

# **TRANSCRIPT**

## **SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE 2026 COMMONWEALTH GAMES BID**

### **Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid**

Ballarat – Wednesday 14 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**

Matt Jenkins, Chair, and

Ashley Anderson, Manager, Llanberris Athletics Reserve, Ballarat Regional Athletic Centre.

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

All evidence taken 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.

**Matt JENKINS:** Matt Jenkins, Ballarat Regional Athletic Centre.

**The CHAIR:** Pleased to meet you.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** Ashley Anderson, Ballarat Regional Athletic Centre.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I will just allow the committee to briefly introduce themselves. I am David Limbrick, the Chair.

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

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Jacinta Ermacora, Western Victoria Region.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Tom McIntosh, Eastern Victoria Region.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Sarah Mansfield, Western Victoria Region.

**Joe McCRACKEN:** Joe McCracken, Western Victoria Region, Ballarat-based.

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

**The CHAIR:** I welcome you to make your opening comments and ask that they be kept to around 10 minutes, please. Thank you. Please proceed.

**Matt JENKINS:** Excellent, thank you. Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity of appearing today before you and addressing the Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid and particularly allowing us to share a local athletics perspective into the effects of the cancellations of Vic 2026. Ballarat Regional Athletic Centre, or BRAC as it is commonly known, is an incorporated association historically tasked with two key responsibilities: overseeing the management of the Llanberris athletics facility, which includes almost a hundred events annually across schools and senior and junior athletic events, and administering the delivery of Athletics Victoria events within the Ballarat region. Until recently it has been made up of representatives from the five primary athletics clubs, being Ballarat Little Aths, Ballarat Harriers, Ballarat YCW, Eureka Athletics and Wendouree Athletics Club. Although now a skill-based board, we still very much work closely with the local clubs as well as Athletics Victoria, City of Ballarat schools and other community stakeholders. In many ways we are the glue which brings the sport together in our region.

The planned 2026 Commonwealth Games, in particular the prospect of athletics being held in Ballarat, brought great excitement and anticipation. It allowed our elite local athletes to dream of competing on home soil and gave our juniors a rare opportunity to be able to watch their idols up close. It provided an opportunity for

officials to demonstrate their expertise at the highest level and for coaches to gather, share ideas and drive performance. It shone the spotlight on the wonderful elements of athletics across our community and promised to deliver significant economic benefits to our region. Most importantly, it was the catalyst for the reinvention of athletics within Ballarat and certainly for BRAC to broaden its historical responsibilities and to transition itself into a true leader of the sport both locally and across regional Australia. Whilst we still have a long way to go to achieve our ambitious goal, we now have a sport with a clear vision on how to utilise the opportunity of the games to prosper well beyond the 2026 event.

Whilst the Commonwealth Games themselves are no longer in play, we firmly believe the opportunities and the benefits surrounding them can still very much be a reality. With strong support from the athletics community, Ballarat Regional Athletic Centre Inc. have already undergone significant change, moving to a seven-person skill-based board and adopting a comprehensive strategic plan, positioning them well to capitalise into the future. We remain fully committed to working with all stakeholders in delivering the following five priorities post the announcement of the games: to relocate the home of athletics in Ballarat to a new world-class athletics facility, to build an annual calendar of major and local events, to establish a legacy of volunteerism and participation, to establish a sustainable funding model that allows athletics to prosper and to maintain a strong voice within local athletics and be a leader of community sport.

Starting with the first priority, the relocation of the athletics facility, despite early concerns, we are pleased with the progress towards the development of a new facility to be constructed south of Mars Stadium. From our perspective it is very evident that the team engaged to design and deliver this facility are committed to delivering the best outcomes they can. The challenge I believe facing them is ensuring that there is sufficient budget to allow all of the requirements required for a category 1 facility. Understanding that the project may be combined with the upgrade of the seating to Mars Stadium, our fear is that despite great intentions, if items need to be trimmed from the scope to meet budgetary challenges, it will be athletics again who miss out to AFL and other sports. I know this was a recurring theme within Athletics Australia's hearing, and we stand 100 per cent with them on ensuring that the less commercialised Olympic and Commonwealth Games sports are not pushed aside now that the games are not proceeding.

It is our view that any new athletics facility, to have a true legacy, must allow for a full relocation of athletics from Llanberris Athletics Reserve. This includes the provision of social rooms, change rooms, equipment sheds, seating, shade structures et cetera. It must be fully accessible to the people of Ballarat and to people of all abilities and be capable of hosting world-class and national-level events. To achieve this standard the running track must be World Athletics certified and the venue must be classified as a category 1 facility, but as an absolute minimum a category 2. For this to occur specific technical requirements must be met, including external throwing areas and appropriate warm-up facilities and, critically, the ability to add future, even if it is only temporary, infrastructure such as call rooms, grandstands, hospitality suites et cetera. It must include a high-performance training facility with capacity for indoor and outdoor training separate from the competition area. This is particularly beneficial in attracting athletes to set up base in Ballarat and even keeping our existing ones here. As we know, our weather can sometimes throw up some challenges for our training across winter. Considering the current state of the Llanberris track and its need for significant repairs, we propose that the development of a new facility be completed within the following time lines: stage 1, relocation of the community facility, to be completed by September 2026 in readiness for the 2026–27 track season; the classification to a world standard to be completed by September 2027 to allow for hosting the Victorian and/or Australian all-schools athletics championships; stage 3, the high performance centre, to be completed by October 2028 to allow athletes the appropriate facilities in the lead-up to Brisbane 2032.

