

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism and Events Sectors

Anglesea—Wednesday, 12 May 2021

#### MEMBERS

Mr Enver Erdogan—Chair

Mr Bernie Finn—Deputy Chair

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Mark Gepp

Mrs Bev McArthur

Mr Tim Quilty

Mr Lee Tarlamis

#### PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Dr Matthew Bach

Ms Melina Bath

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr David Davis

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

**WITNESS**

Ms Liz Price, General Manager, Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism.

**The CHAIR:** I declare that the Economy and Infrastructure Committee public hearing for the Inquiry into the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism and Events Sectors continues. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I wish to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land. I pay my respect to their elders past, present and emerging.

I wish to introduce committee members that are present with us right now: Mr Barton, Mr Gepp, Mr Tarlamis, Mrs McArthur and Mr Meddick. Ms Wendy Lovell will be joining us shortly.

I would like to call our next witness, Ms Liz Price from Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism.

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

All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

We welcome your opening comments but ask that they be kept to a maximum of 5 to 10 minutes to allow plenty of time for discussion. Could you please give your name for the benefit of the Hansard team and then begin your presentation. Over to you. Thank you.

**Ms PRICE:** Thank you, Chair. My name is Liz Price. Thank you very much for coming to our region and for being out here to talk to myself and also to operators. I think that is what you will find the most valuable over the next couple of days, actually speaking to the people on the ground. For us, the pandemic is not over and the crisis is not over. I think that that is a really important message to walk away with. Yes, we have to be optimistic and we have to instil optimism in the industry, but we also need to be realistic.

International borders will remain closed—if I am to believe the budget announcement last week—until at least mid-2022, which is a pretty frightening prospect. Many businesses have not returned to their full capacity, and they will really be questioning today where they sit and how they are going to see through the winter. I think Damien sort of highlighted that for you.

Interstate visitors are still not tracking at back-to-normal levels. They lack confidence because they do not want to be caught by a snap border closure or be forced into quarantine, so we know there is a significant challenge with confidence. We know that events still remain constrained from a numbers point of view but also that being at that behest of a sudden lockdown, and we need to think about how we can de-risk events so that they can go ahead. We realise that they are absolute demand drivers, so how we can support those to continue to be demand drivers. The cost complexity of hosting events—especially in a COVID-safe manner and when so many of the people that run them are volunteers—is really putting them at risk and making them decide they cannot go ahead.

The return to office has started happening in many places, and you will hear today from my colleagues in Geelong. It still has a long way to go and getting back to the norm of face-to-face meetings and getting out for business events and business travel is really important. That is why we talk about the complexity of the visitor economy—it is not just leisure visitors, it is business visitors and it is event visitors—and really needing to understand the breadth of that.

There is a bit of a narrative that regional Victoria has recovered and that it is booming, but that is a big generalisation. I think we have got to be really careful about how we do generalise that, especially for the businesses and the destinations that are still hurting and feeling like they have been left behind. The impact from the pandemic and that pathway to recover is not homogenous. It is probably one of the detriments of the

visitor economy or the tourism and events sector that we are made up of so many individual parts and what happened in each part is quite different and the solutions are quite varied to actually help on the pathway to recovery. But that lack of being able to come up with one golden solution, one big bullet, makes it really difficult often and so you do hear different stories. I think it is really important, and we have got to understand, that different regions, different destinations and different business types are all recovering at different paces and all have quite unique challenges.

You know, you hear a lot about how regional Victoria is booming, and my colleagues in the north-east are having a good time at the moment, but I would actually say that we have had a bit of a sugar hit. I think that maybe it has been taken out of context what that initial period of release delivered for regional Victoria. That is why I call it a sugar hit. There were people that had been locked up in Melbourne, driven to get out and see their family, wanting to be back out in open spaces. We do not know what it is like to be locked down until we are told we cannot go more than 5 kilometres and we have only got an hour a day to walk. That did create this real sense of, 'Oh my God. I want to get out'. It was really interesting being in regional Victoria versus Melbourne and talking to colleagues in Melbourne. You hated ringing them and finding they were on their one hour of walking. You wanted to get off the phone, not have a work thing to talk to them about. But even when we were talking to people that help us with marketing that were based in Melbourne, you know, they were coming from a very different place and we were starting to see different behaviours. So I really think we have got to recognise where that was at.

