.

## COMPARISON BETWEEN VIC2026 BUDGET AND GC2018 ACTUALS

Financial analysis (\$m)	Worst case	Best case	GC2018 Actual	Diff Worst (%)	Diff Best (%)
<b>Capital Costs</b>					
Competition venues	\$745.0	\$430.0	\$318.0	134.3%	35.2%
Games Village Housing Program	\$250.0	\$200.0	\$250.0	0.0%	-20.0%
Public Domain Improvements	\$7.3	\$7.3	\$7.0	4.3%	4.3%
Other	\$2.1	\$2.1	\$2.0	5.0%	5.0%
Lifecycle costs of State-owned assets (Kardinia Park Aquatics and Gymnastics Centres)	\$0.0	\$0.0			
<b>Total capital costs</b>	<b>\$1,004.4</b>	<b>\$639.4</b>	<b>\$577.0</b>	<b>74.1%</b>	<b>10.8%</b>
<b>Operating costs</b>					
Ceremonies and Queen's Baton Relay	\$41.9	\$41.9	\$40.0	4.8%	4.8%
Arts and Culture	\$50.0	\$50.0	\$24.0	108.3%	108.3%
Games Legacy Benefits	\$40.0	\$40.0	\$8.0	400.0%	400.0%
Corporate and Admin	\$71.2	\$71.2	\$68.0	4.7%	4.7%
Workforce	\$240.0	\$240.0	\$252.0	-4.8%	-4.8%
Games Operations	\$173.2	\$173.2	\$139.0	24.6%	24.6%
City Operations	\$16.7	\$16.7	\$14.0	19.3%	19.3%
Venue and Village Overlay	\$291.1	\$257.4	\$211.0	38.0%	22.0%
Marketing and Comms	\$65.0	\$65.0	\$50.0	30.0%	30.0%
Media, Tech and Broadcast	redacted	redacted	\$145.0		
Transport	\$110.0	\$110.0	\$92.0	19.6%	19.6%
Security	\$200.6	\$200.6	\$174.0	15.3%	15.3%
Carbon neutral games costs	\$60.0	\$45.0	n/a		
Games Fees	redacted	redacted	\$68.0		
Operating contingency (applied to total operating expenditure)	\$250.3	\$163.2	\$0.0		
<b>Total Operation Costs</b>	<b>\$1,846.7</b>	<b>\$1,710.8</b>	<b>\$1,286.0</b>	<b>43.6%</b>	<b>33.0%</b>
<b>Non-LOC Costs</b>					
Office of Commonwealth Games / governance costs	\$119.0	\$119.0			
Village delivery	\$35.0	\$25.0			
Transport costs (DOT)	\$0.0	\$0.0			

Security costs (VicPol)	\$0.0	\$0.0			
<b>Total Non-LOC costs</b>	<b>\$154.0</b>	<b>\$144.0</b>			
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>\$3,005.1</b>	<b>\$2,494.2</b>			
<b>Operating revenues</b>					
Broadcast Rights (CGF)	redacted	redacted	\$64.0		
Sponsorship	redacted	redacted	\$83.0		
Ticketing	\$63.4	\$77.0	\$66.0	-3.9%	16.7%
Licensing and Merchandising	redacted	redacted	\$5.0		
Victorian Government Grants and Funding	\$0.0	\$0.0			
Australian Government Grants / Funding	\$0.0	\$2.0	\$2.0	-100.0%	0.0%
Local Government Grants / Funding	\$15.0	\$80.0	\$79.0	-81.0%	1.3%
Interest and Others	\$37.7	\$37.7	\$36.0	4.7%	4.7%
<b>Total operating revenues</b>	<b>\$234.3</b>	<b>\$247.9</b>	<b>\$336.0</b>	<b>-30.3%</b>	<b>-26.2%</b>
<b>Public sector contribution for capital expenditure</b>					
Federal Government Grants / Funding	\$205.0	\$215.0	\$154.0	33.1%	39.6%
Victorian Government Sport Infrastructure Funding	\$0.0	\$215.0			
State Government Housing Program	\$0.0	\$200.0			
Local Government Grants / Funding	\$15.0	\$20.0	\$32.0	-53.1%	-37.5%
<b>Total public sector contribution for capital expenditure</b>	<b>\$220.0</b>	<b>\$650.0</b>	<b>\$186.0</b>	<b>18.3%</b>	<b>249.5%</b>

## NOTES

While the costs for these line items were redacted, we can calculate that the estimated cost of Games Fees and Media, Tech and Broadcast together are \$236.7m for Vic2026 against \$213m for GC2018 - so 11% more - as the total cost figure was included.