Our second priority is around major events. In athletics terms the great loss of the Commonwealth Games was not just the opportunity for Ballarat to showcase the sport on a world scale; it was the opportunity for coaches, athletes, officials and volunteers to become involved and experience a world-standard event firsthand and to use it as a launch pad into 2032. We have bold ambitions of being the best represented region from regional Australia at the Brisbane Olympics in 2032. This is from a coach, athlete, administrator and officials perspective, and we believe a consistent calendar of events here locally will allow us to achieve that. With the existing challenges associated with other Victorian venues, which I know you have already heard extensively about, our early informal conversations with peak athletic bodies give us great confidence that should an appropriate facility be built we can establish long-term partnerships that ensure Ballarat becomes a regular host of major events on the state and national athletics calendar. Whilst it is obvious that these events would drive significant economic benefit to our region, they importantly build the profile of athletics locally, which can

bring unique commercial opportunities for investment back into the sport. Without such events, the opportunities to seek corporate support are significantly more difficult. Despite excellent capability to host such events, our ability to attract and resource these events is of course heavily contingent upon the establishment of a new world-class facility but equally so on the initial seed funding and the establishment of secure recurring revenue, tourism funding and event support.

Our third priority is around participation and particularly participation around volunteering. As it is a foundation to all sports, we believe formal participation in athletics is considerably higher than our current 600-plus members would indicate. Our estimated calculations suggest actual participation within the Ballarat region to be well over 25,000 people, inclusive of attendance at school sports, informal competitions and recreational running. If we consider current participation numbers in sports that utilise the skills developed through athletics, such as running, jumping and throwing, the opportunity to reach a goal of 2000-plus formal participants by 2026 grows even further. The games was another opportunity for us to highlight and convert some of these casual members into actual members. Planning was already underway to convert that through school programs, and with the appropriate funding we can still recruit and train the coaches to execute these plans.

We know that athletics is unequalled in terms of inclusivity and diversity. As one of the few international events where able-bodied and para-athletes compete side by side and with the unique sense of competitive unity amongst the various cultures of the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth Games were the perfect platform to highlight and celebrate athletics leadership in this space and drive participation in para- and multicultural athletes. Locally our percentage of multicultural athletes is less than 2 per cent. The strong connection to our First Nations people that was planned for the games also allowed for a celebration of the amazing contribution our First Nations people have made to athletics and for further enhancement of the pathways for their future involvement. Whilst the games would have provided this platform, we believe that, again, with the right funding and resources, this opportunity still exists.

Although participation in sport is often thought of in terms of athletes, athletics provides a great opportunity for involvement at multiple levels, including coaching, officiating and volunteering. A great challenge facing athletics in an era of reduced volunteerism is the ability to attract, train and retain the high number of officials and volunteers required to run a successful event. To comply with the standards set by World Athletics, our local Saturday afternoon track meet over the summer could require more than 10 qualified officials and a further 20 volunteers. This requirement allows for high levels of integrity within the sport to be possible but also poses an unsustainable burden on many individuals. A legacy of the Commonwealth Games was to be the increased number of officials and volunteers supporting athletics within the region. With this opportunity now gone, it is critical that we re-create this opportunity with strong recruitment and training and ample local opportunities for officials to participate and officiate at the highest level of competition.

Our fourth point is around establishing funding that allows athletics to prosper. Unlike many sports which have highly profitable national competitions and commercial agreements that are able to subsidise and support the grassroots level of their sports, athletics within Australia relies on the local clubs to fund their own operations via their own activities. Unfortunately, the costs associated with athletics are often disproportionate to other sports due to the cost of facility upkeep and hire and the large amount of cost of unique equipment required. Despite its underfunded nature and high cost requirement, it remains a critical sport in the development of young people, typified by the high levels of participation within schools. For this reason, we believe it to be incumbent upon all stakeholders to work with Ballarat Regional Athletic Centre to ensure any decisions made impacting the future of the sport in our region take into consideration a long-term financial model that allows athletics to leverage commercial arrangements with schools, other sporting organisations and the private sector. This could include how the track hire is managed; commercial arrangements within the stadium, including catering and sponsorship; delivery of programs; or co-tenancy agreements.

Finally, our fifth priority is to unite local athletics and be a leader of community sport. Although at times our sport can be divided, the excitement and anticipation of the Commonwealth Games created a unity not often seen. It was a great reminder of how strong our sport can be when it comes together and how a strong BRAC has the ability to bring the sport together on a shared purpose.

Once the reality of the games not proceeding hit home, the focus of many within our athletics community shifted back to the present, and that shared purpose was lost. To our board this reinforced the need for BRAC to create new opportunities for shared excitement and the reinvigoration of athletics. Whilst we still have some

way to go in this space, establishing partnerships with key stakeholders helps to ensure we can fund and deliver those opportunities.

