

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

WITNESSES

Alan Climpson, President, Geelong Hockey Association; and

Tim Woods, Vice-President, Geelong Swimming Club.

The CHAIR: We will now resume the committee's public hearings for the Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid.

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, 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.

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

Tim WOODS: I am Tim Woods. I am from the Geelong Swimming Club.

Alan CLIMPSON: Alan Climpson, Geelong Hockey Association.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Pleased to meet you. We will just briefly introduce the committee. I am David Limbrick, the Chair.

Michael GALEA: G'day. Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan.

Tom McINTOSH: Tom McIntosh, Eastern Victoria.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Jacinta Ermacora, Western Victoria Region.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Sarah Mansfield, Western Victoria Region.

Joe McCracken: Joe McCracken, Western Victoria Region, and David Davis, who will be here momentarily.

Melina BATH: Melina Bath, Eastern Victoria.

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

Alan CLIMPSON: Pleased to meet you all.

Tim WOODS: A couple from the region. That is good.

The CHAIR: Excellent. I welcome you to make some opening comments and ask that they be kept to around about 10 minutes so that we have time for questions. Thank you.

Alan CLIMPSON: I definitely will not last 10 minutes, let me tell you.

The CHAIR: That is good. In this heat not many people will.

Alan CLIMPSON: Do you want to open it, Tim?

Tim WOODS: Sure thing. I am notorious, so I will do my best to stick to your time note, Chair.

The Geelong Swimming Club is 140 years young. It is a stalwart of community sport in this region. We are routinely a top five Victorian club. Other than in Traralgon, our major competition is in Melbourne. We are the reigning country Victorian swimming champions. This is a place where we understand what legacy looks like

for swimming assets. If you think about that beautiful Eastern Beach and the swimming baths that are there, that is the place where we prepared, before some of us were born, myself included, Olympians, Commonwealth Games champions, Commonwealth Games Empire Games captains, world record holders and Olympic medallists over a long period of time – our spiritual home, if you like. These days our home is the Kardinia Aquatic Centre, a couple of pools that you will be familiar with there, I think. We love that pool and its complex and we want the very best for it, but we also want the very best for our community when it comes to the swimming assets and the aquatic assets that this region, which is cornered by the ocean on the one hand and the sea on the other, desperately needs and needs more of as it is continuing to grow.

We were of course disappointed when the Commonwealth Games ended up not being here because we had been excited about the Commonwealth Games being here, no question about that. We were particularly excited and we thought it was appropriate that the aquatics were going to be here. There were two reasons for that. One was, as I say, we are cornered by the sea in its different forms right here, but in addition we knew that the right assets were the future-building that would be required for the next phase of aquatics development in and around this region. I am going to go to those questions, and I know that they are fundamental to your considerations.

I think it is important to know at the outset that on balance we supported the development of a new fit-for-purpose world-class facility in Armstrong Creek over a renovation of the Kardinia Aquatic Centre, and I will go to the reasons for that, which are fundamentally about swimming and aquatics in the region and the adequacy of the asset base here. When we learned that the legacy of that facility would not include the retention of all the pools and assets that we know are fundamental for the fit-for-future regional hub that we could envisage, we were again disappointed, and in particular that is because what we need to advance aquatics in the region – when I say ‘aquatics’, I mean pool swimming, I mean triathlon swimming, I mean water polo – is 50-metre pools and we need them to be available all year round. For all that it is extremely hot today, that is a problem to swim in, but it is just as big a problem in the middle of winter in a region like this. It is what you get when you are at the southernmost tip of the hottest continent and the northernmost tip of the coldest ocean. You are going to get both extremes. You need a bit of indoor, but you need that 50-metre water.

While we were disappointed about that proposed legacy, we ultimately and on balance acknowledged that the growing local community in Armstrong Creek, very young and particularly needy of water safety training, would need some form of asset that was pretty local to it so that families could support their children to learn to swim. That is not to say that we thought that was the appropriate ultimate asset but rather to say that if nothing else then at least that growing southern community would have that local asset available to it. Had the games proceeded we had a view that it was within our potential to exert community influence, once those pools were in, to keep them there. Our calculus was pretty simple. If the pools went in, it would be harder to remove them than it would be for us to argue for them initially to go in. Now, as it transpires, the games are not proceeding. That is disappointing. There is a legacy pool that is proposed to be provided, we understand, which is more likely to fit the standard model that seems to be being rolled out in large part by council needs around their profit and loss bases and their concerns about running Learn to Swim but not running an aquatics program, rather than the sort of pool complex that we could envisage that would be something more like an MSAC, or I think we heard it described during our discussions internally as an MSAC-lite sort of facility.

