

TRANSCRIPT

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE 2026 COMMONWEALTH GAMES BID

Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid

Traralgon – Thursday 14 March 2024

MEMBERS

David Limbrick – Chair

Joe McCracken – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

David Davis

Jacinta Ermacora

Michael Galea

Sarah Mansfield

Tom McIntosh

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

WITNESS

Ken Balcombe, Secretary, Morwell Gun Club.

The CHAIR: Thank you for appearing today. I will just read out this preamble. We will now resume the committee's public hearings for the Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid.

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

Ken BALCOMBE: My name is Ken Balcombe. I am Secretary of the Morwell Gun Club.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Pleasure to meet you. I will allow the committee members that are present to introduce themselves for the record. I am David Limbrick, the Chair of the committee and Member for South-Eastern Metro Region.

Michael GALEA: G'day. Michael Galea, also from South-Eastern Metro Region.

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

The CHAIR: And we have some members appearing remotely.

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

Joe McCracken: Joe McCracken, Western Victoria Region.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Sarah Mansfield, Western Victoria Region.

David DAVIS: David Davis.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I welcome you to make your opening comments. I ask that they are kept to around about 10 minutes. Thank you.

Ken BALCOMBE: Okay. Probably our story starts when our gun club had to close due to the expansion of the Yallourn mine. Our gun club is on the EnergyAustralia site, so we had to close our doors. Then EnergyAustralia found some new land over on Marretts Road for us, so they accommodated us really well, but through that, you know, you cannot do anything nowadays without money, so the shooting sports facility program, which is through the state government, we applied for that and we got round 4. Our relocation project had to be made up into two parts, stage 1 and stage 2. The shooting sports facility program in round 4, we applied for that and we got the maximum amount of \$300,000. That enabled us to get going on stage 1 of our relocation project. Then they came out with round 5 funding, which was another \$300,000, so we then applied for that and were successful in getting that grant as well. That enabled us to complete our relocation project, or the funding for it anyway.

Through that all EnergyAustralia were very supportive of what we were doing. We went through that process. That was probably early 2020, so it took probably 12 months to get the ball rolling with permits and funding and all that sort of stuff. Then in late 2022 EnergyAustralia started all the earthworks in the grounds. They also did some in-kind contribution in regard to the roading and the car park and the layout of the shooting grounds. That started at the end of 2022, like I said, but through the whole process from 2020 to the end of 2022 we had formed a relationship with the shooting sports facility program people, and they liked what we were doing and all that sort of stuff. They came down for a visit in late 2022 to have a look at the site, the earthworks and all that sort of stuff. There was a group of four who came down to have a look. Looking back in hindsight, some of

those people were from the Commonwealth Games, which we did not know at that stage. In 2023 the builder started his project. We delivered our project, so we got our club. He started the build in March 2023, and we finished our build in November 2023. What we did with our build, we delivered our project on time and on budget, which is –

Melina BATH: A novelty these days.

The CHAIR: You should be in the government.

Ken BALCOMBE: It was always our aim to do, but what I found out with some of these projects is that it is actually quite a big tick and all that sort of stuff to get that done. In early 2023 we then had some more inquiries from the Commonwealth Games committee people. They made a couple of more visits. There were some busloads that came down and had a look at our site, and through that process – they did not actually say really at the time; towards the end they virtually did, they said it without saying it. And it was quite a funny process because they actually did not say – they made a lot of visits and they made a lot of inquiries and they were really having a good chat to EnergyAustralia and making sure they were the landowners, and we went through all the Indigenous cultural heritage issues and all that sort of stuff and worked through a lot of things. We sent them a lot of information, and even through that process back in February 2023 when it was virtually kind of, ‘You’ve got it, but you haven’t got it’, EnergyAustralia were doing the earthworks for our shooting layout. To build an Olympic trench layout we came up with a design, which I have got here if you wish to have a look at it. In our design, to put in the Olympic trench layout requires more earthworks. So EnergyAustralia took it upon themselves to do those extra earthworks in the hope that we were going to be the host of the shooting sports at the Commonwealth Games.