One of the other opportunities is around our leadership as a sport to our local community. Athletics is a foundation sport. The fundamental skills practised in athletics provide a practical connectivity to all sports. We believe that the inclusive, worldly nature of athletics highlighted within the Commonwealth Games would provide the platform for athletics to become the leader in community sport administration and governance. With that opportunity lost, we look forward to working with government peak bodies and other sporting groups to explore ways in which we can play a leading role in building a community sporting ecosystem to mirror the great aspects of athletics.

In summary, Ballarat Regional Athletic Centre had developed a clear view on how to leverage the 2026 Commonwealth Games to build on the already rich history of athletics in our region. It has since established a clear vision of what a games legacy could be. What we now need is for state and local governments to partner with us to bring that vision to life by assisting with the shortfall in anticipated resources that would have been derived from Victoria 2026. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I will first pass to Mr Galea.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you both for joining us today. You spoke a fair bit about your ambitions for the new regional athletics facility.

**Matt JENKINS:** Yes.

**Michael GALEA:** I appreciate your input on the time lines which you would seek to have things done by as particularly helpful as well. In terms of what it will deliver for athletics and community sport more broadly in Ballarat and the broader region, what are the main benefits that you see coming from this project, and what are the particular things that you would like the new facility to have in place to be able to deliver those benefits?

**Matt JENKINS:** I think the biggest opportunity – and, Ash, you might add to this – is about attracting a greater calendar of events to the Ballarat region, which then starts to build that momentum of the sport and build the profile of the sport, which in turn then starts to increase participation numbers et cetera. So I think that is probably the number one priority, to ensure that it is at a level that can actually attract a greater level of events. We had the Vic countries a couple of weeks ago, which was a wonderful event. It brought people from all over regional Victoria. They were not able to warm up appropriately in the proper spaces. There were a few limitations. As much as we did a great job, the ability to attract an event of a higher standard than that – it just simply would not be possible. That is probably the number one thing.

I guess the other part would be around ensuring that there are appropriate facilities to allow a greater number of people at any one training time. If you come down there on a Thursday night when it is peak training, it is very, very hard to find a bit of clear track. So I guess having a facility with a dedicated warm-up area and a high performance area allows for those greater participation numbers. You will not have people that are not dedicated track people down there through those times, because there simply is not the room, but a facility set up to accommodate that allows you to have a broader participation at the actual facility. It also allows schools to be set up in a way that allows the more efficient running of school programs et cetera, which is sometimes a challenge at the moment, which Ash knows far more about than I do.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** Yes. I think it is sort of twofold, you know, when you talk about the participation opportunities of a new facility and then the major events, and they almost coincide in a lot of ways. More major events usually coincides with more participation. But as Matt said, a majority of the users of Llanberris Athletics Reserve are the schools. We have about 48 schools that use the facility each year for their sports day, and the numbers can be up to 25,000 that come in each day. So it is a very heavily used facility in Ballarat, and in regard to Llanberris I think the tracks are typically resurfaced every 10 years. It was last resurfaced in 2014, so you can sort of do the maths there on where it is up to now.

There are also shortfalls when it comes to the facilities that are around. So in regard to what you were saying on what we would like to see in the new facility, it just comes with a complete update as well when it comes to the technology advances that have happened over the last 10 years – things like photo finish for the finish line. There is no capability to do a lot of work there where we currently are, at Llanberris, but if you purpose-built a

facility that could take into account these new advances, it would be much, much easier and would allow you to actually progress further into the sport. We want to be providing local participants with the best opportunities they can have, and that requires a new facility at this stage.

**Michael GALEA:** Yes. That is quite interesting as well. I had not considered things like those tech advances and photo finishes. It is a really good point. You sort of both touched on this anyway, but I was going to ask about your demand, and clearly it is very, very strong. Have you seen growth in that demand as well over the past few years as we have come back from COVID?

**Ashley ANDERSON:** Yes, we definitely have. I mean, we talked about I guess the numbers when it comes to actual athletics members, and I know Athletics Victoria have seen a big increase in recreational running membership, which is a new type of membership which is not necessarily track and field or winter season but is recreational running. It is a booming area at the moment. It is really, really strong, and we want to incorporate an opportunity where we can engage with our recreational runners through the new facility as well and through athletics. I mean, ultimately it all falls under the one umbrella. Numbers are increasing. We are starting to see a lot more schools that are coming from different areas as well and coming into Ballarat for that. So yes, the numbers have been steadily increasing I guess from a member's perspective, but the actual total involvement in athletics-based participation is really expanding.