I think one of the challenges with that initial sugar hit too, though, was that there was also a lot of profitless volume. We saw a lot of people that wanted to get out into big spaces where there were no crowds, but they brought everything with them, and they did not necessarily spend in commercial businesses. So we have got to realise visitor numbers do not always equate to visitor spend, and we have got to be using visitor spend as the metric, not volume. Yes, as Damien said, many businesses—and I am in a summer location—had a good summer, but summer is our peak and, you know, we are now on the precipice of going into what is going to be a very, very long winter. And I think that is where most of the businesses are sitting. We understand that even a good summer really does not equate to or make up for the period of being locked down and what they gave up over that period of time. Many businesses could not trade at all, and you are going to hear from some of those over the next two days that really could not trade, had extended closures. There was no opportunity for them to pivot or to transition their business.

We had a loss of really significant events. This region is very blessed. We pretty much have a year-round calendar of events—everything from the May race carnival to Port Fairy Folk Festival, the Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race and the Rip Curl Pro. It broke my heart to be shopping in Woolworths and hear that we had lost the Rip Curl Pro this year—and to hear it from a journalist, which is always great. But realise that those have enormous impacts not just on this region but also on Melbourne and Victoria's reputation as a whole. The loss of those events really do hurt those communities. The Port Fairy Folk Festival invest so much of what they make back into that community. The volunteer program that works around that is a model to be put up on a pedestal.

There is also significant uncertainty and concern for businesses as we go into this off-peak because we see a lot of the stimulus programs have been trying to push Melburnians out, but they do travel on weekends. Our midweek is going to be a real challenge, and we have already really seen that gravitate to the weekend as we have started. The loss of the internationals and possible border closures to at least mid-2022 is really going to send a ripple through our industry today. We get about a million nights from international overnight visitors and about 800 000 daytrippers. A lot of us want to talk about the profitless volumes of those on buses, but there are many businesses, including the chemists and the newsagents, that do benefit from those people that are there in that short period of time, and the international overnights do spend significantly more than domestics and they do our attractions.

Again, I am not sure if you are hearing from Wildlife Wonders, but one of our newest attractions opened on the day of the circuit-breaker lockdown. I was on the podium and thought that I was not very engaging because I was watching everybody looking at their phones. I realised they were announcing we were going into lockdown as I was trying to open the attraction for them. They reopened a week later when the state did. The few visitors they have had are raving about the experience, but it is an experience that is very geared around internationals. Domestic visitors do not go and do our attractions and experiences. They think they can see it all

in the wild. They have done it all before. So they are not trading at viable numbers currently—a real challenge for something that was to be a spectacular attraction and a great asset for our region.

Cape Otway Lightstation—I know you are hearing from Matt tomorrow—are operating at about 30 per cent and have actually told Parks Victoria that they are going to hand back their lease because they cannot make it a viable proposition, so their staff will end up being let go, and 12 Apostles Helicopters is operating at about 20 per cent, so these products and experiences are really struggling to survive, as are many of the accommodation providers that rely on those places.

We also have a lot of accommodation that is in what I call overflow destinations. They are not destinations in their own right, the Cobdens of the world, the Terangs. They often get people that because Port Campbell is full or because Timboon is full will travel on. Those places again are the ones that are missing out first—because they can get into the town now, they will stay in the town.