And similarly, that the estimated revenue from Broadcast Rights, Sponsorship and Licensing and Merchandising are between \$51.2m and \$118.2m for Vic2026 against \$152m for GC2018 - so between 66% and 22% less - as the total revenue figure was included.

It is surprising - especially considering the added complexity of the distributed regional model for Vic2026 versus the single location model for GC2018 - that some of the worst case cost estimates for Vic2026 are lower than the actual costs or not a lot more than the actual GC2018 costs. Examples include Games Village Housing Program, Ceremonies and Workforce.

## CEREMONIES EXAMPLE

Ceremonies is a good example. The ceremonies cost \$40 million for GC2018. The worst case figure for Vic2026 is \$41.9 million. At just 4.75% higher this doesn't allow for the normal increases in costs over that many years. But it goes further than that.

Both the opening and closing ceremonies for GC2018 were held at Carrara Stadium - a 35,000 seat stadium. For Vic2026 the opening ceremony was going to be held at the 100,000 seat MCG and the closing ceremony was going to be held at the 40,000 seat Kardinia Park which is in another city. Resulting in a very large amount of duplication - especially in terms of production and site infrastructure. And, while Carrara Stadium was being used for many other Games components, the MCG was just to be used for the opening ceremony.

It is also worth noting that the opening ceremony of GC2018 was fairly modest compared to the Melbourne 2006 opening ceremony. It is not known whether the aim was to have the Vic2026 to the scale of Melbourne 2006 or GC2018.

All this considered, the \$41.9 million figure in the budget for ceremonies for VIC2026 would seem to be a fair way out. It is puzzling that this slipped through. As with a number of the other items.

The business case Appendix F notes regarding the ceremonies: "An increase for minor variations in scope from the Gold Coast program has been applied."

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The stakeholder engagement strategy makes no mention of engaging with the Event Industry or those within the Event Industry.

This would seem to be a massive oversight considering that the Event Industry is relied upon to provide a large amount of the workforce and suppliers for the Games. And, in light of the massive impact of the COVID pandemic on the Event Industry.

Surely a priority should have been to engage with the Event Industry to get an understanding of the likely available resources for the Games as well as what needed to be done to ensure that the needed resources could be available.

And similarly, to engage with the Event Industry to utilise the industry's vast practical knowledge of putting together major event.

Again, the Event Industry was not valued.

## THE BASICS OF EVENT MANAGEMENT WERE FORGOTTEN

For events to be successful you need to get the foundations right. If you don't get the foundations right it is unlikely that your event will succeed. This applies to events of all sizes.

The same rules apply to organising events no matter of whether they are small events or major events. Sadly, with Vic2026 the basics of event management seemed to have been forgotten. Or, perhaps they were never understood.

These include:

## EVENT EXPERTISE

Successful events don't happen by magic. They happen through the combination of people with specialist event expertise and good planning processes - as has already been covered.

In the case of the Games, many of the top people leading the project - especially in the critical foundational stage - had little to no real operational major event experience. This was very surprising for an event of this scale and complexity.

This will have hampered the process the whole way through - from initial concept and pitch on.

## HAVING A CLEAR PURPOSE AND WELL DEFINED OBJECTIVES

The starting point is to have a very clear purpose and well defined objectives. And, for all of the key stakeholders to agree on and be working towards the same clear purpose and well defined objectives.

Without a very clear purpose and well defined objectives events tend to go in all directions.

It is hard to understand at this point what the real purpose and objectives were for the 2026 Commonwealth Games. It would seem that different parties to the Games had very different purposes and objectives.

Another key foundation is getting a highly experienced team in place to deliver the event - as already mentioned.