**Matt JENKINS:** And we know that the uplift in participation in the lead-up to a major event like a Commonwealth Games is significant. As we talked about, there are about 25,000 students that use the facility; we have 600 members. So if you look at that conversion ratio from people who are doing the sport to actually participating formally in the sport, it is a very, very small conversion rate. Now, in the lead-up to the Commonwealth Games, as they are in the classrooms learning about the different countries, learning about some of their heroes and some of the athletes that they would look up to, it just gets them involved in the sport. How do we replicate that? Clearly we are not going to be able to replicate it exactly, but how do we work programs into schools and into things like that, which we absolutely have the capability to do but not the capacity? That is generally a funding piece. We have got Ash two days a week, who primarily spends time on just running the school events and handling some basic inquiries. We know that there are very, very capable people out there that can run some stuff like that, but where does the funding for that come from? We are certainly not looking for recurring handouts but to seed some stuff. The Commonwealth Games was going to be that catalyst to be able to put some things in place that could have then stood on their own two feet.

**Michael GALEA:** That is an interesting point. And just lastly – I have run out of time – you talked about recreational running as well. Have you seen any conversion from people who have engaged with your club recreationally and have then gone on to participate in other athletics?

**Ashley ANDERSON:** Yes. So one thing – and I know this was mentioned in the Athletics Australia transcript – is that Llanberris reserve used to be a closed facility, and essentially the reason behind that was that the money obtained through the gate cards went into reinvesting into the facility. There was, I guess, a partnership between BRAC and City of Ballarat that after the last refurbishment of the track, from 1 January this year, the track would be free access. The track has turned into free access. Almost immediately, I think, we noticed the increase in people training at the facility. That has actually resulted in quite a few people doing some invitational events during the AVSL season. We noticed a new recreational running club started at Lake Wendouree since the new lights were put in there recently. Those sorts of things we are trying to engage with on a broader scale. In regard to the conversion, there are obviously so many different individual events at track and field, and recreational runners are not going to be interested in all of them, but it is being able to convert them to more specialised events. We are certainly working in that direction, and we have seen some success there.

**Matt JENKINS:** Just building on the access to the facility – even as recently as just driving up here – we have just been at the facility this morning, and as we were leaving, there were three carloads of individuals that we had never seen, who had never been engaged in athletics before. They all just walked in and were using the facility. Now, we would not have seen that prior to opening the gates up. We want to be able, obviously, to do more of that. But to do that –

**Michael GALEA:** You need the resources to do it.

**Matt JENKINS:** And just have a plan in place for the ongoing maintenance of the track. If you are having to resurface it every 10 years, who is funding that? How does that work? It is things like that. It is an exciting opportunity to be able to open it up to more people. We definitely want to do that, but with that comes its challenges.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Tyrrell.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, gentlemen, for joining us today. Can I please start with the time line of your involvement in the Commonwealth Games preparation for 2026. What role, advice or meetings did you have with the Victorian government in relation to athletics at the games?

**Ashley ANDERSON:** Do you want me to take this one?

**Matt JENKINS:** You can, and I will fill in gaps.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** If we are talking about the Commonwealth Games new facility build, it was probably fairly minimal when it came to the actual development from a Commonwealth Games perspective. Obviously we heard the announcement the same as everyone else – that the Commonwealth Games were coming to Victoria, that Ballarat would be the home of the track and field, and there would be a new facility built. I cannot say there were too many meetings leading up to that or after that around what the facility would actually look like. I would not have specific dates for you to go through.

**Matt JENKINS:** I will be less diplomatic.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Yes, go for it. Be as frank as possible.

**Matt JENKINS:** No, no. I appreciate that there were some challenges with sharing information, but we did feel in the dark.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** You were thrown in the deep end.

**Matt JENKINS:** Not necessarily thrown in the deep end. I think we wanted a voice and probably did not feel like we were getting that at that time. What I will say is that post games that has been different, and I do feel as though we are being listened to a lot more now.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Okay. That is good.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** So you had minimal – a bare minimum – consultation with the government prior to the games being put in. Did you find this unusual considering that athletics is one of the grassroots sports for the games?

**Matt JENKINS:** Probably not unusual. Frustrating, yes, but I guess understanding the time lines that we were working against et cetera, it was probably somewhat understandable that we were not able to have as much conversation as we would have liked. As passionate as we are about athletics, we want to be able to share our perspectives and ensure that the legacy component is genuinely going to be met and is going to allow for us to build that future that we think we are able to do.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** Just from speaking to a lot of the leaders that I spoke to in different areas, I do not think it is too uncommon when it comes to a Commonwealth Games build for a lot of the conversations to be with your national sport bodies and even your state sport bodies rather than the local. I think that was the frustrating part: we knew how important it was going to be for the Commonwealth Games, but also that it was going to be a facility that was going to be a local Ballarat responsibility for hopefully 50-plus years. There was not an engaging amount of conversation between the developers of that, when it was Commonwealth Games, and then the local community. I again agree with Matt that ever since the cancellation those meetings have been much more frequent, and we are certainly feeling now that the inputs of the local community and the local athletics community are being included in the design of the new facility.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Okay, thank you. In its submission to the inquiry Athletics Australia stated:

The cancellation of VIC2026 has had and continues to have a devastating impact on our sport and our athletes. The manner in which the news of the cancellation was delivered further compounded the angst, with the then Premier of Victoria stating that he made no apology for cancelling the Games ...

How devastating has the impact been felt here on the ground in Ballarat?

