

TRANSCRIPT

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE 2026 COMMONWEALTH GAMES BID

Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid

Geelong – Tuesday 13 February 2024

MEMBERS

David Limbrick – Chair

Joe McCracken – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

David Davis

Jacinta Ermacora

Michael Galea

Sarah Mansfield

Tom McIntosh

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

WITNESS

Ali Wastie, Chief Executive Officer, Greater Geelong City Council.

The CHAIR: I declare open the committee's public hearings for the Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised. I welcome any members of the public in the gallery. I will remind those in the room to be respectful of proceedings and to remain silent at all times, please.

All evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. 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.

For the Hansard record, can you please state your name and the organisation that you are appearing on behalf of.

Ali WASTIE: Ali Wastie. I am the Chief Executive Officer of the City of Greater Geelong.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Thank you. I will just briefly allow the committee members to introduce themselves for the record. I am David Limbrick, the Chair of the committee.

Michael GALEA: Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Tom McINTOSH: Tom McIntosh, Eastern Victoria Region.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Jacinta Ermacora, Western Victoria Region.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Sarah Mansfield, Western Victoria Region. I just wanted to state at the outset for the record that I am a former City of Greater Geelong councillor, up until the state election last year, and I will keep that in mind in terms of the questions that I have.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Joe McCRACKEN: Joe McCracken, Western Victoria.

David DAVIS: David Davis.

Melina BATH: Hello, Ali. Melina Bath, Eastern Victoria.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: And Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Member for Northern Victoria. Hi.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We welcome your opening comments and ask that they be kept to a maximum of around 10 minutes to ensure that we have time for questions. Please proceed.

Ali WASTIE: Sure. Thank you. At the time of the games cancellation I was the chief executive at Bass Coast Shire Council. My first day at the City of Greater Geelong was 28 August. Like most Victorians, I was disappointed and surprised by the decision to cancel the games. Geelong was looking forward to playing a key role in the Commonwealth Games – staging of sports and community celebrations – and had put significant work into planning for the games. The city continues to hold regular discussions with state government on the delivery of legacy infrastructure projects. Our priority is to advocate for infrastructure that delivers for our community now and for the future. The city has worked well with the state government throughout conversations associated with the games, both pre and post cancellation, to ensure that key infrastructure investments and assets delivered to the city provide the best outcomes for the community now and into the future. The city has played a key role in seeking to understand community needs and balance these insights with evidence-based strategic planning to ensure these are considered throughout planning and delivery. The

city has continued to advocate for infrastructure that is needed for the community and has been clear with community intent.

The city provided a response to the VAGO audit request for information with regard to the state's withdrawal from the Commonwealth Games 2026 in October 2023. The city has since received the redacted VAGO report, which was provided to contributing LGAs in January 2023. The original VAGO response provided by the city included details relating to the following key areas: a games prefeasibility study – the city contributed \$6000 to this study in the 2017–18 financial year; payment was made to the Greater Shepparton Council. It also provided details about the commencement of the city's involvement in the games; formal agreements between the city and the state government; financial contributions from the City of Greater Geelong; confidentiality agreements; community competition venues; difficulties obtaining information about the games; site selection for venues; planning for the Geelong games village; the withdrawal from hosting the games; the regional support package announcement, which was done at the time of the withdrawal; and the cost and spend today by the city.

There was ongoing discussion with the state government before the cancellation of the cost of staging the games in Geelong, which was significant. The city has calculated a cost estimate of \$6.27 million in the lead-up to the games cancellation, with an estimate of an additional \$1.115 million since being re-engaged by the state post cancellation of the games. These figures do not include any co-contributions the city may have committed to providing for legacy venues pre cancellation of the games, and this has not accounted for the ongoing operating cost of legacy infrastructure, which is estimated to be in excess of \$8 million annually.

At the time of the cancellation the state government announced they would go ahead with the regional sporting infrastructure and community projects. These projects included a community sports complex at Waurn Ponds, a swimming complex at Armstrong Creek and an upgrade of the Stead Park hockey centre in Corio. In general the city welcomed the state government's promise to fund projects because our region is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia, and the region does need new infrastructure to service the needs of the rising population. The City of Greater Geelong takes seriously our role to advocate for the region and to deliver for the people who live here. The city has strongly advocated for a regional indoor sports and event centre, called a RISEC, to accommodate the surging interest in basketball and netball but also to host elite competition for up to 5000 spectators. Our community needs a regional indoor sports and events centre like what is currently available in other cities such as Bendigo and Ballarat – we do not have one here. As the second-largest city in Victoria and Australia's premier regional city, this is an essential piece of community infrastructure that is required to support the growth and development of high-level competition and elite-level sport as well as to attract major sporting events and teams to the region. The delivery of a regionally recognised netball and basketball venue has been a long-held priority for the city. There are over 10,000 netballers in the region and over 8500 registered basketballers in Geelong and 11,500 in the G21 region. Approximately 10 per cent of the population of the region participate in either netball or basketball, and both sports are growing. The original commitment by the state government to the Waurn Ponds infrastructure would not have delivered on these long-term futureproofing goals, so we are in negotiations with the state government to try and ensure the RISEC is able to be delivered.