## BEING DISCIPLINED

Event concepts growing like Topsy is very, very common. And this is on events of nearly all sizes.

Clients will often ask for more and more - without understanding the implications. Experienced event people will spend a lot of time keeping their client's expectations of what is possible in check.

If the key people managing the project don't have the detailed knowledge and experience to be able to quickly understand the implications - be it from a cost, logistics, security, etc.... perspective - and to be able to give immediate feedback to the client then things can very quickly get out of hand.

Having people in many of the key roles with little to no real major event experience during the really formative period for the Games means it is very hard to know the implications of changes.

Similarly, if the people running the event project aren't willing to stand up to the client, they will get locked into commitments that cannot be delivered.

It is very common to have to be very firm with clients. Sometimes you have to be blunt enough to say that the additional things that the client is asking for could compromise the success of the whole project. Hence it is important that the people running the event - as was the case with Melbourne 2006 - are very strong characters.

## UNDERSTAND THE LOGISTICS AND THE COSTS BEFORE MAKING COMMITMENTS

Committing to additional things - and in fact announcing them publicly - before the logistics are properly detailed or costed is always a recipe for disaster with events.

This has all been proven countless times before and is very well known and understood in the Event Industry. It is event management 101.

It is unsurprising that a regional model that did grow like Topsy had become impossible to deliver.

It seems that by the time the people who had really serious major event experience were brought on board for the 2026 Commonwealth Games in late 2022 / early 2023 - so people who could really understand the implications of the changes - the event was already locked into a near impossible model due to election promises.

The word in the Event Industry was that the project had been in strife for a number of months before the cancellation was announced.

## MORE ECONOMICAL OPTIONS FOR THE GAMES

There is no question that the 2026 Commonwealth Games could still have been staged - but in a way that was far more cost effective.

The Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games provide a good example of the cost structure for the Games. The key pages from their final report are included in Appendix C. The costs in the report are quite detailed and list area by area for operating costs and venue by venue for infrastructure costs.

Here are the main numbers from the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games:

• Total Operating Expenses	\$1,421m
• Total Operating Revenue	\$324m
• <b>Net Operating Cost to the Qld Government</b>	<b>\$1,098m</b>
• Net Cost of Infrastructure to the Qld Government	\$410m
• <b>Total Net Cost to the Qld Government</b>	<b>\$1,507m</b>

Noting that there is no question that in many ways the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games were done in a more modest way to the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games. The opening and closing ceremonies are examples of this.

It is understood that the original proposal for the 2026 Commonwealth Games was based on a similar net cost to the Victorian Government. This was based on using nearly all existing venues in Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo.

It is puzzling that it has been suggested that the 2026 Commonwealth Games would have cost nearly five times the cost of the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games.

Similarly, the Games could have been held almost completely in Melbourne using the same venues as used in 2006.

Noting that \$1.525 billion was spent on building venues and the like for Melbourne 2006 - which has left a legacy of great venues that continue to be used, and could have been used for the 2026 Games.

## CHANGING THE MODEL VS WALKING AWAY

To event people, the idea of just walking away from an event instead of working through all of the options goes against everything we stand for. And especially in a situation like this where it is walking away from a solid commitment that had been given to the Commonwealth Games family and the 51 nations that would be competing in the Games.

It is very common to have to find lateral ways to successfully to get the event across the line.

However in this case it seems there was not even a willingness to go back to the model that was originally proposed back in 2021 - i.e. an event utilising largely existing Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo venues.

## SUMMARY

Having been a leading event state and having successfully delivered numerous major events - including what had been the most successful Commonwealth Games to that time - Victoria should have been very, very well placed to have again delivered a very successful Commonwealth Games that would bring a lot of benefits to Victoria and more broadly to Australia.

Sadly, the Victorian government didn't really draw on the state's vast experience in delivering major events, and somehow managed to forget the basics of event management.

Again, this debacle was predictable and avoidable.

While it is easy to try to put the blame on the 'innovative' regional model, etc..., the cause of all of this debacle is far more fundamental.