One of the key reasons for wanting the additional asset in the form of an additional swimming pool is because the swimming pools are full. It is easy to imagine that in the middle of the day perhaps they are not full, but at peak training times – so we are talking about 5 to 8 in the morning, 5 to 8 at night, 4 to 8 at night – they are completely full to the point where most swimming clubs, most triathlon groups, most of the water polo groups are forced to turn people away who have not come up through their internal feeder systems. It is a classic case of an insufficient asset base. Leaving aside the recreational, social, health, mental and physical benefits that accrue from those pools, we know that there are an insufficient number of facilities, so the 25-metre pool that might go into Armstrong Creek is at least fit for that community, albeit not fit for the purpose that we could imagine as the best possible legacy.

So why do we support a new pool and not an upgraded Kardinia Aquatic Centre? First, there is the need of the Armstrong Creek community. Of course the Geelong Swimming Club is large. We have members who come from across the region, and that includes Armstrong Creek. Those people are entitled to the same assets as everybody else, regardless of the time frame in which the pools have become available and they have come into the region. The second reason I alluded to: the pools are full. There is not sufficient lane space for all of the rapidly growing interest that there is in competitive swimming. Now, did that come about because the

Commonwealth Games were coming to Victoria and specifically the aquatics might be coming to Geelong? It is hard to imagine that six-year-olds have become engaged in swimming because they heard on the TV via their parents that the Comm Games were coming. But we are seeing that push through our own learn-to-swim school, and we know all the other clubs are as well. Maybe it is the COVID thing; it is that thing about the mental release that comes from certain types of sport. But it is a burgeoning sport, not one that is going away. Of course it does not hurt that Australia is an apex contributor in world swimming.

There is another reason why we supported a new facility. There is nothing fit for purpose in this region. There is no coherent strategy around investment in aquatic assets, and there has not been for a long time. It is not casting aspersions on anybody who has been engaged in that process. It is a 30-year-long deficit of strategy that means we no longer have a facility that is capable of holding major events as well as meeting community aquatic needs. Instead what we have got is a set of pools that, like the proposed legacy pool for Armstrong Creek, are dropped into a location, and they meet a narrow set of needs, not the total set of needs and interests. It is not possible here to hold major events.

I was just discussing with Ms Bath our recent experience in Traralgon, where the Gippsland Regional Aquatic Centre operates. This year we were able to be there in summer, swimming in the 50-metre swimming pool that is in that purpose-built complex indoors for the first time – perfectly adequate despite warm days, properly prepared, sitting on top of an aquifer et cetera – and we will be back there at the very same pool in winter, swimming in the short-course championships. Now, that brings a huge amount of economic activity because it brings a huge number of people. We will bring at least 300 people from our club alone in Geelong in families for three to four days for each of those events. The economic activity that that brings is very substantial. You cannot do that here. In Victoria's biggest regional city you cannot do that. You can hold the country Victorian swimming championships, and for those that have not been, it is the best swim meet on the Australian swimming calendar.

Melina BATH: It is deafening.

Tim WOODS: It is deafening, but deafening with the greatness of young people enjoying country sport.

Melina BATH: Enthusiasm.

Tim WOODS: Yes, enormous enthusiasm. We can hold the country long-course championships here. Despite all those 25-metre pools that are populating this region in the little subareas, you cannot hold a short-course championship in any of them. There is nothing fit for purpose, nothing that comes close, which longitudinally you might shake your head at, but in the moment you have an opportunity potentially to build better capability so that does not happen in the future.

Fourth is really related to that previous point. I know Swimming Victoria spoke to you. There will come a time, and it will not be far away, when the best pool in Australia, the outdoor pool at MSAC, has to be significantly renovated. It will close for two years, maybe three, when that happens. Where will you hold your state championships? How will Victoria hold its next short-course world championship or whatever else it is able to do? It does not have a place. The only logical place is the largest regional city in Australia. It is a very sound rationale for saying that the MSAC-lite belongs in the region that probably most needs it, has the largest population and has a new and growing population that does not have any asset in the Armstrong Creek space. That is significant from our point of view.

Fifth, if you renovate Kardinia, which will itself have to happen in the next decade, without already having a new similar-size facility in place, you will take it out of commission also for a long period of time. What beggared belief to us was the idea that you would take that out of commission as though somehow the local talent were not a chance to be on their home Commonwealth Games team. This year Geelong Swimming Club has at least three athletes who have tickets to the Olympic trials. They are two swims away from the show, not pie in the sky. But imagine you shut the pool that they swim in that prepares them. You cannot do that. So on balance it was an easy decision really, because that final point actually does it for a competitive swimming club.