**Matt JENKINS:** I think initially there was that obvious disappointment, and I think we as a body have been trying to, I guess, look at the glass-half-full opportunity and have been saying, 'Well, yes, it's clearly disappointing that we are not going to have this sport in our backyard, but we are working towards what we can still achieve for the sport locally.' People move on relatively quickly, and I think we definitely want to ensure that we still are able to leverage a good legacy out of the outcome. If we can achieve that, people will see the new facility, the attraction of new events et cetera, et cetera. Hopefully, the Comm Games not being here is only a small blip. I guess the future will determine whether that is reality or not, but that is certainly the hope that we have been trying to talk up throughout our community, and I guess it is around wanting to continue to have people engaged in future opportunities. As much as it was disappointing, we are really trying to look forward rather than back.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Okay. Considering that the government made a commitment prior, saying, 'We're going to have the games,' then they cancelled them, you seem really optimistic that they are going to deliver on these legacies as well. If they fail to do that, what impact would that have on your community and athletics here?

**Matt JENKINS:** Clearly if we end up with a sub-par facility that at best is equal to the current one, there will be obviously disappointment within the athletics community. I think there is an opportunity there to be able to build a facility that can attract world-class events, and we have spoken around why that is important, but also to leverage that and other things in converting that casual participant into an active athletics member I think was going to be the real opportunity. I think if we can still do that, we will be fine. If we do not, then of course the athletics community will feel as if there has been an opportunity missed and an opportunity lost. When you feel as though you have any loss, of course that brings a whole range of emotions. Right now we have got to remain optimistic because –

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** That is all you have got.

**Matt JENKINS:** that is what we have got. Time will tell whether we were naive and where that sits, but right now we have got to remain hopeful that we can achieve a significant amount still.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** All right. Thank you. His finger is hovering; I know my time is up.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Tyrrell. Ms Ermacora.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Thank you. Thank you for appearing today, and also thank you for the role that you play and your advocacy, which is really important –

**Matt JENKINS:** You are welcome.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** and also for what appears to me to be some really good strategic planning that you are doing for the long term for your sport, which is terrific. We heard in Geelong yesterday a similar story about future plans for athletics, which is great. I have got a couple of questions. I did go to school here for a couple of years, but my geography is dangerously ignorant. Llanberris is actually just down the road, isn't it?

**Matt JENKINS:** It is, yes.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Right. And the new location is at Eureka?

**Matt JENKINS:** Just south of Eureka, in that precinct.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** On the same precinct, yes?

**Matt JENKINS:** Yes.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** And Eureka is Mars Stadium – well, Mars Stadium is there as well.

**Matt JENKINS:** Yes.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Thank you; I was not sure of that. You have got 600 members. What is the gender breakdown of your membership?

**Ashley ANDERSON:** That is probably more my area. Yes, it is certainly divided. I believe the Ballarat Little Athletics club would have about 250 of those members. Ballarat Little Athletics does range from about five all the way to – they do go up to under-17s, but I would say a majority of their members would be under 12. So they would go from about five to 12, and then there is a variety. One thing that is really great about athletics is that it is a sport for life, and we do get a lot of juniors, then under-20s and then opens, and then we do have a lot of 40-, 50- and 60-plus athletes. I could probably find a complete breakdown and supply that at a later date, but certainly that mixture is quite spread across a range of different –

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** So at the moment is it mostly women or mostly male?

**Matt JENKINS:** Gender-wise it would be fairly even.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** Yes, it would be fairly even. The last statistic run I did, which was based on last year's figures, was 56 per cent male and 44 per cent female.

**Matt JENKINS:** I am involved in little aths as well. I would think that is probably flipped at the junior level.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** Yes.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Fantastic. Do you count Indigenous or Aboriginal community participation as well?

**Ashley ANDERSON:** The state bodies do when they register through the state body, but I would not have that information. It is probably gettable.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Sure.

**Matt JENKINS:** One of the challenges that we face is that we technically only have five members, because they are the five athletics clubs.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** That was my next question.

**Matt JENKINS:** It is their members that we refer to as active members of athletics. We do not always get the full visibility of what that looks like, so we are reliant upon them providing us that number. We can shake up some numbers for you, but it is not something we actually have an active database on.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** I was also wondering; there is the Llanberris Athletics Reserve – you are the manager, Ashley – and then there is the Ballarat Regional Athletic Centre, but it sounds to me like your role is more as a Ballarat regional athletics association.

**Matt JENKINS:** It is, and it is something that comes up, with constant comment around 'You're a centre but you're an association.' Anyway, yes, you are spot on. I think historically its role was around running the centre, and then it has evolved over the years. But certainly the future direction of where we are taking it is very much around, I guess, the peak body for athletics in the local region.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Okay. That is fantastic.