Had a senior leadership team with a similar level of major event experience to the one that so successfully delivered Melbourne 2006 been brought in at the beginning of the serious pursuit of the 2026 Commonwealth Games - i.e. in late 2021 / very early 2022 - and they had been listened to by government, it is safe to say that Victoria would now be well down the path of organising a successful Vic2026 Games. It is also safe to say that the Games would be in a different form to what was originally pursued - and include Melbourne based components.

Victoria's Event Industry has gone through a lot over the last three years. It has been incredibly difficult for nearly everyone and every business in our industry. We have a long road ahead to fully rebuild our industry. Just as people have a long road ahead to rebuild their careers and businesses.

Being the Event Industry we have been used to having to look after ourselves and get on and make things happen. We have long been an industry that is taken for granted. As to outsiders a lot of what we do seems to happen by magic.

It remains astonishing that the Victorian Government - with Victoria having been a premier event state and events being an integral part of Victoria's brand - didn't, and still doesn't, understand or value what the Event Industry does. Nor does it understand or value the extraordinary skills and experience that the vast group of people who are Victoria's Event Industry have.

It is important that the lessons from this whole debacle are learned and that the same mistakes don't continue to be repeated. This requires the Victorian Government to fundamentally change its approach to events and to the Event Industry.

## A DEDICATED EVENTS VICTORIA



Many in the Event Industry have long pushed for a dedicated Events Victoria. A unit dedicated to supporting, developing and promoting Victoria's Event Industry. A unit that employs people who have real experience of events and the Event Industry and a real understanding of how to support the Event Industry to rebuild and to help rebuild Victoria's capability and reputation as a leading event state.

And for Victoria to finally have a proper, modern events policy. A policy that focusses on making a step change in the way events are viewed and used at the community level, for supporting and growing industries, and for the state of Victoria as a whole.

For Victoria to have a real strategy for regaining its position as a leading event state.

Sadly, the Event Industry will be affected more than most other industries by the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games.

**It is essential that the Event Industry is finally understood, and valued and recognised for the huge role we play in life in Victoria, and in Australia, and for the huge contribution that we make to this state and to this country.**

As we all rebuild after the pandemic while also facing unprecedented amounts of change - be it technological, social or geopolitical - there has never been a time when events have been more needed and more valuable to bring communities together, to help organisations and whole industries innovate and change, to educate and inspire, and to create a cohesive society.

**This is the power of events. And the real value of Victoria's Event Industry.**

## **SAVE VICTORIAN EVENTS**

Save Victorian Events was started in mid 2020 by nine very long time members of Victoria's Event Industry.

We were deeply concerned that our industry was already in a dire situation - having been completely closed for four months and with no sign of when it would reopen - and nothing was being done in terms of financial or practical support for our industry. We seemed to have been abandoned by all and sundry. No one was representing the real views people and businesses in Victoria's Event Industry to government.

Save Victorian Events began with the simple purpose of giving a strong voice to the broader Event Industry in Victoria during this time of crisis. And, with a strong emphasis on representing the small businesses, freelancers, and workers who had never had a real voice to government.

The campaign actively involved over two thousand members of Victoria's Event Industry from more than 900 businesses from right across the Event Industry. The group was the main source of information about what had been going on with government to much of the Event Industry. Similarly, we were the main source of information from the front line of Victoria's Event Industry back to all levels of government.

Our industry surveys were the only comprehensive survey's of Victoria's Event Industry - and gave very many key insights.

Save Victorian Events was gradually wound down during 2022.

## **MY BACKGROUND**

I have proudly worked in Victoria's Event Industry for over forty years. Initially from a production background, I've organised a vast range of events from concerts, festivals and public events; through to all types of business events. As well as having consulted to large government projects and major event companies and entertainment promoters.

I was one of the founders of Save Victorian Events as well as the day to day coordinator of the campaign. This gave me an even greater insight into the Event Industry - and particularly how people and businesses were affected during the pandemic. It also meant that I spent a huge amount of time during the pandemic dealing with a vast array of people across all levels of government and the media.

I had hoped that once we started to come out of the pandemic that I wouldn't need to be writing documents like this.