The CHAIR: And they did that at no cost to the club?

Ken BALCOMBE: They did that at no cost. They were fantastic in that journey. We had all that in place, with the ball rolling. They did not actually set some real time frames, but they were always coming back with more information and they wanted to know about this and we did soil samples and all that sort of stuff. We did a lot of work in the background to try and make it happen. We were actually really positive that it was actually looking in favour of where our club was going to be. I think from memory there was the Echuca gun club, which is the home club of the Victorian Clay Target Association, and they were very keen to get it as well. It was not to our knowledge, but they were fighting pretty hard in the background to put their best foot forward to try and get that. But like I said, through the whole process and with our shooting sports facility program, the people we were dealing with liked what we were doing, and obviously we delivered our project on time and on budget. Between ourselves and EnergyAustralia we were very accommodating, and we worked with them quite well to achieve what they wanted to achieve. And then in – I cannot recall. When did it get cancelled, the Commonwealth Games?

Melina BATH: July 2023.

Ken BALCOMBE: July 2023. I think it was on the Tuesday, but on the Friday before, we had the Commonwealth Games people from the shooting sports actually come down to have a look at our site for the disabled, because we were going to have Para shooting as well, so we had all fully disabled access paths and all that sort of stuff and very good access from the car park. They liked the clubrooms; they liked the whole facility. By this time the clubrooms were up, and we just had to do some work out the front in regard to our shooting range and all that sort of stuff, but you could get a good feel for what the gun club was going to look like and how it was going to look. On that Friday there was a good contingent from the Commonwealth Games people. There was actually a lady there – I have forgotten her name now – who did the Commonwealth Games in London and all that sort of stuff. She had come through, and she seemed like the Boss Hoggett, if you know what I mean. She had a look at it, and she was very impressed at what she saw. In that meeting there was me; Todd, the president; and Sam Lineham, and he is a guy from EnergyAustralia who has done a lot of work in the background and worked really well with us as well. We have got a really good relationship there. He provided the Commonwealth Games people with a lot of information, like I was saying, in the background, so he was also at that meeting. We all walked away from that meeting feeling pretty confident. That was on the Friday afternoon. We also had the police come back through that Friday afternoon because they were in Morwell that day checking some stuff out.

The CHAIR: So there was no indication that there was a problem at that point.

Ken BALCOMBE: No, no indication at all. From our indication it was all systems go. They loved what we had done and what we had built and our layout and all that sort of stuff. And on our side here – Sam Lineham here actually did all the overlays of the Olympic trap layouts. Our club was all originally set up for down-the-line shooting, which is the Australian Clay Target Association. Olympic trapshooting is ISSF standard and all that sort of stuff, which is International Shooting Sport Federation, so that is a worldwide thing. So all our layouts and all that sort of stuff was set up to accommodate all the ISSF rules. And it all fitted; it was to hold three Olympic trench layouts. There was going to be a shot curtain, and there was going to be a lot of infrastructure in the background – like there were going to be tents for food and seating and media and all that sort of stuff. They proposed to bring generators and all that sort of stuff down. We had some other plans with a lot of stuff on them. On that Friday afternoon we walked away thinking, ‘This is going to look really good.’

Melina BATH: I have got that as Friday 14 July.

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes, it would have been around about that time. And then – I think it was the Tuesday or the Wednesday; I think it might have been the Wednesday – they got notified on the Wednesday that it was being cancelled. I was travelling around. I did not quite know; I do not listen to the media that much. I got a phone call from my sister in Geelong, and she goes, ‘The Commonwealth Games have been cancelled.’ I have gone, ‘You’re pulling my leg,’ and then she said, ‘No, they’ve indicated that the Commonwealth Games are going to be cancelled.’ And then all of a sudden I got a phone call from, you know, some media outlets – it is funny how people find your phone number when you do not even know them. I got a lot of phone calls in regard to, ‘Do you know anything about the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games?’ and all this sort of stuff, so it was actually genuine and real. It did get cancelled, and that is where we were. That was that point then.