They have to support, for all the other reasons as well, a Commonwealth Games pool system in Armstrong Creek that can also be a legacy that the district, the region and the state need. We know that it is challenging for councils because of that emphasis on profit and loss once the asset is provided. I understand that. We are the biggest provider of funds for service to the pool system in the region. We spend a very large amount of money

with them. We know how much it costs them to operate those pools. One of the things maybe that state government has to do is to lift its eyes above the profit-and-loss proposition and think about the long-term economic benefits of pulling a regional world championships or the national swimming championships into a place like Geelong – the economic value that can flow through a community.

If it is not possible for councils to consider running those facilities, because of the constraints under which they operate – we understand those; I am a ratepayer here – then we find an alternative model. There are alternative models, and they include models like those where large universities – Geelong is a university town. We have a great relationship and an evolving relationship at Geelong Swimming Club with Deakin University, with the Barwon Sports Academy and Swimming Victoria and Swimming Australia. So a proper discussion would involve working through what the legacy assets look like, making sure they are in the right place in the community so that they are community assets and ensuring that they are operated and managed by a cohort that is completely committed to them in their current instance, not just in this kind of light form that the current legacy has proposed. Thanks.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Did you have anything that you would like to open with? We are running a bit over, but that is okay. We are the last in the day.

Alan CLIMPSON: I will cut the time back pretty quick, let me tell you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. If the committee is okay, we might run a little bit over – but please.

Alan CLIMPSON: Okay. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I am here today to represent the Geelong Hockey Association, which is made up of 850 members and a total community exceeding 3000, of which 55 per cent are female. We believe the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games has negatively impacted hockey in our region. The announcement that we were successful in being a host supporting the games was a shot in the arm for us, as we were in the process of beginning required upgrades to our facilities at Stead Park in the northern suburbs of Geelong, which had included upgrades to our canteen, change room and toilets as well as a complete resurface of pitch 1 at an estimated cost of \$1.1 million, at our own expense.

These facilities accommodate games being played at the local level. We run our local competition for eight clubs now in the Geelong region, and we also send 15 teams up to the Melbourne competition, the Hockey Victoria competition. We get a lot of players from western Victoria, particularly Ballarat, Warrnambool, Hamilton – those type of areas. So we are a hub for hockey from the western half of Victoria. We act as an intermediary, virtually, for travel up to Melbourne. We also run a summer competition from October to March.

But the surface has become unsafe, and we were looking at the upgrade to the facility as being the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to grow our sport and have a current, up-to-date, international-standard facility. At the time, Hockey Victoria had developed a 10-year plan for the facility on our behalf, in which they indicated that we would be able to host international games and the possibility – a very real possibility, I must say – of being the home base for the Australian under-21 national team. And all that now is up in the air because of the games being cancelled.

We are currently waiting for a decision from the minister on what the legacy will look like for us going forward. At this stage we have had some ideas of what it could be – nothing definite yet. We are waiting for a scope of work and what that involves. We have a third pitch that will be put down into the Torquay region, which is in another council, which is the south coast shire, so they are very keen for this to happen and for us to develop to the south of us – again, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We are still waiting to see how that all eventuates. Hopefully that goes forward.

In concluding, we had a great opportunity to grow our sport between 15 and 20 per cent in memberships as well as our volunteerism. Since COVID, everybody knows volunteerism has dropped off. This was an opportunity for us to highlight our sport at a regional level to kids that do not get the opportunity to see their national teams playing. We very rarely get the national players down here, because of the tyranny of distance from where the national team is based, but there was an opportunity for our kids to get the exposure and also to raise the profile of our sport in Geelong and use it as a growth opportunity for us then. In closing, I think we have missed a great opportunity. We hope the legacy that has been promised will be delivered. We will wait and see and live with the hope that we will take the best of what we are given and keep contributing to the local community as far as being support for our young kids. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

The CHAIR: Thank you both for your comments. Mr Woods, I actually appreciate the situation that you were talking about with training. When I was in high school I used to do competitive swimming down at Cranbourne pool, and we had a little 25-metre pool that was not suitable for running competitions. I remember we went on a camp to go and train in a 50-metre pool, and we had never been in one before. It is a very different experience both in training and in competition, so I imagine that is a big issue for your swimmers. I am interested in this alternative model that you are talking about of partnerships with universities rather than councils running the pools, because I think you have a good appreciation of the financial pressures that councils are under. Could you elaborate a bit more on how you would envisage that sort of thing working? I think they do this a lot in the United States, don't they?