## APPENDIX A - EVENT INDUSTRY SURVEY RESULTS

Some of the Save Victorian Events survey results:

- February 8 2021 survey results
- August 30 2021 survey results
- January 18 2022 survey results



## **Final Survey Results: The Devastating Impact on Victoria's \$10+ billion Event Industry**

### **IMPACT ON VICTORIAN EVENT INDUSTRY COMPANIES**

By companies we mean event organisers and the vast array of suppliers to Victoria's event industry such as: AV, audio, lighting, theming, expo, marquees, catering, etc...

**Income from April to December 2020 was down 85%**  
**Forecast income for January to June 2021 is down 76%**  
**Forecast income for July to December 2021 is down 67%**  
(compared to the same period in pre-Covid years and excluding government support)

**94% of companies are currently receiving JobKeeper**

**Receiving JobKeeper has enabled:**

**38% of companies to keep all staff on**  
**47% of companies to keep some staff on**

**If JobKeeper ends in March:**

**43% of companies will need to let staff go**  
**An additional 40% of companies will potentially need to close their business**

So **83% of companies in Victoria's event industry will be severely affected** by the ending of JobKeeper - if it is not replaced by some other form of financial support.

### **IMPACT ON FREELANCERS AND CONTRACTORS**

These are the highly skilled professional service providers such as producers, production managers, stage managers, technicians, risk managers, lighting designers, etc.... who play such a critical role in the planning and running of events.

**Their income from April to December 2020 was down 89%**  
**Forecast income for January to June 2021 is down 80%**  
**Forecast income for July to December 2021 is down 67%**  
(compared to the same period in pre-Covid years and excluding government support)

**77% have had to seek work outside of the Event Industry to survive.**

**69% will need to get jobs outside of the Event Industry if JobKeeper ends in March.**

### **IMPACT ON VICTORIAN EVENT INDUSTRY WORKERS**

**Only 27% of people who were working full time in the Victoria's Event Industry pre-Covid are still working full time in the Event Industry.**

**35% of people who were working in Victoria's Event Industry pre-Covid are no longer working in the Event Industry at all.**

The survey was conducted by Save Victorian Events from February 3rd to 7th with more than 360 businesses and more than 200 individuals from Victoria's Event Industry responding.

Contact: [help@savevictorianevents.com.au](mailto:help@savevictorianevents.com.au)

# The State of Victoria's Event Industry

Survey Results - August 30 2021

## Earned Income - Businesses

**Only 19%**

of normal income  
for Apr 20 - Aug 21

**Only 18%**

forecast income  
for Sep - Dec 21

**Only 34%**

forecast income  
for Jan - Jun 22

## Cancelled Events and Projects

**34%**

have had ALL cancelled  
until the end of the year

**61%**

have had MOST cancelled  
until the end of the year

## Losses Due to Recent Lockdowns

**29%**

of businesses  
lost \$50-200k

**35%**

of businesses  
lost \$200k-\$1m

**20%**

of businesses  
lost over \$1m

## Impact on Workers

**Only 40%** of permanent staff are still employed

**Only 16%** of the highly skilled freelancers,  
contractors & casuals are still employed

## Reduced Business Capability

**Only 52%** of their pre-pandemic capability and  
capacity to deliver events & projects

## Business Survival

**Only 27%** likely to survive to the end of the year

**26%** unlikely to survive    **47%** not sure if they will

# The Impact of Omicron on Victoria's Event Industry

Survey Results - January 18 2022

## Companies: Earned Income

Apr 20 - Aug 21

Sep - Dec 21

Jan - Mar 22

Apr - Jun 22

**Down 81%**

**Down 66%**

**Down 68%**

**Down 58%**

(Actual. Pre-Omicron)

(Actual)

(Forecast)

(Forecast)

Earned income of Event Industry companies compared to the same period of a normal year. Noting this is an average so many have earned a lot less or more.

## Freelancers & Contractors: Earned Income

Apr 20 - Aug 21

Sep - Dec 21

Jan - Mar 22

Apr - Jun 22

**Down 84%**

**Down 65%**

**Down 71%**

**Down 55%**

(Actual. Pre-Omicron)

(Actual)

(Forecast)

(Forecast)

Earned income of our vitally important Event Industry freelancers and contractors compared to the same period of a normal year. Again, this is an average.