We were in a bit of shock. We had put a fair bit of work into it in the background to accommodate it, because from our point of view as a club, to get an opportunity like this to have a Commonwealth Games shootings program at your club in regional Australia, let alone regional Victoria, was a very, very big thing. We were really looking forward to it. It was going to be a great, positive thing not just for our club but for shooting sports in our area as such. We thought it was a real positive for us and shooting sports probably in Victoria really. We were really looking forward to it as a club, and we were quite disappointed when it got cancelled. Then after that things went quiet for a little bit. The media did their thing. Then it all got cancelled, and it was in the news, as everybody knows, for a couple of weeks and all that sort of stuff – maybe longer; it is still in the news now.

Then we got a call from Harriet Shing to go and see Harriet, so we went and saw Harriet. I cannot recall the date, so I would have to go through my stuff if you want the date. We went and saw Harriet. She asked for Todd and me to go and see her and have a meeting about how it all happened, and she just wanted to cover a few bases and all that sort of stuff. We wanted to know what was happening. Is it all dead? Are there still going to be some positives come out of it? From what we understood in the media releases, everything that the Commonwealth Games people had committed to was going to be delivered as part of building regional Victoria. Is that what you call it? That is how we read the media. We went and had a meeting with Harriet, and she virtually said the same thing. Like I said, to accommodate the Olympic trench layouts – we are a small community club, so we are not flush with a heap of money – we actually made our road entry a bit bigger. We had to build our DTL trap layouts, because we extended all the material with the dirt out further. We had to build our DTL track house layouts – we had to build them into the ground instead of sitting at the ground with the dirt coming up to the back of them. Between those two projects we had to spend another \$35,000 to make that happen, out of our own funding. We got that done because we wanted to finish our project and deliver our project to our club members and all that sort of stuff. We committed to that, but what that did was make us run virtually on the bone of finances where we were. When we got going some club members had to actually put some money forward to buy all the old targets and all that sort of stuff to get the club off the ground. Club members put in about \$8000 to get the club going originally. That 35-odd grand that we had there ready to go to get the club going, we already had to spend that because of the Commonwealth Games stuff, if that makes sense.

In that meeting we brought that up with Harriet. When we went in there she said, ‘Well, we can make that happen, and we’ll look after you in regard to that.’ But that did not happen. I sent a few emails off backwards and forwards and all that sort of stuff, and it got to the point where we hit the brick wall. And you talk to people

and all that sort of stuff. By this time the legacy Victoria stuff was starting to kick off, and we were contacted by those guys as well. I was chatting to those guys about it, because we were reeling and hurting a little bit from that, because we were close to the bone and we had had to borrow money off members and all that sort of stuff to get our club going. I spoke to one of the ladies there, and she said, 'Well, you know how government works – if it's not up front, if you don't put your money up front, you don't get it on the back side of things,' if you know what I mean. We had to kind of take that on the chin and run with it. The Commonwealth Games was a really good thing that we were looking forward to, but that was another bit of a whack on the chops that we did not really want. That is where we are.