In the domestic sense we have never been in a more competitive environment. So we all talk about the need for money for marketing, and it is such a challenging thing. The investment in both Visit Victoria and Tourism Australia is a great thing, but we also need to see the investment in individual destinations and regions. We have this real challenge that Australia becomes a bit more of the same same, so how do you stand out from the pack? And that is why we have got to be looking long term. Part of that long-term solution is investing in the infrastructure and the product and experience, both big products and also the small products that are going to make sure that we are competitive and we are year-round destinations.

You asked the question before about this destination—why Bright? Bright has been lucky to have significant investment in some infrastructure, public and private, and investment in marketing, and they really are shining as a great destination year-round; we are not. Most of the marketing that traditionally has been around our region in the past has very much been focused on the Twelve Apostles and the road, and the breadth of the magnificent offering here is what we have got to make sure visitors understand. There are so many new things to explore. Yes, so many Melburnians and Victorians have done the road, but have they really? Have they not just scratched the surface? And that is what we have got to start to bring to life, but significant investment in the game-changing infrastructure is going to be critical.

We talk about international bubbles, and I think it is such a double-edged sword because so many of those bubbles could end up a net loss for Victoria, especially, and for Melbourne. They may benefit some of our northern states, but we have really got to look at which of those bubbles are going to deliver the results. International students are such an important cohort, so looking at how we can start to bring those students back—but also those markets like Singapore and Malaysia that are strong for Melbourne and strong for regional Victoria. Before the pandemic we were really conscious of how reliant regional Victoria is on Melbourne in comparison to some of our interstate destinations. Regional New South Wales is not as dependent on Sydney, and regional Queensland is not as dependent on Brisbane working to get visitation, but we are very, very dependent on Melbourne. So it is critical that we invest in Melbourne, but we cannot think that is the only pathway to a solution for regional Victoria, because our problems are different and Melbourne also becomes one of our biggest competitors. The more there is to do in Melbourne, the more discretionary dollars Melburnians and regional Victorians will spend in Melbourne, and regional Victoria will miss out.

Damien talked about how the pandemic actually exacerbated some of our big challenges of workforce and of availability and affordability of accommodation, especially for workers. Businesses now are really constraining their operations to work within what they can get. As Damien said, they are often reducing their capacity, keeping sections closed in the restaurant, changing hours. We have got a significant number of businesses that have dropped back from a seven-day-a-week business to a four-day-a-week business and are rethinking their business and operating models, with all the uncertainty, to make sure they are going to be profitable, but sometimes to the detriment of the region. And we really worry about, on the other side of this, what is our product offering going to be, and how do we stimulate midweek visitation if there are not places open, places people can eat and things that they can go and do? So we really see that we are increasing the risk of reducing the region's product offering and competitiveness even further.

I also just wanted to touch on—it would be really remiss to not talk about—the emotional tolls and the mental health issues that have come through this pandemic. This sector is very much a sector of a lot of individual businesses that do work in isolation—often head down, bum up and just getting the job done. There are about

1900 tourism-dependent businesses in the region, 1200 employing, but 700 of them that do not employ. And again you are going to hear from some of those and about the heartbreak of what they have had to go through as well. For many businesses that were not able to pivot, they had the anguish of having to, you know, dismiss longstanding staff members, having to reshape their business to try and survive to make sure they could meet their personal commitments, let alone their business commitments, and so continuing mental health support and business mentoring are absolutely crucial—and thinking that that is not a six-month program, that is an extended two- and three-year program. We are going to see those effects as people respond to other crises that happened in coming years.

On an optimistic note, you know, we did see in the 2020 budget a \$485 million investment in regional tourism. Hopefully that is a good sign for the 20th and more is to come, so I can be optimistic, but I also think we have got to think about how we can quickly implement things. We have got to accelerate implementation. The investment in infrastructure—as Damien touched on, we are so lucky in the region that we are on the cusp of lots of public and private investment. We have got to make sure it can happen quickly.