It is true that the City of Greater Geelong and the state government have not always been fully aligned in the past. We have been up-front that the region's priority has been securing the futureproof RISEC over the new Armstrong Creek aquatic centre at this time. We have continued the conversation with the state government, and we do acknowledge the state government's commitment to honouring its promise to the region on the aquatic centre. The city is working well with the state and is dedicated to ensuring best community outcomes.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will start with a couple of questions. Thank you very much for your introduction. You mentioned the process you had gone through at the moment with the Auditor-General, and you mentioned confidentiality agreements. What is the nature of those agreements that were being looked at by the Auditor-General?

Ali WASTIE: I would actually have to take that on notice. I do have quite a lot of detail with me in terms of what exactly was provided to VAGO. The city did receive a much-redacted report from that, and my understanding is that the other submitters from local government associations also received redacted reports. I imagine – actually, I am not going to imagine; I will just take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Okay. So you will be able to provide that.

Ali WASTIE: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Was there any discussion either from government or other people to ask the city to not appear or not provide evidence to this inquiry?

Ali WASTIE: No, not at all. I am here before you. It was received quite late, the invitation. So, no.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you. I will quickly pass to Mr McCracken because I will come back to some issues later. Thank you.

Joe McCracken: Thank you. I know that you were not the CEO at the time of the cancellation, but are you happy to take some questions on notice if you cannot reply?

Ali WASTIE: Sure.

Joe McCracken: Yes. Okay, that is good. I want to talk a bit about the non-disclosure agreements as well because, as I understand it, they were not just sought for Geelong, they were sought across the sector for those municipalities that were quite involved in the Comm Games. Were you aware if the Geelong CEO at the time had signed one?

Ali WASTIE: No, I am not aware.

Joe McCracken: At all?

Ali WASTIE: I am not aware that she signed one or did not sign one – or he; I am not sure whether that would have been under the time of Martin Cutter.

Joe McCracken: Okay. I am happy if you want to take that on notice and have a look at it if you want, because I know that there are other local government areas that have.

Ali WASTIE: Sure.

Joe McCracken: Do you know anything about the non-disclosure agreements at all?

Ali WASTIE: No, I do not. I was not here at the time, and it is something that has not been brought up with me. We are very much still in negotiations with the post-legacy assets, and that has been solely my focus coming in here in terms of looking forward and working with the state government to secure what we can for those legacy assets.

Joe McCracken: Okay. We have heard evidence from the organising committee and the Office of the Commonwealth Games, the Department of Treasury and Finance and the Department of Premier and Cabinet that the budget bid of \$4.2 billion for the games was put forward but knocked back in April 2023. Can you provide the dates that funding requests from the City of Greater Geelong were asked by the Victorian government for the co-contributions for hosting those parts of the Comm Games that were meant to be here?

Ali WASTIE: I am aware of negotiations with the City of Greater Geelong with regard to co-contributing for facilities post legacy, but I am not aware of those dates because I was not here. I can take that on notice, and I can get that information to you.

Joe McCracken: Yes. Even just a list and then a bit of detail around those would be really, really good.

Ali WASTIE: Sure. Yes, no problem.

Joe McCracken: I guess I would also want to know what the outcome of the advice was as well, because if there was a discussion between the City of Greater Geelong and the state government, you guys put a view forward. What was the result of that and the discussion around that as well?

Ali WASTIE: Sorry, with regard to –

Joe McCracken: Co-contribution of hosting – sharing the cost, basically.

Ali WASTIE: My understanding is that the costs associated with the games were more around the assets and in terms of what Geelong city council was going to be left with and the ongoing benefit to Geelong. Obviously the costs that I outlined before with regard to the money spent, a lot of that would have been officer time. It was around making sure that we could deliver those games and play our part.

Joe McCracken: Okay. With regard to the council's time lines of involvement in the Comm Games and preparation for 2026, what role, advice, meetings did council have with the Victorian government? I know you mentioned it in your opening, but what was the lead-up to signing up and saying 'Yes, we are a part of this'?

Ali WASTIE: Okay. So in terms of the lead-up, the notice that the city council had that the bid was there was very short. So there were not negotiations with the City of Greater Geelong in the lead-up to the announcement of the Commonwealth Games.

Joe McCracken: So there were no negotiations. It was just 'This is what's happening'.

Ali WASTIE: Yes.

Joe McCracken: So you guys had no idea that the Comm Games was coming. You just said, 'Okay, the Comm Games is here. How are we going to make it happen.' Is that –

Ali WASTIE: As I said before, the City of Greater Geelong made a contribution in the 2017–18 financial year to investigate the possibility of a 10-city regional bid to host the Commonwealth Games across regional Victoria, and that payment was made to the City of Greater Geelong. So there would have been conversations about –

Joe McCracken: Shepparton.

Ali WASTIE: Sorry, the Shepparton council. There would have been conversations about that possibility and that aspiration to host the games. So –

Joe McCracken: When it was announced, though, the City of Greater Geelong did not know that it was coming.