But since then, the program people have been in contact with us in regard to the legacy infrastructure. They have been talking on and off and all that sort of stuff since the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games. I cannot recall the actual dates and all that sort of stuff, but they have been in contact. I have not heard from them for about a month now. In the media release it said, 'We're going to do the Olympic trench layouts and the fencing.' It is all in the detail, dealing with all these sorts of things. The original layout was three Olympic trench layouts. When we actually spoke to the legacy infrastructure people, they said, 'We'll do the perimeter fencing and then we'll give you one Olympic trench layout instead of three Olympic trench layouts.' We have negotiated backwards and forwards over that. You cannot really have a competition with one Olympic trench layout. It is going to be a practice layout and that is virtually all it is going to be. With two Olympic trench layouts you can have a competition and you can encourage people into that sport. The whole purpose for us with the Olympic trench layouts was to practise Olympic trench. An Olympic trench is the pinnacle of all shotgun shooting in shooting sports. If you are living anywhere in Gippsland, to train for that discipline you have either got to go to Canberra or you have got to go to Melbourne – there is nothing in between. And the actual president of the club Todd Malone, he was the first reserve at the London Olympic Games, and he made that position by travelling to Melbourne four and five times a week to train. Not everybody can do that. So part of our vision and even going back to our application for stage 2 of our project in round 5, we wanted to do like a stage 3 project which was getting some Olympic trench layouts in. It is good for our club, but it is great for the sport. That is our whole vision to bring that sort of infrastructure into this region, so there is the opportunity for juniors to get to that Olympic trench layout level. That was our whole vision, and that is how that has happened.

The CHAIR: All right. Thank you. I will just inform members I will cut back time a little bit. That is very good evidence. I just want to clarify some things. The relocation of course happened well before anything to do with the Olympics.

Ken BALCOMBE: Correct. Yes.

The CHAIR: That was forced by EnergyAustralia requiring that land, is that correct?

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes, for coal extraction for the Yallourn power station.

The CHAIR: Sure. If not for the Commonwealth Games, would the club have invested in the Olympic trench layouts?

Ken BALCOMBE: No, we would have campaigned for it to try to get extra funding. But an Olympic trench layout is around about – we costed it before COVID and it was around about \$200,000 a layout, so we were going to campaign back through Melina and Harriet and all those other people. That was going to be our next step. That was our vision.

The CHAIR: Understood. And from the evidence you have given today, you are stating that the government is currently offering to help fund one trench layout.

Ken BALCOMBE: No, so I need to expand on that, sorry. After our negotiation, going backwards and forwards, they have come back and said, 'We will support you with' – well, there is no commitment to any of this. This is just conversations we have had backwards and forwards, but we have got it up to two Olympic trench layouts with some fencing and maybe some lighting, because as we are in Gippsland, Victoria, you start to lose your light at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon during the winter months. A down-the-line target travels at 43 miles per hour and an Olympic trench target travels at 75 miles per hour, so you need good visual – you need your eyes to work and all that sort of stuff. They have come back, and they have said they will look at the lighting as well and some barrier fencing in between the layouts so there is not that visual obstruction.

The CHAIR: Understood.

Ken BALCOMBE: So that is where they are now.

The CHAIR: Okay. I will pass to Mr McCracken.

Joe McCracken: Thank you very much. Thanks for your very extensive opening there; it was much appreciated. I missed your name, sorry. It is Ken, is it?

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes, Ken.

Joe McCracken: Yes, sorry, Ken. Thanks very much for your introduction – much appreciated. It was very detailed, very fulsome, so that was excellent. Would you be able to just provide us with a time line from when you first were engaged with the government up until more recent times. I do not expect you to be able to give that right now. But maybe from the first time you had contact with the government up until pretty much now, would you be able to give a bit of an outline and tell us what happened when and that sort of thing so we can put it into context to get a clear picture of things?

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes. In late 2022, like I said, we had that visit onsite.

Joe McCracken: Yes. I am happy if you want to take it on notice, by the way, and sort of nut it out in your mind so you can put it all in order. That is fine.

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes. I have not got any of those details right in front of me. But yes, that was the first visit. They kind of spoke about the Commonwealth Games, but they did not say Morwell. So it started in late 2022, and then it went through all the way to that Friday before the cancellation. And then the legacy infrastructure people, they took over probably a month or six weeks after that. They are still talking with us at this stage.

Joe McCracken: Okay. If you are happy to come back to us with some written detail about that, that would be really much appreciated. Thanks very much for that, Ken. I appreciate that.

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes, no worries.