## Current Outlook for Events in 2022

January & February Events

March & April Events

May to December Events

**46% - Cancel**

**22% - Cancel**

**9% - Cancel**

**28% - Postpone**

**30% - Postpone**

**12% - Postpone**

**16% - At Risk**

**36% - At Risk**

**44% - At Risk**

Current expected outcome for events. Hence the urgent need for financial support and measures to help restore confidence in events.

## APPENDIX B - AN EVENT LED RECOVERY

Simple summary of the strategy for an event led recovery for Victoria.

Noting that a far more comprehensive strategy to rebuild Victoria's Event Industry was contained in the Save Victorian Events submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry - which can be found here:

[https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCEI/COVID-19\\_Tourism/Submissions/S007\\_Save\\_Victorian\\_Events\\_Redacted.pdf](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCEI/COVID-19_Tourism/Submissions/S007_Save_Victorian_Events_Redacted.pdf)

# An Event Led Recovery for Victoria

## Part 1 - The Vision

The Covid pandemic has had a profound impact on everyone in Victoria over the last 18 months. It has taken a huge toll on people, organisations and communities.

The Vision for an Event Led Recovery is to use events to:

- bring people back together again
- share a vision for our future and give people reason for hope
- help start rebuilding confidence and optimism
- show that the recovery is starting and real action is happening
- give confidence that we do have a future together

To use a lot of more modest sized events to help rebuild Victoria community by community, organisation by organisation, region by region, sector by sector.

To use events over the next six months to bring people back together to help drive Victoria's recovery and return to prosperity.

### Community Events

Encouraging and empowering people and organisations to hold events in local communities to bring people back together again, to reconnect the communities, and to get people working together again.

### Public Events

Providing support and encouragement to get public events, performances and festivals of all kinds that bring people together from right across the community happening again. They can also involve and support talent from right across the event industry, music, the arts, food & wine, technology, education, etc....

### Business Events

Providing the confidence, encouragement and some financial support to organisations - commercial, for purpose, associations, and government - to start holding events again to re-engage with their teams and stakeholders, to reward the efforts of the last 18 months, to inspire and motivate people, and to help create the change and innovation needed to adapt to this new world.

### Major Events

The emphasis with major events needs to be getting the existing ones successfully to happen again. And, most importantly, to put the time and effort into helping to change and develop these events so they are more suited to this new environment, and provide greater and more relevant overall benefits to the community.

# An Event Led Recovery for Victoria

## Part 2 - The Strategy

### A Vision and a Commitment

Governments committing to leading an event led recovery for Victoria. And committing the necessary resources to make this happen quickly.

### A Roadmap and Guidelines for Events

Showing what will be allowed for remainder 2021 and for 2022. And practical guidelines for events.

### Practical Support

Pro forma event plans, checklists, training courses, a dedicated telephone help line, safety items, etc... - to make it much easier to hold events in a Covidsafe way.

### Marketing and Communications

A dedicated marketing and communications campaign to promote the benefits and use of events as part of Victoria's recovery.

### Covid Cancel Event Insurance

Government backed Covid cancel event insurance.

### Continuation of Existing Financial Support for Businesses and Workers

A continuation of the existing Business CAP financial support for businesses and Federal Disaster Payments for workers until events are properly happening again.

### Victoria Event Led Recovery Funding Program:

#### \$10m Community Event Fund - Regional

For regional councils to fund organisations and businesses to hold events.

#### \$20m Community Event Fund - Metro

For metropolitan councils to fund organisations and businesses to hold events.

#### \$30m Public Event Fund

To provide grants to organisations - for profit, for purpose, or associations - to hold public events and festivals over the next six months.

#### \$40m Business Event Fund

To provide grants to organisations - for profit, for purpose and associations - to help them to hold events and conferences over the next six months that will help to rebuild the confidence of our community and getting our economy running again.

#### \$50m Event Industry Business Support Fund

To provide direct financial support to event industry businesses to help them to survive and just as importantly so they can gear back up again to be ready to support many events happening again.