**Matt JENKINS:** And that includes obviously facility management but also competition management, growth of the sport and a whole range of other strategic priorities as well.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** And again, it is so important, that role that you are playing for all those other clubs. You said five other clubs roughly –

**Matt JENKINS:** There are five primary users of Llanberris, but there are also a number of other athletic clubs that now we are starting to incorporate, such as Buninyong Little Athletics and some of the junior

athletics programs out here as well – the schools, pro running. There are a whole range of other athletics clubs that historically we probably have not necessarily engaged with.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** Definitely across all of western Victoria as well, Ballarat is probably the only place where you can do a lot of competitions – pretty much across western Victoria. Normally athletics competitions are in Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong and then your metro venues. Being in western Victoria we get athletes even from as far as the border that come for competitions to Ballarat.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** I think Warrnambool has got a fairly shiny track.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** They do have a shiny new track, yes.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Possibly one beyond its size.

**Matt JENKINS:** We have a number of athletes from Warrnambool come up to compete. We had a number here on the weekend actually.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** They currently do not compete on that track as a weekly competition via Athletics Victoria. They do you use it for other purposes.

**Matt JENKINS:** They have got their juniors.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** Yes, their juniors and school clubs.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Yes – an awesome juniors program. Just on the legacy of the athletics facility going into Eureka precinct, I guess what you are trying to do, from what I am hearing you say, is reshape what that legacy is going to look like. From some of the feedback we have heard already, some are saying we are now able to focus that legacy on exactly what we need as a community and a region rather than exactly what the Commonwealth Games required.

**Matt JENKINS:** Correct.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Is that one of the benefits?

**Matt JENKINS:** Absolutely. Not that we know this, because as we said, we were not necessarily engaged at the beginning, but I would imagine that from a Commonwealth Games perspective it would have been a track and perhaps some minor amenities around it. Now the conversation is around how we actually create a standalone world-class facility. Whether that was going to occur or not I am not sure, but certainly that is the narrative now that we are really trying to work through.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Thank you very much.

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

**Joe McCracken:** Thank you, gentlemen, for all that you guys do. I know you have had an interesting time over the time you have been helping out with athletics and trying to grow the sport and everything like that. As you said, the consultation or lack of it before was probably frustrating, but you are obviously trying to work towards a better outcome, which I commend you for. You know, trying to turn a negative into a positive is a good thing. I know Athletics Australia said in their submission that the cancellation had impacted pathways for athletes, like the next generation. Have you seen that sort of thing locally?

**Matt JENKINS:** I do not think we probably have yet, but I definitely think it will start to arise, as the games or as elite athletics is not here. But if we can replace that with some other stuff, then I think we can probably circumvent that challenge at a local level. I certainly appreciate the way Athletics Australia in their submission put that across around athletes that were trying or that were using the Commonwealth Games as a part of their four-year cycle.

**Joe McCracken:** A springboard.

**Matt JENKINS:** Absolutely. I think we have probably got a handful – maybe more than a handful – of elite athletes that would be looking towards Commonwealth Games, absolutely, and international competitions. I

think they would be absolutely impacted in the same way that Athletics Australia spoke about. I guess at that next tier down, around what I would call the emerging elite, like kids that show promise –

**Ashley ANDERSON:** Yes. I think there is definitely an impact. You think about obviously the Commonwealth Games, and I think you narrow it down to being: it is great to see the athletes on the world stage, and they are going to get inspired and everything.

**Joe McCRACKEN:** Yes, the aspiration is part of it.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** But to me it is also probably that a year, even two years, leading into it, you would have the best athletes definitely in Australia and potentially some in the world running camps in Ballarat. That is a big deal. These would have been obviously the first regional games to be run and they probably were not used to a lot of this, and so they would have said, ‘Why wouldn’t we come to Ballarat a couple of years before or a year before and actually train and be involved in that?’ And so for me it was actually –

**Matt JENKINS:** Then they would get involved in the schools and local clubs and that.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** In the schools, and the access that you got to – imagine having a world-class athlete and their coach training at Ballarat and then running clinics and then running programs.

**Matt JENKINS:** Particularly in some of the athletics events, we have genuinely got the world’s best in the Commonwealth. When you look at some of the African countries in the distance, the Jamaicans in the sprinting world, we have got the best in the Commonwealth, who would have been competing here in our local backyard. As an example of just the impact on youth, the Maurie Plant meet tomorrow night in Melbourne – I would anticipate, just from the conversations that I have had, there would be 50 kids from Ballarat heading down to Melbourne tomorrow night to watch. I know that is nothing much when you compare it to a footy match or something like that, but the opportunity to engage with elite athletes in Australia is virtually non-existent.

**Joe McCRACKEN:** So the Comm Games is – I will paraphrase here – essentially a lost opportunity for all that good stuff to happen.

**Matt JENKINS:** Yes. So how do we then bring it back?

**Joe McCRACKEN:** Schools, engagement, sharing culture – a lot of that good stuff.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** A big key one too is officials. I know we also spoke about how important officials are in the sport and our accredited officials we have. The indication we had was that at a Commonwealth Games obviously in Australia at least 50 per cent of the officials would be from Australia, and because it was in Ballarat there was a strong chance that a fair portion of our accredited officials would be used in the Commonwealth Games. We have had a couple of officials in Ballarat that were at Gold Coast and some of them that were at Melbourne and even some that went to the Sydney Olympics as well. But the fact that they would get more opportunities to be engaged in an event at that level –

**Matt JENKINS:** Not only that, it is the person that is maybe casually involved in the sport that goes, ‘Actually, I might now become accredited and become an official, with the opportunity to now officiate at the Commonwealth Games.’ So it then converts them into someone who then gets involved a little bit more actively in the sport.