The Eden Project will be an absolute game changer for this region. It is an environmental attraction that sells the breadth of the experience here: the implication of our landscape, the water, the air, the wind and the role of fire. Now, we really could see that as a major attraction to really sell a different message, appeal to different audiences. The Twelve Apostles precinct plan—you know, that attraction has been an embarrassment for so long. You know, here is an opportunity to actually build back better and have an amazing attraction that is not just talking to international but absolutely inspires Melburnians to be proud it is in their backyard and want to come and visit. The Apollo Bay harbour redevelopment, Point Grey redevelopment in Lorne, Cape Otway Road Australia that Bev talked about, Tower Hill activation, Budj Bim landscape—we are such a lucky region. The Cape Bridgewater resort—no matter which part of the region you look at, there is an opportunity we could accelerate. It helps in the short term with employment, with accommodation providers and food and beverage providers servicing the construction workers, but it means we are an amazing destination when we build back, that we are year round and we start have a bit more of a night-time economy. Many of these projects are funded through the city deal. Many still need some more money, but we could get on with the job with the money we have got and start to deliver results.

The final thing I would just say is that I did mention that we have got to change the metrics. We have got to talk about what the visitor economy returns, not about the numbers coming through the front door.

In terms of what we need now: really quick and consistent, and clarity around any changes in restrictions so businesses can adapt. We talked about the circuit breaker. At 1 o'clock they were told they were closing down. At 6 o'clock an announcement came. Visitors could have still travelled and returned, but between those 5 hours most businesses had already turned their customers away and refunded. So we have got to have the clarity of what each restriction means when we bring it in. We need a road map of what a reopening of international borders is going to look like and what the vaccination program can mean for businesses so that they can also encourage people to get vaccinated. We need continued targeted support. We have got to really think about making sure—I think you talked about the question of vouchers—it is driving the right behaviour: midweek, off-peak, the problems that we all have; multi-night stays where people will get out, go and see the attractions. I think the TA line was: 'Half-price airfares, full-on holidays'. That is what we need people to be having—full-on holidays. Do the things that you would do when you are travelling overseas, not just the things you do on a quick weekend away.

We need increased investment in the regional tourism boards. It would be remiss of me not to sell myself. We do play an important role in bringing the industry together. Pre pandemic we had about 600 operators that were part of our program. We did offer it free and have brought it in with our local government partners to continue that. We have over 1280 businesses now that we are working with. So it really does position us to help them help themselves to recover. We need to extend the investment in the Regional Events Fund but also look at exploring more opportunities to bring Melbourne-based things out into regional Victoria as well. White Night is going back to Bendigo and Geelong, but what is the other opportunity to bring some of these things—bring back our creative arts sector but bring them out into regional Victoria as well. We really need to support the workforce challenges—look at a statewide approach to: how do we start to address the accommodation affordability? Bev asked, 'Is there land available?'. Yes, there is some Crown land, some public land, where we could do some things quite quickly, especially for the seasonal workers. It may not address the bigger issue about building our communities and building population, but maybe it is a start in the right direction.

That is really it for me. Thank you very much for the opportunity to present to you in person, and I am happy to take any questions.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Liz. Great submission and great presentation. What I might do is: I am acutely aware that there are a number of witnesses today, so I might give each committee member one question, and strictly one question only. So we will start right to left, which is easier, in my line of sight: Rod, Mark, Lee, Bev, Andy then Wendy. So one question—fire away.

**Mr BARTON:** Thank you, Chair. Thanks, Liz. Just from my own experience, I worked in the commercial vehicle sector and certainly 10 or 15 years ago we were doing private groups and were talking about cars and buses, and the reality was we would do a one-day trip. We would have international visitors coming here. One day we would go to the Great Ocean Road. The next day we would go down to see the penguins. The other day was going out—

**Ms PRICE:** If you are lucky there is a tour that does both in the one day.

**Mr BARTON:** Yes, but that is not good for us. We like to sell three days. That was a challenge back 10 or 15 years ago, and quite frankly we never stopped here. We just went straight through, in and back, in one day. It is really about how we expanded that. It was mainly because I know people who own some wineries out in the Yarra Valley, but we were being contacted; we were going out to the sites. They encouraged the operators—drivers, bus companies and all that sort of stuff—to change the way they were doing it. What sort of work are we doing around that these days?