Joe McCracken: Just on the cancellation of the games, your reaction, you said before – and I wrote it down – ‘whack on the chops’ was the term that you used. I thought that was a good turn of phrase. I would have said ‘kick in the guts’, but there are many different phrases you could use. Why do you think that?

Ken BALCOMBE: It is a whack on the chops for us because of the amount of work that actually went on in the background on it, which people do not realise. We did a lot of work ourselves in the background – and we are a community-based club, so it is all volunteer stuff. Then the guy Sam Lineham and EnergyAustralia, the amount of work they put in from probably January 2023 through to the cancellation of it. And I feel for everybody else, all the other clubs across Victoria, who – I am a volunteer, and when you become a volunteer you realise what other people put in. So it is a whack in the chops for us, but for everybody else as well. That is how I feel about it.

Joe McCracken: You said you had a bit of contact with Harriet Shing obviously as your local MP. Did she contact you with a bit of forewarning about the cancellation of the games in any way, shape or form?

Ken BALCOMBE: No.

Joe McCracken: No, okay. I know you said you had a meeting with Harriet, with Todd and yourself, and it was about this \$8000 and she said, I think your words were, ‘We will look after you’ sort of thing, and now that has gone nowhere. Can you give a bit more detail about that and expand on that, please?

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes. It was about \$30,000. It cost us an extra \$14,000 to do all the infrastructure for the concreting and all that sort of stuff to build our down-the-line trap houses, because all that extra material had been put there. Then there was probably another \$14,000 for the road entry, which we made bigger to accommodate buses coming in and out for the Commonwealth Games. I had the two quotes, so I did the right

thing and I got all the quotes and gave proper figures; I was not just pulling figures out of pie-in-the-sky stuff. I actually took them with me and I presented that to Harriet on the day, and then that is where it ended.

Joe McCracken: Can you give any correspondence that you might have had with her office too, just so we can understand how it all played out? Would that be possible?

Ken Balcombe: Yes. I kept –

Joe McCracken: Thank you. I think my time has just gone up; I heard the little buzzer. So if you could provide that, I think that would be really helpful, Ken, thank you.

Ken Balcombe: Yes, no worries.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr McCracken. Also, yes, you are welcome to submit anything after the fact via email if you choose to do so. Mr Galea.

Michael Galea: Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Ken, and for your detailed presentation as well. Just to begin with, I would just like to clarify. We have spoken about the relocation and the just over \$600,000, I think it was, out of the round 4 and 5 of the shooting sports facility –

Ken Balcombe: Which is a very good program.

Michael Galea: Excellent, good to hear. That is good feedback for us to have. And I just wanted to be clear – because this also came up this morning and there was some confusion with overlapping funding – so that is completely separate to the regional sports infrastructure program funding that you are getting, which are these legacy benefits –

Ken Balcombe: Yes, that is correct.

Michael Galea: That is correct, yes. Just to double-check that. And as you say, those conversations are still ongoing, about them.

Ken Balcombe: Still ongoing, so we have got some hope that something will happen, but at the moment it is just hope.

Michael Galea: Yes, okay.

Ken Balcombe: So there is no commitment to anything.

Michael Galea: It is a bit early at this stage to be saying what has happened is what I am gathering from what you are telling us. Is that right?

Ken Balcombe: Yes, correct.

Michael Galea: On the details, yes.

Ken Balcombe: And they have indicated to me, ‘Look, if you get approached by the media or anybody like that, you have got to try and keep the details secret or quiet,’ because they do not want any of those details getting out as such.

Michael Galea: Until it is all finalised, yes.

Ken Balcombe: Yes, until it all finalised, until it is signed and sealed, sort of thing. I am trying to play my part so I do not shoot myself in the foot, pardon the pun.

Michael Galea: Of course. We respect that, and we will look forward to seeing that as it comes through too. But far from going nowhere, it is actually progressing is what you are telling us, is that right?