Tim WOODS: Yes, there are models in the US. There are also models elsewhere in Australia where the pool assets that still belong to a community are not necessarily run by a council. The two, from the perspective of government, might not be divisible, but the community would not necessarily say that its interests are always tied to and always connected to council. One option, if you think through community-based sport activities, you cannot quite find the land base for some activities or the capital base, say, for swimming pools, but there are large institutions like universities, which have a capital base of their own. They have a land base, they have a range of capabilities and they have interests.

Deakin University of course, for I think the third year running, are the world's leading sports science institute. They have interests in developing that through community et cetera, and that is how clubs like ours end up having an evolved and evolving relationship with them. You can envisage a proposition where you need a fair bit of water every morning, you need a fair bit of water every afternoon and you need to be tested. They have got students who need to do testing in order to do all the things that they need, so there are potentially some synergies in that. In the meantime you have got the daytime when the general community has access to swimming pools. That model is not as far afield as the US. Some of that would even apply in places in Queensland and in New South Wales, but it does require thinking perhaps away from the three-tiered model of government when it gets to community just thinking about what the right thing is for a particular community. Some could not do it. I understand that – it needs to be council. In other situations, perhaps because there is a university, there is an opportunity worth exploring.

The CHAIR: So would you suggest that a recommendation of this committee should be maybe to encourage the government to look at alternative models for sports infrastructure like 50-metre pools with universities, for example?

Tim WOODS: Look, I think the university applies in this case because there is a community context to that. I mean, the reason for the state government to invest in assets for the community through the councils is that that is a delivery mechanism. So how do we deliver for the community with an alternative mechanism where that might be appropriate, and where councils are demonstrably constrained and have a range of other things that they have to do, are there other ways to do things? It might be just one option, but for us it looked pretty compelling, and it was looking compelling, frankly, even around the larger proposition at Armstrong Creek. It was maybe that even if it was going to go ahead, and with the Commonwealth Games it was going to stay there, maybe that was always going to be too much for this quite large council with all the spread that it has got to cover.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr McCracken.

Joe McCracken: Thanks, gentlemen, for coming in. We appreciate it and appreciate the work you do on behalf of your respective sports as well – all volunteer, might I add. I guess, in terms of the Commonwealth Games and your contact with the state government, was it extensive or was it limited?

Tim WOODS: Limited.

Alan CLIMPSON: Prior to the announcement?

Joe McCracken: Both. All up – prior to the games and prior to the announcement.

Alan CLIMPSON: We probably had more contact after the announcement with the government rather than prior to it. It was very sparse in any kind of communication prior to the announcement, to the extent where we were questioning ourselves on –

Joe McCracken: Whether it was actually going to happen.

Alan Climpson: whether we were going to be the host for hockey or whether they were going to decide to use the existing state hockey centre and that kind of stuff. We were questioning –

Joe McCracken: You did not get consulted on it?

Alan Climpson: No. There was no communication. I found out about the announcement. I was at work and got a text from a colleague of mine, who said, ‘You need to get to a TV. There’s an announcement being made about the Commonwealth Games, and you need to hear it.’

Joe McCracken: Yes, right.

Alan Climpson: I work at a primary school. I got to the staffroom and got the TV on and managed to hear the bad news. I consequently attended the federal Senate inquiry in Bendigo, and they were very surprised at the lack of communication. We have had a better line of communication since the announcement, with some input from Ella George, the member down here. She did a lot to help us get some information out of the government about what the next step was going to be. We are at the stage now where we are waiting for the minister to make an announcement on what the legacy is and the scope of work. We are still up in the air about what it is. We particularly want the timing, because one pitch is going to be out of service for a year. We have got to find an alternative, either with Geelong Grammar School or we start playing back on grass for a year or something like that.

Joe McCracken: Different arrangements, yes.

Alan Climpson: It is a big change to the way that we play our sport.

Joe McCracken: Are you able to provide a list of when you met with all the state government representatives and what conversations and emails you had.

Alan Climpson: Yes. I can do that for you. I cannot do it today, but I have got it in my diary, and I can send it up.

Joe McCracken: Even any correspondence you had with Ella George as well would be very helpful.

Alan Climpson: Absolutely. She has been very helpful.

Joe McCracken: It would be very good to see that, because it sounds like you needed the help.

Alan Climpson: I think there were a lot of people that needed it. The feeling that I got when I was in Bendigo was that there was probably a lot of despair at the announcement, for a start – and then we just did not know what was happening after that.