Ali WASTIE: The city was not involved in developing the state of Victoria's initial bid to host the 2026 Commonwealth Games.

Joe McCracken: It just seems, I mean, pretty funny that the state would say, 'Well, you're going to host this, this and this,' without talking to you first. Wouldn't you think that is a bit odd?

Ali WASTIE: It is probably not for me to answer that. I have got the facts in front of me in terms of the information that has been provided, and the state did not approach or engage the city about the games until after the public announcement or press release on 19 January 2022.

Joe McCracken: That is a great shame, because you would think that if the state was going to host a games across regional Victoria, they would engage the biggest council in the state and get the best outcome for the community. How did that make Geelong feel, given that you had not been consulted about it?

Ali WASTIE: Well, Geelong, not that I was there at the time – but absolutely being here, we are very proactive and we take opportunities. So that was what it was, but I do know that we received the formal letter from the state on 16 February 2022.

Joe McCracken: Did they ever give you a copy of the business case at all?

Ali WASTIE: I would have to take that on notice.

Joe McCracken: Okay.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr McCracken. Ms Ermacora.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Thank you, Ali; thank you for appearing today and for your contribution. I just want to take you to the city deal, actually. I am keen to hear from you and learn about the \$500 million Geelong

City Deal. As I understand it, this is a major partnership between all three levels of government, working with industry and community and the private sector and First Peoples to revitalise Geelong and the Great Ocean Road, right down to where it almost intersects with my own region, where I am from, Warrnambool. So can you talk me through the Geelong council's involvement with the fund?

Ali WASTIE: I can absolutely speak to the post – to the games cancellation – and what we have been involved with and the ongoing negotiations with the state government, which have been really proactive. I have had several meetings with Development Victoria, DJSIR, the heads of those departments, to make sure that the assets that are going to be coming Geelong's way are fit for purpose. During my introductory remarks I did note that we are very much focusing on trying to secure a regional indoor sports centre for Waurn Ponds. It is no secret. Obviously everywhere we are in an era of limits. It is a very financially constrained environment at all levels of government, private sector included. So we are working in partnership with the state government to make sure to try and get what we can, or at least futureproof those assets. So if we cannot achieve –

Jacinta ERMACORA: So in terms of the city deal, though, that predates the games.

Ali WASTIE: What we are talking about – sorry, what I am referring to now – are all of the post-legacy things. When the cancellation came out, there was an announcement, obviously, from the state government that there would be funding for not only the host cities but regional Victorian in general – there was something there for regional Victoria to benefit from. There is a housing commitment from that as well, so we should not lose sight of that. We look forward to entering into negotiations with the state around what that housing commitment looks like. There have also been funds associated. Recently the Geelong city council put forward Landy Field for the Community Support Fund, where \$5 million has been – whether we are successful or not in that, that is what we put forward at the last council meeting as an application. Those are funds that have been made available to regional councils who missed out or who were going to host the games. So that is a \$5 million contribution that will be coming into the City of Greater Geelong, providing our application is successful, and then there are obviously the ongoing negotiations with the state government around the three sites: Stead Park, Waurn Ponds, Armstrong Creek.

Jacinta ERMACORA: I guess why I am asking about the city deal is really about the broader context that today's topic sits within, so that is why I was interested in hearing some of the projects that you are involved with.

Ali WASTIE: They are definitely the projects that we have been very much focused on. Council is, right now, as we speak, in very strong negotiations with the departments to try and secure those and to be involved in the design and delivery of them.

Jacinta ERMACORA: I suppose if you look at the flagship project under the city deal, the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre, I understand that construction has already begun on that project. Can you sort of speak to the impact that project will have on the city?

Ali WASTIE: I think it is catalytic. It is amazing.

Jacinta ERMACORA: What do you mean by 'catalytic'?

Ali WASTIE: I think having an event centre and conferencing centre in the heart of the City of Greater Geelong is superb. It is much needed. I think it will create a great sense of pride. It will bring in obviously economic benefit when we have people from all over the world coming into that conference centre. I think it puts Geelong on the map. We are a clever and creative city. I had a meeting last week with the chair of the trust, Rick Aylett. It is happening. What we love to see is action on the ground, and we welcome that contribution from the city deal and also local government.

We have also contributed funding to that project as well, so we are a strong supporter of it. We are doing some public realm improvements out the front there. I think anyone who comes to the City of Greater Geelong and has not been here for a few years just goes, 'Wow, look what's happening in our city.' As I said in my opening remarks, we are Australia's premier regional city. There is so much investment every day, new news is being dropped, and I think it is on all of us to take what we can and go, 'Okay, there's been obviously disappointment with the cancellation of the games, but proactively how can we leverage what is coming to the city for our communities and also visitors?'

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Ermacora. Mr Davis.

David DAVIS: Ms Wastie, thank you for your evidence, and I get the point that you were only at the City of Greater Geelong from 28 August – so about a month after the events broke loose and we lost the games and cancelled with huge international damage, but I think a lot of local disappointment too. You mentioned the material that you provided to the Auditor. We would like a copy of that, because you seem like you have given that in a very systematic way and covered all of the spending initiatives.

