

TRANSCRIPT

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE 2026 COMMONWEALTH GAMES BID

Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid

Bendigo – Tuesday 27 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

Stacie Wright, Chair, Bendigo Stadium Ltd; and

Glenn Harrison, Secretary, Bendigo & District Cycling Club.

The CHAIR: We will now resume the committee's public hearings for the Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid. Welcome, and thank you for coming today.

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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, could you please state your name and the organisation that you are appearing on behalf of.

Stacie WRIGHT: Thank you. Stacie Wright, Bendigo Stadium Ltd.

The CHAIR: Pleased to meet you.

Glenn HARRISON: Glenn Harrison, the Secretary of the Bendigo & District Cycling Club.

The CHAIR: Pleased to meet you also. I will also allow the committee to briefly introduce themselves for the record. David Limbrick, Chair of the committee.

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

Sarah MANSFIELD: Sarah Mansfield, Member for Western Victoria.

Joe McCRACKEN: Joe McCracken, Western Victoria.

Melina BATH: Melina Bath, Eastern Victoria. Hello. And Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, from Northern Victoria Region, just stepped out for a minute.

Tom McINTOSH: G'day. Tom McIntosh, from Eastern Victoria Region.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Jacinta Ermacora here, from Western Victoria Region. Hello. I am sorry I cannot be there today.

The CHAIR: And I believe we have Mr Davis online, maybe. He may have stepped away. That is fine. We would like to invite you to provide opening comments and ask that they be kept to approximately 10 minutes. Please proceed. I am not sure who wants to go first.

Glenn HARRISON: Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the select committee on the cancellation of the 2026 Commonwealth Games. While we acknowledge the significance of this inquiry and the potential impact it will have on Victoria's reputation, business community, tourism and major events, we would like to clarify our position as a club. The Bendigo & District Cycling Club had limited to no direct involvement in the Commonwealth Games bid process or preparations. Given this limited engagement in the process and with our role only as a member-based sporting club, we believe that the primary responsibility for providing insight into the inquiry should rest with the peak bodies and entities more closely tied to the Commonwealth Games planning and delivery process. The Commonwealth Games represented a unique opportunity to accelerate the growth and development of cycling in Victoria and indeed in Bendigo, from grassroots through to elite, as well as boosting economic, health and social benefits generated in all forms of inclusive cycling.

A bit about Bendigo & District Cycling Club – for this purpose we will just refer to it as the club. The club has a rich history in cycling, from grassroots club level through to elite, Olympic and world champions levels. The club has been in existence since the 1880s and has been able to deliver many forms of cycling throughout this time. Our greatest successes have been on the velodrome and in road racing. There are over 100 Olympic, Commonwealth Games and world champions coming out of the Bendigo & District Cycling Club and the Bendigo region. Examples of locally connected riders that are on the current world stage include Chris Hamilton, Jack Haig and Patrick Eddy. Other emerging riders include Alessia McCaig and Blake Agnoletto.

Our spiritual home of the Tom Flood Sports Centre in Bendigo hosts the annual Bendigo International Madison, a track cycling event that brings not only international level competitors but provides a spectacle that is well acknowledged as one of the best around the world. It also supports economic and social benefits through thousands of visitors who are attracted to the event each year. The Tom Flood Sports Centre, whilst practical and serviceable, is in need of substantial redevelopment to make the track more accessible to all abilities in all weather conditions. The club holds a vision to support an inclusive and all-abilities environment while developing future elite athletes. Most, if not all, elite athletes stem through the club through the track cycling. In addition to this, the facilities are being used by other sporting codes for various forms of football and human-powered vehicles.

In terms of a missed opportunity through the cancellation, we as a member-based club run by volunteers rely heavily on the support of local and state government funding to support infrastructure development and operations. The facilities and legacy infrastructure that were to be developed through the Commonwealth Games would have seen the Bendigo & District Cycling Club tradition of elite development continue as well as grassroots cycling. This is of particular significance in the post-COVID years, where we have seen an apparent decline in junior and grassroots cycling activity for both road and track disciplines. The Commonwealth Games provided a recovery opportunity after the damage caused by COVID restrictions and poorly planned capital works programs over the past three years. Infrastructure such as a velodrome redevelopment was top of our list, but it was important for the creation of a new vehicle-free cycling precinct whereby infrastructure was dedicated to criterium tracks and associated facilities that could be developed to promote safe and accessible cycling options. We saw this as having many benefits besides the racing element of cycling. Having safe and accessible cycling facilities could have contributed to the health and wellbeing of our community and had a positive impact on community health and activity levels. In addition, the availability of safe and accessible facilities could have created opportunities to further promote linkages to health-based programs in the community and the active lifestyles that all levels of government promote.