**Ms PRICE:** I think the biggest challenge for us is: we have not had the product to actually shift that conversation. We have seen some growth in product in recent times, but we have not got the accommodation room stock. We have not had the attractions that would cater for the numbers and provide those ancillary experiences to encourage that length of stay. That is why the infrastructure piece becomes so important, and big P and small P. Probably my optimistic story that came out of COVID is that it was staggering in the last 18 months how much new food offering we have actually got in the region. You have seen the Lorne Hotel bring MoVida down into Lorne, but they have also now brought Coda. We have had some people fleeing the Melbourne market that have opened up at Lavers Hill, so we are starting to get some product that will start to enable that, but traditionally it has been a lack of product. So pre-COVID we had a supply issue. We still have a supply issue, but it is slowly on the mend and I think that investment in infrastructure will address that.

**Mr BARTON:** That is key.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Barton. Mr Gepp.

**Mr GEPP:** Thank you, Chair. Thanks very much for your presentation today. Two quick points if I can precede the question. On international border closures Ms Lovell made the point before that that is a federal government-controlled area or space. My question is going to go to the midweek offering that you talked about, but I know from talking to people particularly in an environment where there have been wages flatlining for five or six years now that it becomes an affordability issue. So coming down to somewhere like the Surf Coast for an overnight thing for a family of four—it is about where do you find that somewhere between \$500 and \$1000 for that weekend spin. Have you got any thoughts on that?

**Ms PRICE:** That is actually a really important thing to understand. Pre-COVID regional Victoria was perceived as expensive. So as a value proposition—that again is where the border opening is a challenge for the those leaving—regional Victoria is considered an expensive proposition and it does not have the same connotation of, 'I've had a really good break'. If I travel overseas—that is what people compare it to—I can go to Fiji. For the \$1200 you have just spent coming to regional Victoria, I could have gone to Fiji for five days. So that is a big challenge and I think the product is a big part of what we have got to shift and get to. We have got to deliver that quality of experience. The breadth of the offer becomes as compelling as going somewhere else.

**Mr GEPP:** Okay. So my question is: in terms of the midweek occupancy, what are two things that we could take back to government that could improve the occupancy rates during the middle of the week?

**Ms PRICE:** So business events is probably the biggest one—and that is not just big business events; it is around small business events as well. I know in the fire crisis we had some companies like Deloitte and things come out and say their workers could have an extra week of annual leave if they actually proved that they went out to regional Victoria. The companies that committed to going into regional Victoria and into fire areas to have conferences—those things really do work. They work midweek. There is the opportunity then, especially if they are on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday: ‘I might come for the Friday and Saturday with my family’ and then the family goes home. So I do think things that can stimulate that sort of thing—some FBT changes might even help to get people out having dinners and things.

**Mr GEPP:** Not our area of expertise.

**Ms PRICE:** I know it is not your area, but you are all advocates.

**Mr GEPP:** I am happy to tell Josh Frydenberg though.

**Ms PRICE:** You are all advocates. The other one I do think is that infrastructure build because, as Damien said, having the road workers was a lifeline. There are many parts of this region that will say that has been their lifeline. That will fill the midweek.

**Mr GEPP:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Tarlamis.

**Mr TARLAMIS:** Thank you, Liz, for that comprehensive presentation. In your submission you touched on some of the innovative relationships and partnerships that have been formed but you did not go into detail. Would you be able to give us some examples of some partnerships that have come out of the circumstances where businesses have partnered and grown?