Ali WASTIE: Sure.

David DAVIS: So that would be very helpful. The second thing that I think is important is to understand exactly how much was spent. Now, you read out a good deal there, and I got to \$8 million. Is that the sort of number that you think has been spent?

Ali WASTIE: Thereabouts. So that is the funding. The amount that was precancellation was – what did I say?

The CHAIR: 6.27, I think.

Ali WASTIE: 6.27, and then –

David DAVIS: 6.27 and then the 1.15.

Ali WASTIE: That is right, post.

David DAVIS: And that is including the costs of council staff and so forth?

Ali WASTIE: That is mainly the cost of council staff. I mean, there are some funds, obviously, that council is negotiating in terms of supporting the development and delivery of the regional indoor sports centre, but that is not confirmed yet.

David DAVIS: So there were all of the projects that were going here for the games, the games were killed, and about \$8 million has been spent in that whole process.

Ali WASTIE: Yes.

David DAVIS: Then we are over here now looking at worthy projects that should go forward in the interests of the local community.

Ali WASTIE: Yes, that is right.

David DAVIS: But the \$8 million is gone, and it is bye-bye.

Ali WASTIE: Yes.

David DAVIS: Right, I have just got that clear. The next thing I want to move to is just to understand about the swimming. What did the council propose to government about holding the swimming at Kardinia Park, because there was a tussle on this, I think, wasn't there? Is that a fair description?

Ali WASTIE: What councils, local government authorities, do really, really well is service-based planning – so understanding the needs of where our population is and what it is going to do – and we design, develop and advocate for services and infrastructure to meet that community need. We are also really keen to ensure that the assets that we have got currently are also maintained and renewed – instead of always building new. It is just financially prudent to do so – looking after your asset base. The council – and again, I was not here – was wanting the swimming to take place at Kardinia Park. We were looking to have that upgraded, and we were always positioning – that is, the City of Greater Geelong – for that to happen at Kardinia Park. It was the state government's decision to have that not at Kardinia Park.

David DAVIS: But at Armstrong Creek – and I am just trying to understand this – there is a tussle about where the swimming will be and where the legacy infrastructure will remain, I think, importantly.

Ali WASTIE: That is right. Yes.

David DAVIS: The state government wanted it at Armstrong Creek, and the council wanted it at Kardinia Park because it had long-term service planning and looked it needs and so forth.

Ali WASTIE: Yes.

David DAVIS: I am trying to summarise this.

Ali WASTIE: Yes.

David DAVIS: So that is right. So where does that sit now? What has the state government said they will fund? Will they fund at Kardinia or are they going to fund –

Ali WASTIE: The state government had made a commitment, obviously, throughout the games to having that aquatics offering at Armstrong Creek.

David DAVIS: What advantages are there in Armstrong Creek and what advantages are there in Kardinia Park?

Ali WASTIE: I am sure the people who are near Armstrong Creek would welcome that aquatic centre. The council has, obviously, done the service planning and has determined there is not a need for that infrastructure there. It has also taken into consideration the aquatics offering that Surf Coast shire are going to be putting in as well – they have got a big aquatics offering, which is not in our LGA – and there are a number of aquatics offerings that the City of Greater Geelong have in that general region that people will use. Again, our aspiration was to have that at Kardinia Park. That is where we are at, but we appreciate and understand that a state government commitment is a commitment, and that is their prerogative to do that.

David DAVIS: The service planning and all that – is all that information available?

Ali WASTIE: Yes.

David DAVIS: That would be helpful for our committee to understand, the decision-making of government, because it does not appear that there was any consultation with you before that announcement on Armstrong Creek was made.

Ali WASTIE: My understanding is that there were lots of discussions and the state government had a commitment to Armstrong Creek.

David DAVIS: Now, I just also notice, and this was again before your time, but I think that there was – well, ‘tussle’ is probably too mild a word – an attack on the council by the Premier and a whole series of Labor MPs. Has that been rectified? I think the Premier said at the time:

Right now, we couldn't, with any confidence, involve the council in delivering the 2026 Commonwealth Games. That's not good. That has got to change.

The then Premier said it. It just seems to ring a bit hollow now.

Ali WASTIE: Well, I would like to say that officers are working very well with state government officers across a range of departments to ensure the delivery of those legacy assets and will continue to do so.

David DAVIS: Were there any concerns at the time about the issues – you know, about the attack on the council and council officers?

Ali WASTIE: I was not here.

David DAVIS: And yet monitors were put in place by the Victorian government – council monitors.

Ali WASTIE: Those monitors were put in place. Their terms of reference are well known. They were not related to the Commonwealth Games.

David DAVIS: Right. It was not punishment for stepping out of line or anything?

Ali WASTIE: No. The terms of reference are advertised. You can have a look at what the terms of reference for the monitors were.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Davis. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Ms Wastie, for joining us today. In your answer to Ms Ermacora earlier you mentioned Landy Field as being the purpose for the \$5 million that Greater Geelong City Council has received out of the council's support package. Can you just talk to me briefly about where that package has aligned and where council sees that, the history, and where that is going to be going for the community?