In terms of our recommendations, notwithstanding the decision to cancel the games, the government's commitment to invest in community sporting infrastructure is welcome, particularly given the cost barrier for the growth and development of cycling in regional Victoria. We would recommend the following: that clarity and fairness be principles applied to how member-based sporting clubs can partner with peak sporting bodies and local and state government and access the promised funding now available to support initiatives at local and regional levels; that genuine collaboration with local community groups occurs, such as and including the Bendigo & District Cycling Club, in relation to how we prioritise available funding; and finally, that full transparency is provided for clear and timely communication on how any process is evolved to address the above issues.

The club thanks the committee for the opportunity to provide this submission. I will also leave with the committee, if they wish, some books on the history of Bendigo cycling and how we used to be known as the home of cycling in Victoria.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I am sure that will be well received by the committee. Ms Wright.

Visual presentation.

Stacie WRIGHT: Thank you. I have got a couple of slides here just to showcase our venues. Bendigo Stadium Ltd is a not-for-profit organisation. Our business focus is on sport and entertainment, and we have a vision for vibrant places where communities thrive and people come together for sport, events and for the entertainment. We employ 170 people in the Bendigo region, and we operate three sporting and entertainment venues: the Borough Club, the St Arnaud Sporting Club and the most significant part of our organisation is the Bendigo Stadium.

Bendigo Stadium is a major asset of the City of Greater Bendigo and a cornerstone, we believe, of the Bendigo community. We host weekly community sporting programs along with sporting and entertainment events. The stadium was established in 1976 with just two basketball courts. We have seen three major developments since 1976, and it has met with growing demand for indoor sporting and entertainment facilities. We now have a 4000-seat show court arena, 10 indoor multiple-sports courts and 12 outdoor netball courts, and we are the largest indoor stadium outside of metropolitan Melbourne.

Bendigo Stadium attracts 15,000 patrons every week, the majority of which are through community sport, which is domestic basketball and volleyball competitions. The venue is also home to the Bendigo Braves, the national women's team Bendigo Spirit, and our elite program to support our local athletes so that they can participate at the highest level here in Bendigo. We also regularly host large events that attract numbers of tourists here to Bendigo and significantly boost local businesses. For example, the annual junior classic basketball competition, which grows year on year, in 2023 was estimated to contribute over \$5 million to the local economy by bringing 3300 athletes plus their families to Bendigo. The Bendigo Stadium also participated as a community hub in the 2022 Victorian flood crisis and was an indoor space to help with SES volunteers, children, teachers and parents of the Rochester community. This is a little bit about our business. Thank you for having us along today.

Just to talk quickly about the Commonwealth Games: like most, we were disappointed, but the reality was a decision was made, and we have sort of looked towards the future and we are fortunate to potentially have some future enhancements coming to our facility. And yes, looking at the positives coming out of the cancellation through the regional sporting infrastructure program, which obviously has not been completely confirmed as yet.

I do just want to point out that our CEO Dennis Bice is on some personal leave at the moment and was not able to make it here. I am chair of the board. I will try my best to answer any of your questions, but any operational questions may have to be taken on notice to him.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Mr Harrison, it is my understanding that if the games had gone ahead they were going to build a temporary velodrome to compete on. Obviously that would not provide any long-term infrastructure that could be used by the club. Now that the games has been cancelled and the government has committed to some infrastructure, is it your hope that those funds could be pivoted towards upgrades of, say, the Tom Flood arena?

Glenn HARRISON: Yes, correct. The club formed a subcommittee during the process with the initiative to be proactive in terms of lobbying the Commonwealth Games committee to try and have some type of legacy infrastructure as a result of the Commonwealth Games in lieu of a temporary facility. So our focus going forward will be very similar on that theme, which is to have some type of infrastructure that is permanent in nature.

The CHAIR: Just for my clarification, you were actually lobbying the committee to not build temporary infrastructure but rather have long-term legacy infrastructure?

Glenn HARRISON: That was our goal, but we never reached that point. The subcommittee was formed for the club, with a number of members. I believe it had two meetings but then dissolved as a result of the decision to cancel the games.

The CHAIR: Sure. Since the cancellation, have you had any further discussions with government or any commitments about some of these upgrades that you might be seeking?