**Ms PRICE:** Yes. So you have got businesses like Bells Beach Brewing, which is a small brewer that is based in Torquay. They are a bit of a cellar door. I am not sure you would call it a cellar door but a little brewery experience. They partnered with a chocolatier. They also partnered with one of the local food establishments to start doing home deliveries, so you saw things like that. You saw someone like Great Ocean Ducks, who actually partnered with the Royal Mail and were doing duck dinners into Melbourne—so I think some of that small P innovation and showing people that they could do things differently. You saw a very quick scale up in some of the F and B businesses to also do delivery and takeaway, and I know that happened in lots of places. But we were pretty much behind the times in this part of the region. Bev will tell you that we have had some digital connectivity challenges in many parts of the region. But, yes, you saw a lot of those things, where they really started to work as partners and do things a little bit differently, even in terms of staff. You have had businesses that have shared staff. Because they could not get staff they have created new models.

I think the employment question was asked before, but the employment model is broken. The hospitality and tourism sector is not an attractive sector to work in. There has been a long-term reputation about not paying people well enough. We have got to look at new models. We have got to look at models where maybe people have an equity in the business. How do we get employers to think a little bit differently? How do we create career progression? How do we give broader job experience in the roles? If I was in Italy and I said I was a waiter, I would be applauded and people would be quite proud: ‘Where do you work? What do you do?’. Here it is like, ‘Well, what are you going to do when you get a real job?’. We have got to change all of that, and part of that is changing the models.

It was interesting; I was talking to William Angliss recently, and even they were saying that one of the changes in people coming back for courses is, ‘How do I preserve things? How do I package things up?’. So how do we make sure we have got that innovation coming to our businesses in regional areas to make sure they are evolving our businesses? I sat and listened to Shane Delia talking about the Providoor model—you know, it was all trial and error—and how quickly he realised that now he has not got a one-dimensional model, he has got a multidimensional model. We have got to bring those learnings broader so that we can help our other businesses get on that track.

**Mr TARLAMIS:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mrs McArthur.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Well, if my colleagues had not worked it out, they should have worked out by now that Liz Price is the superstar advocate for tourism, especially in this area.

**Ms PRICE:** Thanks, Bev.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** We are lucky to have her. Do not leave, Liz. But what I am hearing from all sorts of businesses, and it is government related, is the issue of certainty. If businesses do not have certainty, they cannot operate, and it is across all businesses. So this idea that we have one case or two cases and we start locking down an entire state, where we should actually probably—maybe it is not even needed—isolate specific select areas like New South Wales did: what would you comment about that? Really we are going to have to live with this virus. It may go on for years—who knows? And whether we have vaccinations or not, it is problematic as to whether we are going to allow businesses to operate pre-COVID normal. So what would the message be to government about this unbearable situation of providing uncertainty for business and snap lockdowns from state to state and whatever. Should that exist?

**Ms PRICE:** No, and I think that is the number one thing. We have got to give people certainty about how things are going to operate and what the implications of a decision are going to be. Businesses have geared up to make sure that they are COVID compliant. They have changed their QR codes to make sure now they are all on the government QR code. Probably more needs to be done to make sure the consumers are the ones that are not getting apathetic and are still continuing to do it, and I know that that is a big challenge. But we know now, 18 months in, that we have got systems and processes to be able to monitor. Now we have got to have the confidence that those systems work and rely on those. So, yes, if we have got a lockdown, let us keep it as contained as possible to enable as many businesses to keep on trading.