Ken Balcombe: Yes, we think it is. But we have not heard from them for a month, though, and generally we have been hearing from them every fortnight and there has been a step – you know, ‘This is

what's happening next time, and we're going to chat about this tonight' sort of stuff, and we have not heard anything for a while. So that makes me just a little bit nervous.

Michael GALEA: Sure. Good to know. And ultimately –

Ken BALCOMBE: After what happened originally.

Michael GALEA: Of course. And when you see it – proof of the pudding – that is when you can be safe and settled, yes.

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes, I am a bit of a proof in the pudding sort of person, if you know what I mean.

Michael GALEA: That is fine. I am just wondering if you can briefly run us through as well – we have talked about down-the-line trapshooting, and you mentioned that too – what sort of impact that will have on your members being able to access trapshooting?

Ken BALCOMBE: The Olympic, or are you talking the down-the-line stuff?

Michael GALEA: The down-the-line stuff at this stage. We can get to Olympic as well, but how will that benefit your members by having that?

Ken BALCOMBE: Well, we are up and running now, so we are fully completed. Melina came to our grand opening, which is great for our club. It is fantastic. So in response to that, we have had a grand opening day that went off really well. We had some really good positive feedback about the club and the facilities and what we have been able to achieve, and people actually like the layout. EnergyAustralia provided us with a really good location. With trapshooting, you want the sun at your back all the time. We are facing directly due south, so the sun is always at our back at any time of day, so we get a good visual on the target and that sort of thing. We are up to our third shoot this Saturday. From that grand opening, the Victorian Clay Target Association has now brought us the state ball trap championships, because they love our location and what we have done and they love our facilities, so –

Michael GALEA: You are going to host the championships?

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes, we will host the ball trap championships later this year.

Michael GALEA: Great.

Ken BALCOMBE: So there is some really good, positive stuff coming out of it, and we have also got a round of the south-east zone coming up in April, and we will probably have 140 competitors shooting there on that day as well. Then we have got the south-east zone continental championships on the Sunday, so we have got a two-day shoot there. It is going to be a big weekend. There are some really good positives for the club. We are getting really good people. We have a practice day every Wednesday. Our numbers are up there. We have had a 15 to 20 per cent increase in membership since the start of the year, so it is all going in the right direction at this stage.

Michael GALEA: That is particularly good to hear. I would love to ask you more about that, but my time is up. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thank you. I struggle to call you 'Mr Balcombe' – so official. Thank you, Ken. Thank you for being on time and on budget with your project. You had EnergyAustralia working with you so well. You had local contractors giving some in-kinds, didn't they?

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes.

Melina BATH: They all pulled together, with some local members working really hard. This is the epitome of what you can achieve in a local context, and also getting some of those grants that were important. I am mindful that you have come out on a limb today because you are here to present your truth, which you are doing. You also still want to continue on the path to be able to receive what was committed to you.

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes, we do, 100 per cent.

Melina BATH: And it has been a month, but what would that time line look like? Previously there had been painted a bit of a time line for you to get the layouts, fencing and lighting. What do you envisage that would look like if it continued on to a positive fruition?

Ken BALCOMBE: At the last meeting we spoke about a time line. There was a time line there, and being locals, we know the conditions and we know what happens in the Latrobe Valley and all that sort of stuff. It gets pretty wet, and we had a few delays in our build. We got it on time, but we built some fat in there so we could get it delivered on time. But winter gets very wet, so I said to the group at our last meeting that we need to be building, if we are going to build an Olympic trench. They are 2 metres deep, just so everybody is aware – 2 metres deep by 20 metres long by 2 metres wide – and we are on the side of a hill, so we have a lot of water coming down the hill. So to build those, they need to be dug and concreted and sealed. They need to start building by March next year.

Melina BATH: Thank you. And I want to talk to you forever, but I will just keep it really short, if I can, because there are other questions.

Ken BALCOMBE: Sorry. I am talking too much.

Melina BATH: Not at all. It is really helpful for us. Lucas Furlan is a rock star in our region, isn't he? He is young, his family have been really supportive of him and he has moved to universal trench, to that discipline, to be part of the games. Tell us a little bit about him, because that is young development that is coming through in the valley.