Glenn HARRISON: No.

The CHAIR: Okay, so there is nothing concrete as yet?

Glenn HARRISON: No.

The CHAIR: Okay. What would you be asking of government now that the games is not going ahead? You mentioned the Tom Flood Sports Centre upgrades. What type of upgrades are we talking about?

Glenn HARRISON: Obviously scope of works would need to be discussed in a broader sense, particularly with peak sporting bodies, given we are only a member-based local community group. And whether that be the existing facility upgrade, our goal would ultimately be a new precinct facility that has other disciplines, not only track, involved, including criterion racing, but obviously any decisions going forward would need to be made in consultation with the peak body, including AusCycling.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Wright, which events were you expecting to host at the arena?

Stacie WRIGHT: There was only one event announced, and that was the netball.

The CHAIR: Just netball, yes. As part of this, were you expecting any funds to be directed to the arena for upgrades? Would it have been capable of handling this in its current state?

Stacie WRIGHT: In the current capacity, netball would have been fine. There were obviously discussions on potentially a second sport, which never eventuated to anything.

The CHAIR: What other sport?

Stacie WRIGHT: There were lots of different sports thrown around. As you would know, there were a number that there was not a home for yet, so there were a number of discussions again in the operational detail that the CEO would have taken on notice, but from what I understand, there were a number of sports discussed.

The CHAIR: Okay, thank you. I will pass to Mr McCracken.

Joe McCracken: Thank you, both, for appearing today, and thanks for all the work that you do in your respective roles. I can understand that the cancellation, while disappointing, you try to be optimistic and make the best of a bad situation, so I can appreciate that. How did you guys find out about the cancellation originally – not the announcement of the games, when they were cancelled?

Glenn HARRISON: Media coverage.

Stacie WRIGHT: Through the press.

Joe McCracken: Okay. That is a bit disappointing. I will go to you, Ms Wright. What involvement did the Bendigo Stadium play in the games preparation, to your knowledge? Were they part of the original bid or anything like that? Were you consulted on forming the business case? Did you see a business case? To your knowledge I know.

Stacie WRIGHT: To my knowledge. As I said, I can take it on notice. Definitely not involved in the bid, from what I understand, but there were a number of tours with various different delegates that came through the venue alongside the Bendigo City Council. Obviously it is their asset, so the majority of the work was by the city council.

Joe McCracken: Do you know about when those tours and –

Stacie WRIGHT: No. I would have to take that one on notice for sure.

Joe McCracken: If you are happy to take that on notice, that would be fine.

Stacie WRIGHT: Yes.

Joe McCracken: If you could give us those times, that would be fantastic. Thank you. In terms of consultation, do you know if the stadium gave any advice to the government in terms of capacity, seating – all those sorts of things – in the lead-up to the games?

Stacie WRIGHT: Yes. Obviously we gave the information about our capacity – via the council, again, being their asset, but yes, we did.

Joe McCracken: So you gave it to the council. Are you able to give us a copy of all that stuff, if you have got it on hand?

Stacie WRIGHT: Possibly, yes.

Joe McCracken: Take it on notice, if you want to.

Stacie WRIGHT: I will definitely have to take that one on notice.

Joe McCracken: Yes, that is fine. I know I am going back a little bit, but on 17 March 2023 the then minister for Commonwealth Games – Jacinta Allan, as you might know – visited the Bendigo Stadium to announce a goods and services procurement pipeline at that particular time. Did you meet with the then minister at that point?

Stacie WRIGHT: No, I did not.

Joe McCracken: Or the CEO?

Stacie WRIGHT: The CEO potentially, but again I will have to take that one on notice.

Joe McCracken: If you are happy to check, yes, that is fine.

Stacie WRIGHT: I am really sorry. He is on extended sick leave, so I could not even get a brief from him beforehand.

Joe McCracken: That is totally fine. I understand that.

Stacie WRIGHT: But I can take that one on notice as well.

Joe McCracken: Yes. That is cool. Did the minister provide any indication that the costs for the Comm Games were increasing and had become a concern for the government?

Stacie WRIGHT: Not to my knowledge.

Joe McCracken: Okay. We heard from other evidence that in January, February, March there were concerns about the capacity to deliver, but we have also heard that the government were going out and talking to people as though it was going to be delivered. That is certainly what you understood at the time?

Stacie WRIGHT: Yes. From our point of view it felt like the process slowed down, but whether that was a result of the cost –

Joe McCracken: When, about, do you think?