Ali WASTIE: My understanding is that the council support package was offered to regional cities, so Latrobe, Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo – potentially Shepparton, I am not sure – and there was a funding opportunity to apply for that. Council officers wrote a report to council with a number of projects that council officers believe met the criteria, and the council chose to put up a long-held project, which is the upgrade of Landy Field, which is a regional sporting centre in itself and will be much used by the communities. We still await the outcome of whether we are successful in that application or not.

Michael GALEA: Sure. Fingers crossed you are.

Ali WASTIE: Yes. It was only submitted a week ago, so we will give them a bit of time.

Michael GALEA: Excellent. I will just move briefly to Armstrong Creek as well. I understand that is a point of contention that you have raised, as Mr Davis has discussed too.

Ali WASTIE: Yes.

Michael GALEA: You did say in your opening comments as well that Geelong is the fastest growing regional city in Victoria. I will be the first to say I am from the south-east of Melbourne, so happy to be corrected, but as I understand it, Armstrong Creek is probably the largest growth area within the city.

Ali WASTIE: Absolutely, yes. Per capita, I think.

Michael GALEA: Per capita. Thank you. Having a growth area myself, I know what the challenges are. We can put all the infrastructure investment in and it is still always never enough; there is more to do. So I am a bit surprised that council would not support such a facility in such a big growth area. Why should people in that area not have access to facilities like people in, say, Norlane have with their new pool?

Ali WASTIE: Because they do. There are a number of pools around that area. The planning has been done on, obviously, current need and future need, and the aquatics offering there is a 25-metre pool. There will be, obviously, Learn to Swim there, but it is likely to cannibalise the success of the Surf Coast shire offering and also the pools in the surrounding area. We are very mindful when we do that planning, so that was the reason why council was strongly advocating for Kardinia Park.

Michael GALEA: Kardinia Park is an existing facility.

Ali WASTIE: Yes, it is.

Michael GALEA: And if that were to then be renovated, upgraded, surely that would require a temporary closure to it. Would that not limit access to that pool for a large amount of the Geelong community?

Ali WASTIE: Well, any time you would have limited access – if something is going to be upgraded et cetera. Yes, whilst we are growing, the City of Greater Geelong is well supported by its aquatics offering.

Michael GALEA: The Stead Park project as well, which is up in, I believe, Corio – can you talk to me about what impact that will have for the regional hockey?

Ali WASTIE: I think it is fantastic. I think the hockey people are coming in to talk to you later on. It certainly meets their community need. We are really looking forward to seeing that asset realised.

Michael GALEA: What specific investments in that project will be included that will actually benefit the community?

Ali WASTIE: It will be regional, and it will be a great asset for people from all across Victoria and indeed Australia – maybe international – to come and play hockey, really good hockey. I suppose you can play really good hockey anywhere, but they will have really good assets there. I think the hockey association, who are coming in, will be very supportive of what they are getting.

Michael GALEA: Yes. I am definitely looking forward to having them in today as well.

Ali WASTIE: Absolutely.

Michael GALEA: It seems clear that Geelong is a bit of a hub already for the sport of hockey, which is good to see. Hopefully that will only continue that as well. Beyond that, I understand there is investment in Waurin Ponds, with six new courts being offered. That is the RISEC project that you referred to, and that is obviously basketball, which again –

Ali WASTIE: It is very much growing – and also netball.

Michael GALEA: not to impose my experience, but it is a huge, growing sport.

Ali WASTIE: Huge, yes.

Michael GALEA: Can you talk to me about the local clubs in terms of basketball and netball in the Geelong region and the demand that you have for both there at the moment?

Ali WASTIE: Yes. As I mentioned in my notes before, around 10 per cent of Geelong's population participate in basketball or netball. You only have to go out in Geelong on the weekend or any given night and you will see lots of people engaging in that. We do have a gap for both netball courts and basketball courts, so there is a real demand. We have done the planning to advocate for more courts for both basketball and netball. That gap needs to be met, and there is an opportunity to do that with good planning at the Waurin Ponds site. What we are missing, though, is, yes, the number of courts but also what we call a regional indoor sports stadium which has the capacity to seat 4000 or 5000 people, and that is where we need the additional investment to go in and fund that opportunity. Whilst we appreciate that these things are incredibly expensive to build, like everything, nothing gets cheaper, so we would like to have that futureproofed. We may not be able to deliver it straightaway, but council would have the opportunity to deliver that or to advocate for funding at future state or federal government elections, which might be around the corner, where those opportunities sometimes arise.

Michael GALEA: Very good. I believe my time is up. Thank you, Ms Wastie.

Ali WASTIE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Galea. Dr Mansfield.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you. Ms Wastie, you mentioned that in around 2017 there was a piece of work that the city contributed to to look at the possibility of a multi regional city Commonwealth Games. Do you know if any co-contributions were considered in that early work from councils?