Joe McCracken: Yes. Well, I was going to ask you too – I know you said you were at work when the announcement happened. How did that make you feel when you were not told about it?

Alan Climpson: I actually knocked off because there was some stuff that we needed to get into place around logistics. We had already planned. We did a concept plan for the Commonwealth Games facility at our own cost, so we handed that to the Commonwealth Games committee when we sat down with them for the announcement and everything and said, ‘Here’s the groundwork. This is what we’re hoping to get.’ That was all at our own expense. We had even gone to the stage of planning and drawing the plans up and everything like that.

Joe McCracken: I know in the media, I think, you said, ‘It was a real kick in the guts.’

Alan Climpson: Absolutely. We are still feeling it now. People still do not know what we are going to get as a legacy, and they are continually asking us, ‘Are we going to get it? Aren’t we going to get it?’ I say, ‘I’ll tell you. As soon as I know, you’ll know.’

Joe McCracken: Geelong, you know, can sometimes be overshadowed by the AFL, and here was an opportunity for some young people to participate in another sport.

Alan CLIMPSON: Well, that was probably our leverage: ‘Here’s an opportunity for us to stick our head above the water and showcase our sport and what we can do.’ We were going to have Australian and international teams, and we have been consistently in the top two or three for 20 years, so we are an elite sport in hockey. We had this opportunity to actually say, ‘This is what hockey does.’

Joe McCracken: You say ‘kick in the guts’; that is strong language. But why do you say that?

Alan CLIMPSON: Because we have an expectation that as a second-tier sport in a predominantly AFL state we constantly see funds that you would love to have one-tenth of or one-hundredth of going to one facility. You have just got to be continually answering questions back to your members. They are saying, ‘Why don’t we get this?’ I say, ‘I don’t know’. We put the process in. You are a second-tier sport, even though you have got a great international reputation – competing against that. We just think we have got AFL, cricket, netball, soccer all above us, and now I think basketball is overrunning everybody.

Joe McCracken: And that chance has now been taken away from you.

Alan CLIMPSON: Yes. That is why it was a kick in the guts. We had the opportunity, and we are just not going to get it.

Joe McCracken: Thanks. I think my time is up.

The CHAIR: Yes. Thank you, Mr McCracken. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, both, for your very interesting contributions. It is good to hear your perspectives at the outset today. I might start with you, Mr Woods. I was interested in your commentary around Armstrong Creek and your view that there is a need for this facility. You mentioned water safety as being something that is important, and obviously we need to be mindful of some very tragic events that we have had in Victoria over the past few weeks. As I understand it, Armstrong Creek is a high-growth area and also home to many new Australians and new migrants to our community. Is that part of why you think that is an important reason to have a local pool at Armstrong Creek – so that people who have come in to live in the Geelong region, possibly from overseas, actually have that education awareness and, I guess, general cultural awareness of how important water safety is in Australia?

Tim WOODS: Yes. The disaggregation of the asset base – there is a pool at Drysdale and there is a pool at northern aquatic in the northern suburban area – in a large municipality makes some sense. Then you look into the new growth corridor. There are a lot of pieces of new in respect of that: people who might be new to the country; they are certainly new to the region. They do not know the surf. They often have new families. It is just the circumstances. So if you are taking that strategy, then that is the logical region to place the next asset in. For us at this end the question is: what was that asset going to be and look like?

Michael GALEA: What does it look like? What does it deliver? I note your concerns around it.

Tim WOODS: The Geelong Swimming Club runs a Learn to Swim school. There is no question that there is a role for the Learn to Swim operations that council operates in those pools in that smaller format. They are most needed where people are new to the area, and they are more likely to have younger children. There is just no doubt about that. All those reasons apply. There is this kind of piece of social equity in that as well. Once you have started to disaggregate your assets, you are probably going to need to continue to do that for reasons of fairness and equity. I can understand that of course. But then the question is: well, what is it that we are going to put in there, given what might have been coming?

Michael GALEA: What sort of facility – I understand. Just briefly, I am assuming your demand for those sorts of programs is at a very high point at the moment for general swimming?

Tim WOODS: There is absolutely no space available for any aquatic purpose that is organised. Learn to Swim all the way through to elite sport are full, so your children now wait for the opportunity to learn how to swim.

Michael GALEA: You mentioned with Kardinia the impact that would have, particularly for your club and a lot of your athletes if it was closed for a period for a rebuild. Give us a concept of how long we would be talking about for a rebuild and what sort of impact that would have.