**Joe McCRACKEN:** Steve Moneghetti, as you know, is like a god of athletics. He said about the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games:

I knew people were excited. It came in such a quick way. There was no negotiation. There was no lead-up. It was just ‘bang’.

It had such a focus for this community and I’m sure it was the same for other regional communities. It’s like getting teased with a carrot and having it dragged away from you.

Do you agree with that sort of sentiment about what he said?

**Matt JENKINS:** I do, but I also try and look at the glass half full.

**Joe McCRACKEN:** To try and look at the positives.

**Matt JENKINS:** Yes, we did get teased with the carrot, and it has been taken away. But it can still be brought back. As long as that happens, as long as there is a mechanism to still bring that hope back – I think that is what we said. It brought the sport together and had that shared purpose, and I think if there are mechanisms to still do that, then we can move forward as a sport and be really grateful. If that carrot does not come back in some capacity, then absolutely that disappointment remains and probably lingers for a time to come.

**Joe McCRACKEN:** I know the site at the old showgrounds – or it is going to be the old showgrounds now in Ballarat, where the site is supposed to be. Have you guys been consulted about any of the works that need to happen on the site given they had farm animals there and that sort of thing? Do you know of any of the works that are needed to get that up to what would suit your purposes?

**Matt JENKINS:** I will say, yes, we have definitely been consulted on the facility now. From a technical perspective around what earthworks are required et cetera, no, but we probably do not need to be on that. Certainly from a technical perspective of what the facility needs to look like, yes. As I said, the design team there are genuinely wanting to put the best outcome forward. The challenge that I think they are possibly going to face is if it runs over budget when they get to the point of scoping it, what stuff gets pulled out? Are they going to pull 2000 seats out and make it a 3000-seat upgrade? Or are they going to say, 'Rightio, we can't actually put that grandstand in that you need in your facility with shade sails, because we need the funding for over here.' That is probably where we just want to ensure that athletics does not lose out.

**Joe McCRACKEN:** The other idea around that whole precinct was the idea of a platform opposite Mars Stadium, which would facilitate the transport of people – not having to take a bus essentially from the main train station in Ballarat all the way out there. Is that something that you think would help facilitate that area and the development of that?

**Matt JENKINS:** To be honest, it is not something we have necessarily given a great deal of thought to. I think our community is very used to having to drive, so it is probably not something we have considered. I am sure we could give that consideration if we needed to, but it is not something we have given thought to at this point.

**Joe McCRACKEN:** No, that is cool. All right, I think I am out of time anyway, but thanks, gents.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr McCracken. Dr Mansfield.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you. Thank you for appearing today. I guess I am interested in prior to the cancellation. In terms of the planning and the engagement that occurred around the Commonwealth Games, what are your views on how that played out from your perspective? Did you have any concerns at all at that stage around the games?

**Matt JENKINS:** We definitely did. We had concerns around what we were going to be left with. There was a very strong narrative around, 'There's going to be a legacy piece; there's going to be a track up there,' but at no point in time did we actually know what that looked like. Of course with the unknown, that is what brings fear within an organisation. If you are kept across what is occurring, you can then have that level of comfort. So I would say, yes, there was apprehension around that at the time. There was also an understanding around it as well, knowing that stuff just needed to happen and that we were not going to be able to be consulted on everything and we were going to have to sort of live with a few things that maybe would not have been ideal. But the challenge was we just did not know, and I think having just been kept informed possibly would have given us a greater level of comfort. I think we are a fairly practical and understanding board and were realistic that those compressed time lines were going to mean a normal level of consultation probably was not going to be realistic, so just being informed would have helped.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** So being informed would have been helpful in an ideal world, and then additionally do you feel your board would have been able to offer something in terms of the design and planning process as well, if there had been the opportunity for that consultation?

**Matt JENKINS:** One hundred per cent. Absolutely. I mean, we have got one of the most competent technical officials in Australia on our board. You know, I think he is the technical official at Maurie Plant tomorrow night, so his level of understanding is second to none. And just the local nuances of the track – wind

directions, where you want the layout for the future and things like that. Some of the things that we are actually engaged with now are certainly some of the things that we probably would have been able to provide that insight to earlier. With a facility like an athletics track, it is not something that you can easily retrospectively amend. If it is built in the wrong position or there is infrastructure in the way of stuff, it is pretty difficult to fix down the track.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Yes. That brings me to: post cancellation, how have you found the engagement? How confident are you that your input is being taken on board and will be reflected in whatever the legacy piece ends up being?