Ali WASTIE: Sorry, I do not. I can find out for you.

Sarah MANSFIELD: That would be helpful. Ernst & Young in their business case stated that some of the risks of a potential cost blowout could be contained and the risks to government reduced if they secured funding commitments from councils to upgrade facilities prior to the announcement of the games, but based on what you have said so far, I would take it that the state government did not secure any potential co-contribution commitments prior to announcing the games. Okay.

Following on from the discussion around the pools, more broadly are you aware of whether the state government had discussions or took into account the city's service planning or priorities when it decided which sports facilities to upgrade or invest in?

Ali WASTIE: There were multiple discussions at officer level, so yes, they were fully aware.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Okay. In terms of the infrastructure that has been chosen by the state government to invest in, how closely has that aligned to the city's service planning? Are there any of those projects that are priorities for the city, or were, as part of the service planning that has been done?

Ali WASTIE: Everything is aligned, with the exception of the pool at Armstrong Creek. But as I said before, we understand that it is a state government commitment.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Okay. And again, sort of in general when the state government has invested in infrastructure or has priorities that do not align with the council, what are the impacts on a council financially potentially from, for example, a pool going where the city has determined it is not necessarily needed?

Ali WASTIE: Council has to be very, very mindful of infrastructure in general. We all like to build new. Everyone likes to build new – great for community. Just with the example of Armstrong Creek aquatic centre in itself, our commercial team have done the figures for that. There will be a \$5 million operating hit to the budget per annum. Included in that \$5 million are obviously the operations and the depreciation of that asset and the full life cycle cost of that asset. So that is why we have to be really, really careful when we do go for these opportunities that we are able to continue to fund all of our assets at the City of Greater Geelong and to make sure that we have got the renewal rate right as well. Otherwise it is – yes – not setting future Geelong up for success.

Sarah MANSFIELD: And just to be absolutely clear, those renewal, maintenance and operating costs are borne generally entirely by the city?

Ali WASTIE: Yes. Pools are run by local government authorities, I think with the exception of MSAC, which is run by the state government. So pools are the domain or have traditionally been the domain of local government authorities.

Sarah MANSFIELD: And how do cities find additional funding to operate these –

Bev McARTHUR: With a rate cap.

Ali WASTIE: Well, we are in a rate-capped environment, so we have discussions about what we are not going to deliver, what we need to stop doing. That is why, you know, local government officers will always go to evidence-based planning and where there is community need first and foremost.

Sarah MANSFIELD: And to change tack a little bit, in terms of legacy, much was made of potential housing benefits for Geelong, where I know the city has identified significant housing need particularly for public and social housing. Are you aware of whether the city has been involved in any discussions regarding the legacy housing aspects of the games with the state government or Homes Victoria?

Ali WASTIE: I have had conversations with Homes Victoria, very initial conversations, and we are looking forward to kicking that off. So it is very much in its infancy.

Sarah MANSFIELD: And do you know if Homes Victoria are aware of the work that the city has done, like the service planning, on housing and their need?

Ali WASTIE: They are.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Okay. And in terms of what the city is hoping to get from that housing legacy, are you able to provide any information on –

Ali WASTIE: Good quality housing that has got co-design, that meets our community need. And when I say good quality housing I mean, you know, ESD, really good requirements, that is close to transport services and has got a good mix.

Sarah MANSFIELD: And has the city made any representations regarding the amount of social or public housing that is needed within their municipality?

Ali WASTIE: We have got those figures and we share them regularly, yes. And council has got its own program as well, yes.

Sarah MANSFIELD: In terms of the site, have you made any arguments for a particular proportion to be social or public housing to help meet those objectives?

Ali WASTIE: Yes. I can send through those details to you. I do not have them at hand, but I will certainly get them through to you.

Sarah MANSFIELD: That would be very helpful.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Mansfield. Mr McIntosh.

Tom McINTOSH: Thanks. Thanks for being here today. All this talk about infrastructure – I was reflecting on work around the corner on what is now GMHBA, on some of the big stand builds in 2004 and 2008 and whatnot. Obviously there are different pressures now – and we have talked about inflation – getting labour, getting jobs built, effectively. I am just interested in the pressures council have found around your infrastructure commitments broadly and the sort of cost pressures inflation has put on the council in recent years.

Ali WASTIE: Thank you for your question. The council has got a really good track record of delivery. Like every council across Victoria – and also indeed the state is dealing with it – it is just cost pressures. There have been experiences where we have gone out to procure, and then by the time you go out to procure you have got to start again because the costs have gone up so much. So again, you either deliver it because that is the cost, or you do not. And then you have some conversations, or you rescope the project.

Tom McINTOSH: And you spoke before about leveraging investment. What are some of the practical examples of dealing with those inflationary pressures or dealing with those cost pressures to leverage up investment to deliver projects and deliver for communities?