Stacie WRIGHT: Potentially during that time frame. Again, I would have to take that on notice.

Joe McCracken: That is fine. Mr Harrison, I have got a few quick questions for you. I know you said that the games were an opportunity to boost the sport, and obviously the cancellation of the games has taken that opportunity away. Can you talk a bit about that in terms of what it would have meant for the club?

Glenn Harrison: Yes. Participation at grassroots level is the key to any, I guess, sporting activity in terms of providing a pathway. Over the last three years we have had COVID restrictions. We have had a number of capital works programs at the Tom Flood Sports Centre not directly associated with cycling. The grass was replaced; we do not use the grass. We have had a big black hole in terms of recruitment driving junior participation. The Commonwealth Games provided an ideal circumstance to put the sport in the spotlight, particularly in the regional area of Bendigo, and to reinvigorate junior participation.

Joe McCracken: I know you said before that you used to be known as the home of cycling. Do you think that is the case now?

Glenn Harrison: That is very much a personal opinion.

Joe McCracken: From your point of view.

Glenn HARRISON: No, I do not believe we have. We believe a number of other locations – in Victoria and across Australia – have probably now taken that mantle from us.

Joe McCRACKEN: Just quickly – and I know my time is running out – you said there are two principles that you wanted to see included in the disbursement of funding: one was clarity and fairness, and the other one was access to funds and having a say over the priorities. Can you talk a bit more about what that means?

Glenn HARRISON: Yes. Obviously the scope of the works and available funding need to be done in a consultative format with some transparency.

Joe McCRACKEN: That was not done in the past?

Glenn HARRISON: Meaning obviously we get the peak bodies' input in terms of what their requirements are, but also at the grassroots and local level we can bring them both together so that we all gain out of that. Going back to having a temporary facility, which the games was always proposing, it never really made sense in terms of a local long-term benefit.

Joe McCRACKEN: There was no legacy from that.

Glenn HARRISON: Yes.

Joe McCRACKEN: Thanks for that. My time is up, I think.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thanks, both, for joining us. I might start with you, Mr Harrison. That dovetails perfectly into my next question. From what you have said to both Mr McCracken and Mr Limbrick, as I understand it, you would prefer a project that delivers a lasting legacy to Bendigo than something that is designed just for a two-week sporting event. Is that correct?

Glenn HARRISON: Correct, yes.

Michael GALEA: You mentioned Tom Flood, which needs an upgrade. Can I ask for some rough detail as to what actually needs to be done? And do you have an idea of how much that is likely to cost?

Glenn HARRISON: The cost I could not answer. In terms of facilities, it is one of the largest outdoor velodromes in Australia. It is a concrete facility, so in terms of international standards, which are regulated by the UCI, which is the international cycling federation, it does not meet UCI standards. Getting that existing facility to that standard would be a mammoth task.

Michael GALEA: In your view, though, that should be an upgrade to the existing site rather than a new –

Glenn HARRISON: Again it depends on the scope of the final outcomes we would like to achieve.

Michael GALEA: And has the city council been supportive of an upgrade to that park?

Glenn HARRISON: We have been assigned capital funding to do works. The track was recently resurfaced, so we have received funding. Obviously all sporting organisations would like to achieve more.

Michael GALEA: Of course. I note as part of the \$2 billion package there are pockets such as the regional community sport development fund, which might be an opportunity, but also the support package to councils, including City of Greater Bendigo. Have you had any conversations with them about pitching this as part of what they receive from state government to put towards –

Glenn HARRISON: Not at this stage, no.

Michael GALEA: You mentioned as well a new vehicle-free cycling precinct. What would this be?

Glenn HARRISON: Effectively it is a location or an area which does not interact with normal road traffic. For instance, Ballarat has its botanical gardens, which it can close down and use for criterium racing or cycling. Geelong also has off-road track circuits. We are lacking in that infrastructure at this point in time.

Michael GALEA: Do you have a location in mind for where that might be?

Glenn HARRISON: The agricultural showgrounds, which was always earmarked for the temporary velodrome, has been floated as a potential site.

Michael GALEA: Great. That is good to know. Thank you. Just touching again on what you were discussing with Mr McCracken – and I am looking forward to reading through that book – would you like Bendigo to be considered the home of cycling again, or is your priority more immediately what you can deliver for your members and for –

Glenn HARRISON: Can you rephrase that, sorry?