Tim WOODS: It is well outside my area of expertise. But I think if the advice is that it would be a couple of years to close MSAC and renovate it, then to close two older pools and renovate the entire complex, with 1960s better block facilities around the edges of it, it is going to be at least a year, and it could be significantly longer than that. Three months out of the pool is too long for somebody who is taking their shot at the show.

Michael GALEA: Even three months, yes. Speaking of time, I am running out of time as well. But I will just finish by saying, I am sure on behalf of the committee, to those three athletes that are currently in Olympic trials: we wish them all the best.

The CHAIR: Hear, hear. Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thank you. Thank you very much, gentlemen, for your passion and lifelong pursuit of not only sport but new and up-and-coming athletes in both your regions. I was interested, Mr Climpson – you just mentioned we were hopeful of about a 15 to 20 per cent increase in participation in the sport. How did your organisation tackle that and prepare for that increase in participation with the Commonwealth Games ahead?

Alan CLIMPSON: With the new facility, we had double the capacity of change rooms and toilets and all the basic needs that we need to actually have people at the facility. We would have had two new pitches at Stead Park with that and a third pitch down at Torquay. That was all part of the Commonwealth package. That was a 33 per cent increase in facility area to be able to manage the increase. Now we struggle at training times; with that third pitch we would free up a lot of training time, which would allow us to increase capacity and not knock back anybody in particular and say, ‘We just can’t fit you in.’ We will always make room for people to fit in and play sport.

Melina BATH: That is right – always encouraged. Thank you. You have talked about Stead Park and – just because my time is limited, it might be wise – how canteen, toilets and resurfacing was \$1.1 million a few years ago. That will be ramped up now and more expensive. And you said you have gone to the minister, and you want to know what this looks like. Can you present to us, in whatever form, what you want?

Alan CLIMPSON: I have got an electronic version of our concept that we put to the Commonwealth Games committee that I can send up to you guys.

Melina BATH: Yes, please. That would be most helpful.

Alan CLIMPSON: So you will actually see what we designed and everything like that. We were at the stage where we had the plans drawn. They could have built it from the plans that we drew.

Melina BATH: Fantastic. If you could provide that to us, we would be most grateful.

Alan CLIMPSON: Absolutely. I could do that.

Melina BATH: Thank you very much. A question to both of you – I have got the Athletics Australia submission here, and it says:

... the VIC2026 cancellation has impacted –
the –

... structural pathway for the next generation of Australian athletes ... to break through in international competition.
It also says:

... the ability to inspire Aussie kids, watching homegrown heroes take on other nations on home soil –
and the –

... ability to ... develop and retain the technical knowledge required ...

I am assuming they are saying that in terms of the coaches and technical officials. Can you both respond to that? Because it seems to me that it is increasingly looking like Australia will not – there will be no other – pick-up of the 2026 Commonwealth Games. We are going to lose it entirely from Australia. What is the impact to your two sports, noting those concerns?

Alan CLIMPSON: I will speak a little bit about hockey. As far as the technical officials go, we have got two young people that were originally from Geelong that are now umpiring at an international level, and they were going to be our tools for the Commonwealth Games as far as running some technical official courses during the Commonwealth Games. Because we were going to have a lot of regional kids coming down to watch the sport, we were going to run off-field courses for those regional areas that do not get that kind of technical development. Umpires were the same; we were going to run umpire development courses in conjunction with the Commonwealth Games. While people were down in regional areas to watch a game or something like that we could run umpires courses and technical officers courses around those. They are now up in the air. The big thing for us was to have the ability to at least apply for international matches, so when Australia and the FIH have the international hockey competitions in Australia we can put our hand up – or we would have been able to put our hand up. We still do not know what we are going to get yet, so we do not know. That is where it left us.

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

Jacinta ERMACORA: Thank you – very exciting to hear about the swimming and the hockey. You know you are a hockey player if you are playing on grass by the creek at Eltham in the winter.

Alan CLIMPSON: We played on the grass by the creek down here in Corio, and there was –

Jacinta ERMACORA: You cannot find the ball.

Alan CLIMPSON: I reckon there are still balls on the ground that you cannot find.

Jacinta ERMACORA: That is right.

Alan CLIMPSON: I was a goalkeeper, and I know all about finding the ball.

Jacinta ERMACORA: It redefined the word ‘divot’.

Alan CLIMPSON: If you look at the history of hockey in the Geelong area, we had 21 grass pitches along the northern edge of Stead Park during the winter competition and they were then softball pitches during the summer. Well, we went from that down to one synthetic pitch.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Wow.