I think we have seen other states that have done it more effectively. We have seen a lot of inconsistency as well. I think we all saw Anzac Day, and I do not know how many calls I fielded on the Monday going, 'I cannot believe my event cannot have 7500 people and there were 75 000 in the G. I'm on 11 000 acres'. You know, there is not that consistency. So I think it is that certainty, that consistency—we know we are going to be living with it, and if it is not this, it might be the next thing, so how do we make sure that we take the learnings and we use those to give the guidelines and restrictions? As I said, at 11 o'clock, if it had been clear—'If you are already travelling, you are able to travel to your location. You will have to lock down in that location, but what a beautiful place to be locked down in, and you will still be permitted to return'. You know, one business, Lorne Bush House Cottages, would have saved \$15 000—that was their heartbreaking email to me on that Friday night. I sent an email at 6.30 pm clarifying, and that heartbreaking email came back. It said, 'Liz, if you'd sent this to me 6 hours earlier, you would've saved me 15 grand'.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** And Liz, could you attest that in some areas that you are responsible for and I am responsible for there has been not one case of COVID, yet everybody was locked down as if we were in North Melbourne?

**Ms PRICE:** Correct.

**Mr GEPP:** That is why there was not a case—because we were locked down. You answered your own question.

*Members interjecting.*

**The CHAIR:** I am acutely aware that we are 15 minutes over schedule. So I will get to Mr Meddick, then Ms Lovell.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Thank you, Chair. In the interests of time, I am happy to submit my questions on notice if that is okay. But, Ms Price, if it also suits the committee, I would like my office to contact you so I can actually sit down with you and go into these things in more detail.

**Ms PRICE:** I would love to.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Lovell, one question.



**Ms LOVELL:** Thank you for a wonderful presentation. Two things you said really resonated with me: ‘Full-on holidays’ and ‘Have you really done the road?’. I grew up with a family holiday house here in Anglesea. As I drove in, I had visions of the old Shell service station on the corner here that was the only fish and chip shop. As I drove around the back and there were the trampolines, I thought of Brendan Edwards’s bounce ball that used to be right down on the front, near the Four Kings, you know, and—

**Ms PRICE:** Do not leave without trying Fish by Moonlite. The potato cakes are to die for.

**Ms LOVELL:** Obviously I still come back here. I have a godfather who lives in town here. I have family who have the bakery at Apollo Bay. My uncle [inaudible] used to have the pub there when we were kids. We have done the road, but all of the things that you said are the new attractions I have not done. And I thought, what a great marketing campaign—to get all of those of us who have great memories of our own childhoods and have even been bringing our own children or nieces and nephews back here over the years but have not really seen these new attractions. What a great marketing campaign.

**Ms PRICE:** I want to bring back the Sunday drive. Nearly every one of us in this room would have been dragged into the car—unfortunately in the days when your father smoked in the car—for the Sunday drive. Get people to reconnect. Regional Victoria is spectacular.

**Ms LOVELL:** Yes. But also one of the things that I wondered—I asked about extending the vouchers into the winter months—was with the full-on holidays and your idea of having a longer stay, so maybe a seven-day stay where they get two days with their voucher, sort of thing. Would it be advantageous to open it up—so for Victoria to open vouchers up to people from interstate to come for longer periods of stay on the ocean road?

**Ms PRICE:** I mean, I think yes. Interstate visitors tend to disperse further and tend to stay longer and are more likely to do the experiences, because ‘I’m not coming back again often’. So it is a bit like your international trip. You go to Italy and you think you are going to cram as much in because you might not get back to Italy again. So I think interstate has a little bit more of that mentality. And probably one thing I would say to this inquiry to take back in is Melbourne and Victoria need to make sure we are not silent interstate. The bucket-list destinations, the Barrier Reef, Uluru, Broome, Kakadu—we need to make sure the Great Ocean Road, the north-east, the Gippsland Lakes and the Grampians are all on that bucket list as well.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Liz, for—and on that point I might have to conclude—your comprehensive overview.

**Mr GEPP:** It does not help that the federal government’s half-price airfare scheme—

**Ms PRICE:** So of the 700 000 areas, 20 000 went to Avalon.

**The CHAIR:** I also have a couple of questions on notice, and I will email them through. Thank you, Liz, very much.

**Witness withdrew.**