Michael GALEA: Would you like for Bendigo to reclaim the title as the home of cycling?

Glenn HARRISON: Definitely.

Michael GALEA: Good to know. As others have said, as a committee making recommendations that is something we can definitely take into account. Thank you very much.

Ms Wright, I also note that as part of the legacy package announced there are going to be four new sports courts delivered for Bendigo Stadium. What impact will that have on your facility and what you can deliver for the people of Bendigo?

Stacie WRIGHT: To answer the first part of your question, we are still working through the impact. However, compared to other builds, the location of the potential upgrade and extension is in a position where we can still run community sport. What was the second part of your question, sorry?

Michael GALEA: I guess that was the impact. Can you talk me through more about the project and where it is at?

Stacie WRIGHT: Again we are working with the City of Greater Bendigo. At this stage we understand that we will have upgrades to some very old courts – I think even the two original courts – which need significant upgrades. We understand that includes all accessibility. So there are upgrades there and then potentially two new additional courts.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. I represent a very different area to Bendigo in the Parliament, the south-east of Melbourne. But there is huge demand for basketball facilities, and we just cannot build enough at the moment.

Stacie WRIGHT: It is cool these days.

Michael GALEA: It is cool. I did play for one year as a 15-year-old. I was not terribly good at it, but I was ahead of my time perhaps. What sort of demand are you seeing in the region for basketball?

Stacie WRIGHT: Significant demand. On Wednesday and Friday evenings we do not have the capacity. So we have to use external courts at various schools, which we do make work, but there are some logistical challenges there. Yes, it is growing, as is our competition. The junior classic, for example, has gone from, say, 280 teams to over 300. It is bringing all those regional children to Bendigo year on year, so it is significantly increasing. We do have an NBA player from Bendigo, Dyson Daniels, if you did not know that.

Michael GALEA: Very good. I did not know that.

Stacie WRIGHT: It helps.

Michael GALEA: I could ask a lot more about this, but my time is up. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Galea. Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thank you. Thank you, Mr Harrison and Ms Wright, for being here. We really appreciate you taking time out to come and speak to us. Mr Harrison, I was interested that you said there were over 100 representatives, athletes, from Olympic and Commonwealth Games. That is a proud record without doubt.

But you also said that there has been a decline post COVID and those lockdowns – in not being able to have sport you have seen a decline in elite development. What would a Commonwealth Games have meant for Victorian and Bendigo cycling?

Glenn HARRISON: In terms of Bendigo cycling, it would have put it back in the spotlight in terms of a sport for consideration for juniors, like an entry pathway, a bit like basketball. In terms of cycling, it has elements of safety and risk to it, so it is not necessarily always a sport of first choice for parents because of those risk elements. To put it back in the forefront and the spotlight as a viable, accessible sport that is undertaken in a safe environment with the appropriate infrastructure would be the goal.

Melina BATH: And tutors and specialist coaches et cetera.

Glenn HARRISON: Correct, yes.

Melina BATH: It is highly likely that we will not have a 2026 Commonwealth Games in Australia. It certainly is not going to be in Victoria because of the cancellation by this government. As a pathway to the Olympic Games, how important is that athlete development pathway of Commonwealth Games to Olympic Games?

Glenn HARRISON: It is critical. In terms of ranking at different levels of the sporting hierarchy, it is a stepping stone for development in terms of hitting the elite level. The Commonwealth Games is obviously the entry point prior to them going to Olympic level, so it is a segue through to a hierarchy of elite participation.

Melina BATH: Thank you. Also, I guess that upskilling of your technical specialists and your volunteers. Is that a component of it that you were looking forward to?

Glenn HARRISON: Yes, definitely. Obviously as people join the sport from a junior level, that brings with it their parents and an opportunity to improve and increase our volunteer resources.

Melina BATH: Thank you. You mentioned, and I am quoting you from my scribble, poorly planned capital works programs in the past years. I want you to develop that. What does that mean? I am assuming that is state, local and federal funding. Can you explain your comment around that?

Glenn HARRISON: Yes. It is quite correct and simple really. Tom Flood Sports Centre is our only track facility in Bendigo. COVID restrictions obviously prevented activity happening at that facility. The COVID restrictions lifted, government spending was then allocated to resurface the internal grass surface of that facility, which then meant the facility was unusable as a user group. Those works were over time, and then once those works concluded they then decided to embark on additional work of resurfacing the track, which then meant cancellation of the Bendigo International Madison and also cancellation of the normal track racing seasons.