Alan CLIMPSON: That probably hit the sport a lot because the council would not maintain the surfaces. We paid for the pitch ourselves. The cost of putting a new pitch in all came from our own money, but we took that hit 25 years ago and we have grown the sport back to where we are now, so another hit was hard to take, you know. We were ready for the hit 25 years ago because it was of our own volition. Now, to build the expectation of the sport and then take another hit was difficult.

Jacinta ERMACORA: I presume that the legacy scenarios will play out appropriately and through due process so I will not take up that space –

Alan CLIMPSON: Well, we are hoping to hear very shortly. We have been assured by Sport and Recreation Victoria that the announcement is coming. I have been on the phone because there has been this little bit of a gap between the last conversation and the next conversation. Hopefully, we will get an announcement soon. They are saying it should happen soon.

Jacinta ERMACORA: The demographics – I just want to be quick because I know we are trying to finish up – particularly 55 per cent women in your club. That is terrific, and then your club community is about 3000. What was the member number – seven –

Alan CLIMPSON: No, 850.

Jacinta ERMACORA: 850. Thank you. Has hockey always been sort of 50–50 male–female?

Alan CLIMPSON: Well, when I first started it was predominantly female. We are probably one of the few sports where we have not had to change our direction for female participation. It has probably worked counterproductive to us because there is a lot of emphasis on female participation in sport. We already had it.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes.

Alan CLIMPSON: We were more trying to get the men back into playing the sport. The females were very strong. We are probably on the opposite side of the coin to everybody else in most sports in Australia at the moment. So we were fortunate that way. But you find a drop-off at 25 with women because they tend to focus on getting a family and everything like that and then they come back in their late 30s, early 40s and continue playing through. That is a cycle for us that we have lived with since day dot, but women in sport for us has probably not been a contentious issue.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes, that is fantastic.

Alan CLIMPSON: It is probably the strength of the sport really.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes. That is great. I presume it brings families to club events too when you have got

Alan CLIMPSON: Well, our committee is more than 50 per cent female. Last year we had a female president for the first time. She is having a family; that is why I have come back into the presidency. That has, for us, always been one of our strengths. We have had that diversity of opinions and outlooks on the sport.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes. I really enjoyed my time playing hockey. I think there is a unique approach to sport amongst hockey players.

Alan CLIMPSON: A lot are still playing.

Jacinta ERMACORA: They are quirky and proud.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Ermacora. Dr Mansfield.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you both for appearing today. We heard from Swimming Victoria at a previous hearing about the approach to planning regional infrastructure and especially competition-level infrastructure and I guess the lack of a strategic approach to those things. I would be interested in your experiences of that and your views on that at your level and in the Geelong region and whether any of that you felt was taken into consideration in the planning of the Comm Games and the selection of the sites.

Tim WOODS: Thank you, Dr Mansfield. I think in respect of the site, yes. It was the point before about once you have pitched your stone at a less than strategic approach to just rinse and repeat types of pools in a disaggregated sense in a large community, then you come to the next part that you develop and you have got to do the same. So in that sense it is a version of the absence of strategy that leads to just repeating –

Sarah MANSFIELD: So you are saying every community then needs a pool.

Tim WOODS: Yes, and it ends up being collectively suboptimal when it comes to meeting a mixed modality essentially. So you have got this range of community needs that start from Learn to Swim. They include rehabilitation, older people, people who have mental health needs – we all know that story about the importance of community sports infrastructure. And then there are also the things that people do around the sport, in this case swimming, in a properly constructed aquatic environment. You do not have to have one or the other. The Gippsland Regional Aquatic Centre is the latest demonstration of the small number of examples that you can actually have it all. You just have to work through that with all of the stakeholders, not just those who are caught with their profit-and-loss sheets playing against their balance sheets, like is so often the case for local councils.

Sarah MANSFIELD: So in an ideal world, what sort of facility would you like to see?

Tim WOODS: I think I am, pun intended, out of my depth when it comes to that in detail. Thank you very much. It is a dad joke.

Alan CLIMPSON: I think you are doing swimmingly, Tim.

Tim WOODS: But I think the really important proposition that I put deliberately in your heads earlier was this idea of MSAC lite. What happens when you have got to shut? The state government is responsible for it. You have got to shut MSAC for a couple of years to get it ready to be the world's leading aquatic facility, which it already is. You have got to do that. Where are you going to go? I know where you have to go. You have got to come here. That is the facility that we have got to build here. It does not have to be quite the same, but it has got to be on the pathway. And what do you do then? You advantage this region, with its enormous interest in aquatic sports of various types, and you meet a community need at the same time by designing it right.