(Funded in part by reallocating from the existing budget some of the additional \$152m for the Major Event Fund for potential future events and the \$20m for the Regional Event Fund. And bringing forward some of this funding from future years.)

## APPENDIX C - GOLD COAST 2018 COSTS

Key financial pages from the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Post Games Report.

The full report can be accessed here:

<https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/gold-coast-2018-commonwealth-games-post-games-report/resource/93979a31-b12a-4f87-a313-10643e3cf439>

## 1.2 Net cost of infrastructure and facilities to the Queensland Government for the period 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2018

	Notes	Revised Budget (\$m)	Actual (\$m)
<b>Infrastructure and facilities expenditure</b>	2.1.6.2		
Belmont Shooting Centre	2.1.9.1	18	19
Broadbeach Bowls Club	2.1.9.2	4	4
Carrara Indoor Stadium	2.1.9.3	8	8
Carrara Southern Precinct	2.1.9.4	6	5
Carrara - Gold Coast Sports and Leisure Centre and Precinct Works	2.1.9.5	105	103
Carrara Stadium	2.1.9.6	6	6
Coomera Indoor Sports Centre	2.1.9.7	40	40
Gold Coast Aquatic Centre	2.1.9.8	41	41
Gold Coast Hockey Centre	2.1.9.9	16	16
Nerang Mountain Bike Trails	2.1.9.10	3	3
Queensland State Velodrome	2.1.9.11	60	61
Runaway Bay Sports Super Centre	2.1.9.12	2	2
Village Roadshow – Sound Stage 9	2.1.9.13	11	11
Games Village	2.1.9.14, 2.2.3.2	264	250
Public Domain Improvements	2.1.9.15	7	7
Other	2.1.9.16	6	2
<b>Total infrastructure and facilities expenditure</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>599</b>	<b>577</b>
<b>Other government contributions for infrastructure and facilities</b>			
Australian Government Grants & Funding	2.2.3.3	154	154
Local Government Grants & Funding	2.2.3.3	35	32
<b>Total other government contributions for infrastructure and facilities</b>		<b>189</b>	<b>186</b>
<b>Net cost of infrastructure and facilities to the Queensland Government</b>		<b>410</b>	<b>390</b>

## 1.3 Total net cost to the Queensland Government for the period 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2018

	Notes	Revised Budget (\$m)	Actual (\$m)
Net operating cost to the Queensland Government	1.1	1,098	949
Net cost of infrastructure and facilities to the Queensland Government	1.2	410	390
<b>Total net cost to the Queensland Government</b>	<b>2.2.2</b>	<b>1,507</b>	<b>1,340</b>

This statement should be read in conjunction with the Notes to the Financial Statement.

## 2 NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENT

### 2.1 Basis of Preparation

#### 2.1.1 Reporting Entity and Basis of Consolidation

The Report is a special purpose financial report. The format and accounting policies adopted when preparing the Report were determined by the Department of Innovation, Tourism Industry Development and the Commonwealth Games (DITID). As a result, the Report has not been prepared in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards and Interpretations, but has been prepared on an accrual basis consistent with generally accepted accounting principles.

The information in this Report has been accumulated from the audited financial information of public sector entities involved in delivering the Games. The Report includes all transactions for the period from the establishment of the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Corporation (GOLDOC) on 1 January 2012 to dissolution on 31 December 2018 to reflect the total Games period.

The Queensland Government is the reporting entity. The revenue and expenses principally include the

following not-for-profit Queensland government agencies that were provided a portion of the Games budget to deliver infrastructure or operational services:

- Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Corporation – This statutory body was established under the Commonwealth Games Arrangements Act 2011 (Qld) to plan, organise and deliver the Commonwealth Games. GOLDOC was dissolved on 31 December 2018.
- Department of Innovation, Tourism Industry Development and the Commonwealth Games (DITID) that was first advisor to the Queensland Government on its investment in GC2018, delivery of legislative obligations, the Embracing 2018 Legacy Program, the State Protocol Plan and state-wide program partnerships, the GC2018 trade and investment program and oversight of Festival 2018.
- Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning (DSDMIP) that delivered the Games Venues and Village infrastructure program.