Ali WASTIE: Well, I think if you look at the City of Greater Geelong's record and partnering with the state and federal governments – coming from a small regional council, I am still blown away about how successful the City of Greater Geelong has been, and it is grateful for that. Also, really the council just has not got the capacity through the ratepayer to fund these things – for example, the new convention centre that is coming in is a massive opportunity and that is through the city deal. I think the investment that is coming in from the private sector, having the burgeoning health and university sectors here, is understanding that, yes, the council is very important but we are part of a much broader ecosystem. We support one another to get really, really good things for this city and for Greater Geelong as well, so it is all about partnerships and it is all about relationships. I think if you look at our track record of securing investment, I do not know another council that has done better. I might be in trouble for saying that.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes. I think the regional investment has been great. That sort of flow-on, obviously, with the proximity to Melbourne, trains. You mentioned before about housing. That opportunity around the \$2 billion regional package and the billion-dollar housing component, those various investments, whether it is around sports infrastructure, housing, worker accommodation and those various things – I presume you, the council, are looking at that full suite of opportunities for that leveraging potential.

Ali WASTIE: Yes, and with the state government – so conversations with the department of transport and the Victorian Planning Authority really looking at infill development as well. Geelong has opportunity and potential for infill development, especially around the rail corridor, rather than – yes, there are obviously still greenfields and we need to do both absolutely, but where there is existing infrastructure, again, mindful of costs, you need to maximise those infill opportunities.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes, and how does that balance of the cost of, say, looking at the infill versus going to a greenfield site?

Ali WASTIE: From a social economic cost – socially people are generally more connected to services, schools et cetera, existing transport. Yes, there is a change in terms of the way people live. It is no longer the quarter-acre blocks, but good housing design is what council is very much engaged in at the moment. We have got some really good urban design frameworks. There is a big community consultation process being

undertaken right now for Pakington Street, where we will see those future opportunities and we will see that development that is fit for purpose for Geelong and that brings community along.

Tom McINTOSH: I think it is incredible, the way you get the night-life nowadays in regional towns where perhaps you did not. Bringing a few more people in definitely helps with that. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr McIntosh. I would like to go now to Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Congratulations on your new role. We were sorry to lose you from Bass Coast, but onward for you. Just in relation to – there were no negotiations. Geelong was told that the Comm Games were coming. I want to understand how Geelong council was informed of the cancellation.

Ali WASTIE: Just before it came out in the press I believe the mayor was given a phone call.

Melina BATH: A day, two days or 10 minutes? Do you know?

Ali WASTIE: I think it was the morning of.

Melina BATH: The morning of. It must have been very early, because it was very early when it was announced, the cancellation. Did you also provide feedback at the time back to government on this? Was there a strong message that you were disappointed at the time? Are you aware of any written responses back to the Premier or to the government?

Ali WASTIE: There were written responses provided expressing our disappointment, yes, but a willingness to work towards those opportunities that were outlined when the games were cancelled.

Melina BATH: Sure. It would be good to have a copy of those, if that is possible – if you could take that on notice.

Ali WASTIE: Sure.

Melina BATH: Thank you very much. Just following on from Mr McCracken's question in relation to the 2022–23 budget, in the budget items it says there will be co-contributions, so I want to understand –

David DAVIS: In the state budget.

Melina BATH: In the state budget. I want to understand: was there a specific figure that the state government asked Geelong for, and was there any breakdown of that specific figure?

Ali WASTIE: So for the Waurn Ponds site, for it to be a regional indoor sports and events centre, the local government, so City of Greater Geelong, had contributed \$7.6 million, I want to say – \$7 million-something – to see that realised, so that was the co-contribution from the City of Greater Geelong.

Melina BATH: Sure. Thank you. And you could provide that, if you could, in detail there. Were there any other specifics that were requested by government at the time?

Ali WASTIE: No.

Melina BATH: Okay. And in relation to the regional sports and events centre – and you have just mentioned that – what other costs are you looking at now for that centre? Could you provide the detail to us? So you are now going in effect to the crumbs saying, 'What can we get out of this cancellation?' What are the values and figures that you have got, if you could provide that to us.

Ali WASTIE: I can get all of those details through to you.

Melina BATH: Thank you very much. And you have just mentioned \$5 million in operating costs, a hit to the budget annually, for Armstrong Creek aquatic centre. I want to understand Mr Cheeseman's role in this. He had a role in government in relation to that as the parliamentary secretary for the Comm Games. What was his role in writing to council or advocating for Armstrong Creek? Could you provide any detail around that?

Ali WASTIE: Well, we just see it as the state government. It was a state government commitment that was very clear that the aquatics offering would be at Armstrong Creek, and that is where the legacy aspect was to go. So we respect that, and that is the state government commitment.

Melina BATH: I am looking for any sort of advocacy that he had, or written work, to council, to the CEO or mayor at the time, in relation to that; if Mr Cheeseman has anything –

Ali WASTIE: Well, it is clear that that is Mr Cheeseman's preference. I mean, there has been media about it. But I am not sure if there was any direct advocacy to the council about it.

Melina BATH: Or was it picked and he went along for the ride on it.

Ali WASTIE: Yes.