Sarah MANSFIELD: And with respect to Stead Park for hockey, you may not know the answer to this, but was it the preferred location from your perspective to have a facility?

Alan CLIMPSON: In the eyes of the council and Hockey Victoria, Stead Park has always been identified as the hub for hockey in the Geelong region. That was always going to be developed around, and we were very fortunate that the Commonwealth Games offered us a third pitch, which originally was going to be put in the middle of Geelong city somewhere. We asked, and they graciously accepted, that they put it down into Torquay because they were 10 years into the process of getting a pitch down there, so there was an opportunity to get a pitch into a strong regional club for nothing – which they took on board. But yes, the home of hockey in Geelong is Stead Park. The design we put forward enhanced the area where it is and gave us better access from another road rather than an internal road that exists for the five or six sports that get played out at Stead Park. There are baseball, softball, soccer, darts, lawn bowls and us at the moment, so it is quite a little group of sports there. There are two major car parks and when everybody is there at once it becomes full. The new concept allowed us to enter from Station Street, and when you see the concept drawings you will see all this, and virtually our own car park area and a separate entrance, which would open up the whole facility then for all the sports. But in answer to your question, hockey was always going to be at Stead Park.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Okay.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Dr Mansfield. Apologies, Mr Woods, I think you were going to answer Ms Bath's question earlier and I cut you off inadvertently. So I will give you the opportunity to do that.

Tim WOODS: I think broadly the question is about the impact on the sport itself. I can only speak from a club and a regional point of view. I know that on the night the announcement was made coaches pulled athletes aside, particularly more senior ones, and said to them, 'Okay, this is what's happening,' and they got in the water and they kept on going. Subsequently we have had more inquiries than we have had in the past, and we are genuinely full. Now, there are demographic factors around not having enough pools and having more people coming, but I think in swimming, which might be different to some other sports, you can absolutely see in front of you what you want to be. Swimming is an extremely well organised sport.

Melina BATH: And the pathways are there.

Tim WOODS: And the pathways are very clear. So you can see the person ahead of you and two spots ahead of you or two stages ahead of you, and you can absolutely see, you know, the household-name swimmers on a routine basis. And perhaps it is not the same for swimming as it is for other sports, but I do not think we saw a noticeable effect, to be frank.

Melina BATH: Sorry?

Tim WOODS: I do not think we saw a noticeable negative effect, to be frank – not one that is measured, certainly.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Finally, Ms Tyrrell.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Okay. Thank you, Chair. The Geelong Swimming Club – it says here that they sponsored a petition to build a competition-level swimming pool in the region to host the games. Has a cost analysis been done that you are aware of on a pool of that size?

Tim WOODS: I am not aware that one has been done. Our view was around providing support for, as I described before, our balance, so that the approach about getting community support beyond our swimming club for a facility of that type was about supporting our on-balance decision that the right thing to do was to focus towards Armstrong Creek. I am not in a position to comment on the cost–benefit analysis piece.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Yes. That is all right. I am just trying to work out who would be responsible for undertaking a cost analysis for that. I will do my research on that one to save time.

Now, Mr Climpson, you have stated a lot during this what the legacy is going to look like, because you do not know yet. In an ideal world, what should it look like that would benefit your sports – potentially both of your sports – to help the region the most?

Alan CLIMPSON: In an ideal world we would have two international-standard pitches and lighting with the facilities that were drawn up, which was clubrooms in between the two pitches so there was viewing for the public on both pitches – so if there were two games being played, you could be either side of the building and see the teams that were playing at the same time. Well, with all the support facilities, coaches rooms, change rooms, tech offices and all that kind of room underneath, the top was more the viewing platform for the spectators. That, in an ideal world, with the car parking that we were just talking about around the facility, would enhance us no end, and it would give us the opportunity then to apply to both Hockey Australia and the FIH to host international games when they become available in Australia. At the moment they are currently either up in Brisbane, over in Western Australia or in Melbourne. Very few regional areas get a chance to host international games, and this would have been very unique in Australia – for us to be able to apply to host those international games – which was for us a benefit in that (1) it raises our profile and (2) we get some financial benefit out of it as well.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Lovely. Thank you. Will you have a crack at that, Mr Woods?

Tim WOODS: Well, I think it is a fair question but in a sense already answered – the MSAC-lite proposition: 50-metre pools with grandstand-type of support et cetera so you can do the things that we can imagine doing, whether Commonwealth Games or not.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Beautiful. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you both for appearing today and providing evidence. You will be given a copy of the transcript for your review in about a week, before it is published. The committee will now adjourn for the day.

Committee adjourned.