**Matt JENKINS:** I think immediately post games it was a concern, but I must say in recent times it has been very, very good at, I guess, an implementation level or a design level. The design team and the sport and rec team that are working through it have been really, really good. I keep coming back to it, but the fear I have is that they are having to work to a restricted budget that means that there may be things that in an ideal world we would like to have or should have that either do not happen or just cannot happen. I guess an example of it is when we started engaging, the building facility that sat with it was it. It was, 'That's where it has to be. That's where it is, and that's pretty much the size of it' et cetera. So there was not really the ability to engage on some of that stuff. They are very, very open to making whatever amendments they can, but it is within a confined set of parameters.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** We do not know how far along they were either. I heard about the cancellation of the Comm Games the same as most people, from the press conference. I was listening to that. I will say that for probably about six weeks to two months after that there was pretty much no communication whatsoever. I had no idea what was going on. It was announced that day that the facility was still going to get built, but there was still no additional information following on from that. Then we did start getting the communication, and I agree with Matt that recently it has been really positive. I have been really impressed with the way that things have rolled out, but it certainly took a while to get going. It did sort of feel like a lot of the work had been done, and we were unsure of how much of that had been done. Then it was that shift from a Commonwealth Games facility to a local infrastructure build, so it was going through all of that. It still felt like there was a lot of uneasy times while we tried to work through what was actually happening. It is certainly much more positive now.

**Matt JENKINS:** I do think that if we had been given a complete green site, post the event – like, if they had come to us and said, 'This is the area you've got, what is it that you can build?' we would have ended up with a different solution to what we will. But I think what we will end up with, hopefully, is still a very, very, very good outcome.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Good. Okay. You raised before some concerns I guess around maintenance and renewal costs, which are always a challenge when it comes to infrastructure like this. I am just wondering if you could shed some light on what the current process is with maintenance and renewal of the existing facility and what you would like to maybe see done differently?

**Matt JENKINS:** You talk about the current and I will talk about the future.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** Yes. Basically, what is currently the agreement is that Llanberris reserve is owned by the City of Ballarat and is essentially leased to the Ballarat Regional Athletic Centre, and that has been the case for a very long time. I guess the overarching maintenance is completed by the City of Ballarat, so they will do a lot of the major repairs, they will do a certain amount of track repairs, they will come in and they will mow the lawns and they will do the gardening and they will do the patching of certain things, but there is still day-to-day maintenance that is run by the Ballarat Regional Athletic Centre. In turn, the Ballarat Regional Athletic Centre will book in all the schools and they will get the revenue from the schools and work through that process, and then a certain amount of that money has to go back into reinvesting in the sport, which is the small level maintenance. But there has always been a contribution that BRAC has made to the track resurfacing every 10 years. In regard to, I guess, the future, I will let Matt touch on that. With the maintenance, it is still a community facility, and the council are the ones that are sort of responsible for doing a lot of that overarching maintenance, because as you said, athletics facilities are expensive. Like a lot of sports infrastructure, they are expensive to not only build but also maintain over a long period of time.

**Matt JENKINS:** At any new facility ideally we would have revenue models that allowed us to manage the maintenance schedule, just because then it is ensured that it is in line with what is needed for that sport. The challenge with that is simply the amount of money required to maintain it. When it is a community asset and a council-owned asset, our ability to fund that is limited, but if there is a recurring revenue model, something that allows us to have the funds to be able to do that moving forward, then that would be the ideal situation in that we could manage that maintenance schedule ourselves. But it is certainly disproportionate to the maintenance schedule of other mainstream sports. To resurface a footy oval is significantly less money than resurfacing an athletics track when you consider all the synthetic works and other specialised works that are required.

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

**Tom McINTOSH:** Thanks for going through everything in so much detail today. It is interesting to hear about the priorities of the relocation, which sounds pretty exciting. I remember being at Llanberris when I was pretty young, and it felt like it needed a bit of work back then.

**Matt JENKINS:** It probably has not had a lot done since.

**Tom McINTOSH:** The annual calendar, overall participation rate, funding, strong voice, community support – obviously there is a strong voice, led by you. And the presentation we had earlier by your peak body – I am definitely hearing that. I do not have too much more to ask, given how much detail there has been, but since the announcement it sounds like consultation in recent months has been good where you are progressing next steps forward. Does that sound right?

**Matt JENKINS:** It has been very good from the design team and the sport and rec guys who have been tasked with delivery of that project. I guess where we are a still a little bit unsure is around the actual budget, and things like that, of the facility. I know it keeps getting bundled up with the entire precinct, so I guess probably a little bit of clarity around that would be helpful and also around any other opportunities to be able to bring some of these legacy pieces to life. I guess we have not had a lot of understanding or correspondence around how we could maybe do that.

**Ashley ANDERSON:** And probably time lines.

**Matt JENKINS:** It primarily has been around facilities. Time lines – we have been updated on prospective time lines and what we are hoping to work towards. I guess within the athletics community there is I guess a sense of ‘Oh, yeah, we’ll wait and see.’ We are hopeful, but there is probably still an element of ‘We’ll believe it when we see it.’

**Tom McINTOSH:** All right. Well, rec is in good hands. Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr McIntosh. And thank you both for appearing today and giving evidence to this inquiry. You will receive a copy of the transcript for your review in about a week, and then after that it will be published on the website. The committee will now shortly adjourn to reset for the next witnesses.

**Witnesses withdrew.**