Melina BATH: Thank you. Now, we have heard in this inquiry in Melbourne – the head of Visit Victoria has actually said this, which I find astounding – that the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games actually enhanced Victoria's reputation for running events. I want to understand: what has been the impact of the cancellation on Geelong, specifically looking at tourism, business confidence and economic benefit? I want to understand that from a council point of view.

Ali WASTIE: From a council point of view, Geelong has never been in a better position. In terms of the prosperity, what is coming in, and appreciating that in general there is obviously less community sentiment because people are being hit with – there is less discretionary spending. We all understand that. I think what has come out of this for council is the absolute commitment to working with our partners, sporting associations, and really hearing from them. So they are the voice. Basketball Victoria, Netball Victoria, the clubs, are very strong in their desire to see the regional indoor sports centre, for example.

Melina BATH: Sure. There is a unified voice for that centre.

Ali WASTIE: Absolutely. Yes.

Melina BATH: The other comment I want you to comment on is – some of the business communities at the time, July 18, we had Nathan Johnston, Cartel coffee roasters, we had others saying basically, 'We have been gearing up for months and the Commonwealth Games would have been fantastic.' There are a lot of devastated people. These are businesspeople in the community.

Ali WASTIE: Yes.

Melina BATH: What has been that interaction between council and business, which is your ratepayer base – how has that negotiation or interaction been? How have you consoled them, I guess?

Ali WASTIE: Yes, sure. So we have a business concierge. We were very well aware – I know all local governments had particular businesses that had leveraged and geared up for the Commonwealth Games. There is no doubt about that. Some obviously purchased and went into seating businesses, or whatever that looks like, so it was very mixed and varied. Council really felt for those businesses and supported them through business support and additional packages that we could through grants. Obviously local government's ability to fund is always limited, but we recognise that need and we recognise that some businesses and some people were very adversely impacted by the cancellation of the games. There is no doubt about that. But in general, what is happening in the City of Greater Geelong in terms of the investment that is coming in – it has never been stronger. So whilst it is disappointing, I do not think we can conflate the two together. Yes, for some businesses it was awful; they were impacted very badly, there is no doubt about that. But in general, where economic development is right now and the prosperity of Geelong –

Melina BATH: So they are trying to come back from that?

Ali WASTIE: And we support them to do that.

Melina BATH: And you are saying that they are focused on coming back from that?

Ali WASTIE: Yes.

Melina BATH: I have other questions, but that is fine. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Bath. Ms Tyrrell.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Thank you, Chair. You said earlier that the council is working really well with the state government. How often do you communicate with the state government?

Ali WASTIE: Personally, as a CEO, I would be on the phone to them once a week. They are coming in today to brief the council. We also have meetings where the CEOs meet, so I meet with the City of Ballarat, city of Bendigo and City of Latrobe CEOs to discuss Comm Games legacy opportunities. We make sure no-one is missing any information. It is very collegial, so the relationship has been really good.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Okay. What departments or offices are you working with from the state government when you are working with them?

Ali WASTIE: DJSIR, Development Victoria and sport and rec mainly.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Okay. Thank you very much. Have any commitments been made in progress towards legacy infrastructure projects yet?

Ali WASTIE: There are ongoing conversations, and it is very close.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Yes. Do you have a rough idea of how close you think it might be? Have you seen some commitments?

Ali WASTIE: Very close.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: She is not going to give me that one. I understand that council wrote to the Labor government in December regarding legacy funding for a new regional indoor sports and events centre. Who did you write to specifically?

Ali WASTIE: The Premier – we wrote to the Premier.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Okay. Have you received a response from the Premier's office?

Ali WASTIE: Sorry, I will have to take that on notice. We may have.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Okay. And if you have, would it be possible that you could share the correspondence here with the committee?

Ali WASTIE: Sure.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Thank you very much. In regard to housing, what is the latest with the former athletes village at Waurm Ponds – did I say that right?

Ali WASTIE: Waurm.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: I am sorry – try saying some of the towns in my electorate.

Ali WASTIE: Initial conversations – so we are not as progressed as perhaps we thought we might have been, but we are really looking forward. Our focus has been on the legacy Comm Games assets, but we need to pivot towards the housing aspect of it; it is critically important.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Okay. You just said how progressed you thought you would have been. Where were you hoping to be by now?

Ali WASTIE: Well, I think, you know, if the games had not been cancelled, they would have been well progressed, yes.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Okay. So has the government confirmed the mix of stock and locations for the housing in the Greater Geelong community?

Ali WASTIE: Not yet.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Have you received a call yet from housing commander Weimar on the latest housing building in the community?

Ali WASTIE: I think we need to give him a few more days. Wasn't he just appointed – by the end of the week.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: I am still working on patience. Geelong was set to benefit from more than 1200 goods and services procurement opportunities around the games. What commitment has the council received from government now on the level of opportunities with the housing build?

Ali WASTIE: Again, that is still to be confirmed.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Okay. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I believe we have run out of time. Thank you very much, Ms Wastie, for appearing today. You will receive a copy of the transcript in about a week, before it is published. Thank you very much, and the committee will now take a break to reset for the next witnesses, which will be very, very soon.

Witness withdrew.