Melina BATH: Okay. So you were really inhibited from three years ago in terms of being able to develop your juniors and cycling?

Glenn HARRISON: That is correct, yes. Three years of lost intake effectively.

Melina BATH: Thank you very much for that. We have heard throughout this committee that legacy items have been promised but have not yet come to fruition. In 2026 there would have been a deadline where capital works would have occurred, whether it be for cycling or for a stadium et cetera. Do you know of any projects that have actually been developed, outlined, planned, funding provided or procurement taking place so far?

Glenn HARRISON: Not to my knowledge.

Melina BATH: Ms Wright, are you aware of any?

Stacie WRIGHT: No.

Melina BATH: Thank you. I appreciate that. The other thing that I just wanted to quiz you about, and my colleague said clarity and fairness, you mentioned access to funding and full transparency on project funding development. Some of our local governments, we have heard, have had to sign a non-disclosure form in

relation to the funding for projects. What would you like to see, if I can open that question up to both of you, about that funding pipeline and transparency from government?

Glenn HARRISON: From my perspective – I guess I am very much a numerical-type person – if you know what funding is potentially available, you can reverse engineer that to what can then be in scope. There is no point asking for an infrastructure facility that is unfunded or unallocated from a budget perspective. If we kind of know the parameters in which we are working, at least we can then work within that scope.

Melina BATH: Ms Wright, are you on a similar thought train?

Stacie WRIGHT: Yes, a similar thought.

Melina BATH: Thank you. So when we make recommendations to government, as this committee does, would that be one of your recommendations, that that needs to have that full level of transparency and funding?

Glenn HARRISON: Transparency, yes. That would be one of the goals for the outcome – transparency, yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Bath. My alarm did not make a noise for some reason. Ms Ermacora.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Hello, and thank you for appearing today. To start with the bike-riding facilities, I just had a bit of a google, because I am from Warrnambool, which is a long way from Bendigo. I am also one of those grubby mountain bike riders – we like rocks and bumps and uneven surfaces. We get a bit of a thrill out of it. Can you describe to me – there is a sort of a pinky-coloured circuit in the picture on the website of the Tom Flood Sports Centre. Is that actually a classic velodrome shape, or is that for another kind of race?

Glenn HARRISON: No. That pinky colour is the actual concrete velodrome at the Tom Flood Sports Centre.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Oh, so it is just that I cannot see the slope of it in the photos.

Glenn HARRISON: Being an outdoor track, it does not have the same characteristics as an indoor track, which would often have far greater banking or degree of angle in the circuit.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Oh, right. Okay.

Glenn HARRISON: It would turn into a dam if it was outside.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Of course it would. Okay. Well, they would have to have drainage, wouldn't they if they had it outside? Okay. Thank you. In relation to the stadium, Stacie, are there non-sporting events that are held there as well?

Stacie WRIGHT: Yes, there are.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Tell me a bit about them.

Stacie WRIGHT: From time to time we have various different entertainment. We had Guy Sebastian, who was cancelled through COVID but eventually got there two years later. I mentioned the flood relief, whilst they are not really events. We have graduations for the majority of the local schools – high schools that is – lots of business functions, conferences and those types of events.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Okay. It does look fantastic actually. What is the capacity of that facility?

Stacie WRIGHT: The overall capacity – I actually could not quote you that, but for the show court arena it is 4000, and then we have the additional courts. Then there is the outside facility, where we have the 12 courts for netball as well.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes. And with the legacy Comm Games commitments from the state government, can you tell me a bit more about the specific upgrades that were going to happen for the games?

Stacie WRIGHT: We do not have all of the specifics yet. We are working with the city on what the specifics look like, but from what we understand, there will be all-abilities access, there will be some refurb to a few courts and potentially an additional two.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Thank you. Just tell me a little bit more about the current accessibility of the stadium.

Stacie WRIGHT: As I said at the start, the two original courts were built in the 70s, so I am not sure the standards were not quite the same as we have today, but with the rest of the remaining part of the structure – I cannot actually remember which upgrade that was – the door access is not correct for accessibility standards. We have a growing need for participation in lots of different all-abilities sports too, so it is definitely a growing need and something we really need to focus on.

Jacinta ERMACORA: I have seen state government upgrades in Portland – for instance, at the Westerns' Alexandra oval there, where there are adult disability change facilities, not just children's and babies' change facilities, which allows for adults with significant disabilities to stay at an event and their carer can help change them if needed. Is that the kind of facility that the legacy upgrade might provide?