APPENDIX D - THE AGE ARTICLE FROM SEPTEMBER 3 2023

SEPTEMBER 3, 2023 SUNDAY AGE

# How a Games caravan housing scheme ran into a funding ditch

**Exclusive**  
**Kieran Rooney**

When a looming Commonwealth Games accommodation shortage emerged, the local caravan industry was thrilled to be part of the solution – until they were asked to supply thousands of mobile homes for free.

In the months leading up to the cancellation of the 2026 event, the industry was in discussions with the Victorian government to supply 10,000 caravans to house Games volunteers and workers.

“The week before [the cancellation], they spoke to me and said, ‘We thought industry was going to pay for it,’” Caravan Industry Victoria chief executive Daniel Sahlberg said. “They were well aware that, for manufacturing caravans, we would need someone, ideally the government to foot the bill.”

When *The Sunday Age* asked the government if it had intended to pay for the caravans, a spokesman said the organising committee had been working closely with local accommodation providers and industry. “No discussions were sufficiently advanced to discuss financing or funding options,” the spokesman said.

Sahlberg told *The Sunday Age* he had met with the Andrews government in the 10 months leading up to the cancellation after organisers quickly realised they had limited options to accommodate vital Games support staff.

Planned athletes’ villages were slated to house competitors but, as planning ramped up in 2023, authorities were under pressure to determine how regional hubs would cope with a wave of visitors, volunteers and workers.

The state explored the option of spectators spending their nights back in Melbourne as it became clear local accommodation providers could not afford to meet the vastly inflated demand over a 12-day period.

Sahlberg said discussions with the state began from November last year after he learnt Wodonga Racecourse was sounded out as an event precinct for the Games.

He thought his industry could become involved to unlock similar public spaces for short stays.

“I ended up getting the Bendigo

council and the Geelong council ringing me as well and sort of say ... ‘That’s really good because we’ve got no accommodation,’” he said.

“I said, ‘We’re here to help’, and it escalated from there.”

Sahlberg said he had met with staff working under Commonwealth Games Minister Jacinta Allan, who wanted to find accommodation for up to 50,000 volunteers, workers and officials.

He told them the industry could build or provide about 10,000 caravans to be ready specifically for 2026.

Sahlberg said they responded by saying, “You’ve solved our problem”.

But during conversations with the Games operational team in June, he said, questions emerged over where funding would come from because the caravan industry fell under multiple departments, such as tourism and manufacturing.

“From that meeting at the start of June, we had probably another five or six meetings with the operational team and every time we met them, the noise got louder about no money,” he said. “If you

had told us that from the start we could have gone out looking, but it is 10,000 units, which is a lot of money that you want an industry to fund. Why wouldn’t you have thought these things through right from the start?”

Sahlberg said he had sought out other companies to partner with and salvage the idea of using

“Why wouldn’t you have thought these things through right from the start?”

**Daniel Sahlberg, chief executive, Caravan Industry Victoria**

caravans to support the Games, but within a week the event was cancelled – at a cost to taxpayers of \$380 million in compensation.

He said everyone was blindsided by the news.

When the Andrews government released its updated figures for the event, it cited \$2 billion in “additional pressures” to explain how the Games’ cost blew out from

\$2.6 billion to almost \$7 billion. This included “accommodation shortfalls in the regions increasing cost”.

During hearings at a Senate inquiry last week, Commonwealth Games chief executive Craig Phillips was asked about concerns that there was little to no accommodation available in host cities.

“The strategy that the organising committee was implying was essentially a ‘day out’ approach,” he said. “With much of the spectators attending the Games actually living in Melbourne and travelling out.

“Prior to the [cancellation] decision on July 18 the organising committee was looking at what the transport solution could be.”

Committee for Ballarat chief executive Michael Poulton earlier told the inquiry that his organisation had been frustrated at the state government’s poor consultation with regional communities. A clear example of this was the decision to build Ballarat’s athletes’ village at the local sale yards rather than around the inner city as his group had advocated, Poulton said.



Daniel Sahlberg: questions emerged over where funding would come from. Photo: Jason South