Stacie WRIGHT: I would hope so, but we have not got to that level of detail yet.

Jacinta ERMACORA: So it is early days.

Stacie WRIGHT: I think that the initial need is to get into the venue to begin with.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Right. Yes. Thank you.

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

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you. Thank you for appearing today. I am just wanting to get some clarity on the extent of engagement with both of your organisations prior to the cancellation of the games. Mr Harrison, you mentioned that you had a couple of meetings, potentially.

Glenn HARRISON: There was no direct involvement from the Commonwealth Games committee, so it was all through the peak sporting body. The club took the initiative of forming a subcommittee of the club in order to lobby for some favourable outcomes as a member group.

Sarah MANSFIELD: And roughly when did those meetings occur?

Glenn HARRISON: I will take the exact dates on notice, but it was only within a very short period prior to the cancellation, yes.

Stacie WRIGHT: Yes, I would have to take it on notice too. It all was, from what I understand, coordinated alongside the City of Greater Bendigo, but there were direct, as I said, tours of our facility.

Sarah MANSFIELD: As far as you are aware, did you have any involvement in the very early stages when the business case was being prepared or the bid was being prepared?

Glenn HARRISON: No.

Sarah MANSFIELD: No? Okay. Do you feel that your organisations would have been in a position to provide advice about the capacity of local facilities to deliver Commonwealth Games events – what was needed, all of those sorts of things – at that very early stage in planning?

Glenn HARRISON: Yes. Local input, I think, would have been invaluable. We did concentrate on track cycling; obviously there are other disciplines, including road cycling. The club is experienced at hosting major multiday road events, which do not require significant infrastructure other than safe roads, so we would have had the capacity to provide very good insight and input.

Stacie WRIGHT: And I think for us there were too many unknowns. We did not know what sports were coming to the venue, so without that information there were too many unknowns.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Although it sounds like you were brought in quite late, did you have any concerns about the timing? And given how long there was between when you were first brought in and when the games were meant to be hosted, did you have any concerns about the ability of those facilities to host the events and be delivered appropriately on time?

Stacie WRIGHT: Yes. I think everyone was excited and wrapped up in what could be. We were still working through, you know, some of the potential risks for the business – being shut down for a period of time, for example. I know there were active discussions – but again, it was very early – still working through all the risks.

Glenn HARRISON: Yes. I would probably say it was very ambitious. That is probably the best way to put it. Creating a velodrome, a temporary one at that, was a very ambitious goal. Sourcing a track to an international standard and having it constructed within that time period was ambitious, yes.

Sarah MANSFIELD: And in terms of legacy, I know that a number of others have touched on it, but I guess if you could get what you wanted out of the legacy funding, what would it be?

Glenn HARRISON: A wish list – this is great. An international-standard timber velodrome in Bendigo would be fantastic.

Melina BATH: Hardwood timber – Victorian hardwood timber.

Glenn HARRISON: Yes, that would be fantastic. But in terms of that, a facility that has access for all abilities, for the community, for many disciplines, would be the goal, yes.

Stacie WRIGHT: Yes, our list would be long as well. Our sports continue to grow – again, accessibility, as I said before, yes.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Just to clarify, you have not had any firm commitments made about that legacy funding?

Stacie WRIGHT: We have had a commitment that there will be some funding; it is just the details of what that funding is and where it is distributed.

Sarah MANSFIELD: All right. I just wanted to pick up on something you said, Mr Harrison, earlier about cycling and parents might have safety concerns for their kids. What did you mean by that?

Glenn HARRISON: Obviously road cycling carries with it risk. We have examples of fatalities as citizens as well as competitors, not in sanctioned events. So it obviously comes with a concern, road safety. Hosting events has become very difficult with all the safety protocols that now must be followed and the various regulators that now oversee what we can do – Victoria Police, VicRoads et cetera.

Sarah MANSFIELD: All right. Thank you.

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

Tom McINTOSH: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, both, for attending. I was just hoping I could ask both of you actually just about the number of members you have each got playing or within the association or clubs?

Stacie WRIGHT: We have a number of associations that use our premises. It is probably easier to say the number of patrons we get through a week, and that is over 15,000.

Tom McINTOSH: How many is that, sorry?

Stacie WRIGHT: Fifteen thousand.

Tom McINTOSH: Wow, amazing.

Glenn HARRISON: From a cycling perspective, it is a difficult question to answer. The membership system in Australia is you actually become a member of AusCycling, which is the national peak body, then you

assign yourself to a local club. You can split that between the different disciplines, mountain bike, road and BMX.

Tom McINTOSH: Just on that, the mountain biking and various forms seem to be really taking off in recent years. Are you seeing a change in where people are wanting to spend their time cycling? From an uneducated view like mine, there just seems to be a real boom in people wanting to get muddy and dirty and do the crazy stuff, but mind you, spinning around the velodrome at a high pace also seems pretty crazy to me.

Glenn HARRISON: Anecdotally, the other disciplines are actually achieving some great success in increasing their market share, if we can put it that way.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes, no worries. On the basketball front, I mean, it is interesting comparing such a big area from south-eastern Victoria to areas like the peninsula but then towns like Maffra and other places where basketball just booms. It is really interesting. In certain regions it goes really strongly. Do you think off the back of events like the Boomers playing last week, Stacie, what sort of impact – do you think that will continue to drive participation?

Stacie WRIGHT: It has a huge opportunity to drive participation. The Boomers game, we had a sell-out – over 4000 people at the venue. Luring those types of events back to a regional setting is really impactful.

Tom McINTOSH: Fantastic. I doubt you have this on hand, but what sort of crowds do you attract? I mean, obviously the big stage stadium, you are not going to fill that as often, but as far as the numbers coming to watch across the various courts and the big court throughout the year.

Stacie WRIGHT: It just varies. Obviously we have the national WNBL team based here in Bendigo, and those crowds vary, but yes, we are always doing things to increase participation. Our next tier Bendigo Braves do quite well and have a pretty significant following.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes. It feels like basketball is on the –

Stacie WRIGHT: It is similar.

Tom McINTOSH: I know it is surging just from an organisational perspective around the country. Okay. Thanks, Chair. Thanks to you both.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Tyrrell.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Hello. Thank you. Sorry I missed your introduction earlier. We have heard from other sporting bodies and clubs that the Commonwealth Games provided them significant opportunity and hope for a boost in investment, membership and engagement within their respective sports. For example, hockey organisers were planning a 15 to 20 per cent growth in participation because of local Commonwealth Games. What growth in participation had you been targeting because of the local Commonwealth Games, the athletes?

Glenn HARRISON: We did no modelling to provide any quantifiable data on that.

Stacie WRIGHT: Whilst we are a member-based organisation, I cannot speak on behalf of the basketball association or netball association here in Bendigo, so I could not answer that, sorry.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Did you begin to prepare for a potential increase in participation?

Glenn HARRISON: With the formation of a subcommittee to lobby for long-term legacy infrastructure the goal was to expand the number of events that the club could host, which obviously was a natural segue into improving participation and uptake.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Okay. We have also heard from other sporting organisations on the importance of volunteerism within your respective sports and training for that and training of technical officials. Did you have any involvement in that preparation? Did you see a surge in volunteers potentially thinking, ‘Oh, there’s the games coming; we want to help out’?

Glenn HARRISON: Nothing direct. Obviously AusCycling, the governing body, has a very good existing we will call it portfolio or list of referees, commissaires et cetera that are world-class standard.

Stacie WRIGHT: I am not here representing a sport, so I do not think I can answer that on behalf of these sports. But we have a great volunteer base from what we observe throughout all of the sports that participate at the venues.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Okay, so it did not fluctuate at all due to the Commonwealth Games?

Stacie WRIGHT: Not that I am aware of.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: No? Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I believe Mr Galea has a couple more questions.

Michael GALEA: Just one more – thank you, Chair – question to you both. We have spoken a lot about some of the legacy benefits or potential benefits and where you would both like to see them go. In terms of the Commonwealth Games itself, in the last few months have you seen much dismay about the games being cancelled, or do you think most people are focused on what we can get for Bendigo as a result of the legacy projects?

Stacie WRIGHT: I personally think the latter.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Would you agree, Mr Harrison?

Glenn HARRISON: It is still a conversational point that takes place. From a Bendigo perspective, geography-wise where the athletes village was to be located, it has its own legacy now.

Michael GALEA: Going to the area of housing, we could get into that conversation as well.

Glenn HARRISON: Correct. As a club it is an ongoing discussion point, including within its members.

Michael GALEA: Great. Thank you both.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Galea. Thank you both very much for appearing today. You will receive a copy of the transcript for review in about a week, before it is published on the website. The committee will now adjourn until 1 pm.

Witnesses withdrew.