Ken BALCOMBE: Well, it is great to see Lucas. Lucas started off as a down-the-line trapshooter. Like I said before, the pinnacle is Olympic trap and universal trap. Lucas has gone very well at down-the-line stuff. He has moved up to universal trench stuff. He is now shooting overseas and all that sort of stuff, yet he is still I think only 16 years old, so he has still got a lot in front of him. He is a great example. We had another really good young guy called Troy Grimes, who was a down-the-line shooter. He made the Australian team a few years ago. They shot a record for the shoot-off to make the team up in Roma, which was probably five or six years ago. I just wonder – if we had these facilities then, we would have had more than one. One other thing that comes to mind is we have got the Brisbane Olympic Games coming up – I forget the year. So to have this sort of infrastructure ready for these young people to really hit the ground – that would be the pinnacle for me.

Melina BATH: I think it is 2032, isn't it?

Ken BALCOMBE: 2032 I think, yes.

Melina BATH: The other thing I wanted to talk about is the spirit of the club. Your father Frank is a clay target shooter and hunter as well, and your son also plays. Can you talk about the family friendly, because it is wheelchair friendly, you have got women playing. It is very holistic, isn't it?

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes, it is. And the great thing about trapshooting is it is very, very inclusive. You can be from 14 to 84. That is the age you can do down-the-line trapshooting. It is very family friendly. We have a lot of husbands and wives shoot. We have a lot of fathers and sons shoot. We have a lot of fathers and daughters shoot. We have mothers and daughters shoot. It is very open, and it is great for the whole encompassing of everybody. You do not get to a certain age where you just fall off. We have got veterans, ladies, opens, juniors, so it is very inclusive all the way through. It is a very excellent sport for that.

Melina BATH: Thank you. I have got more, but I think my time is up. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Ermacora.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Thank you. Hi, Ken.

Ken BALCOMBE: Hello.

Jacinta ERMACORA: I do not have a lot more questions because most of them have been asked, but it is lovely to hear about the family nature of the club and of the shooting activity, which is terrific. I am just wondering how many members you have.

Ken BALCOMBE: Before COVID we had 65 before we closed, and then during our closure in COVID we dropped down to about 45, and now we are back up to about 75.

Jacinta ERMACORA: That is fantastic. That is what you mentioned – a 15 to 20 per cent increase.

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes, that is right, exactly, and it is great to see. Everybody who has come along – it is all the simple things: like we have got proper disabled toilets now, we have got proper ladies toilets now, we have got air conditioning, we have got heating, we have got the clubrooms. You can sit in there and feel comfortable out of the weather. And we have got a nice big verandah out the front. You can sit there and have a view out of the sun so you do not get sunburnt. Our previous facility had outdoor toilets with batwing doors on them –

Jacinta Ermacora interjected.

Ken BALCOMBE: I know. We have come a long way, but it is amazing what you can do. It was a bit of an eye-opener for me as well. If you have good facilities, you open yourself up to so many more people.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes. That is a great summary of – perhaps not entirely in this case – just the impact the infrastructure can have on participation.

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes, correct – 100 per cent.

Jacinta ERMACORA: It is great. Look, that is all I had, Ken. Thank you very much for coming along and contributing.

Ken BALCOMBE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Dr Mansfield.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you. I echo that: thanks for coming along today and for providing really detailed information about how this whole episode has played out for your club. I am interested in I guess your views on lessons we might learn from this process from a sporting club perspective. You know, what could have been done better, even prior to the cancellation in terms of, say, engagement, that maybe we could take forward should there ever be anything like this come up again?

Ken BALCOMBE: Righto. Probably the one thing that struck me was it was all kind of Secret Squirrel stuff all the way through. It would have been nice for us and EnergyAustralia, because EnergyAustralia did all those earthworks hoping and thinking – and not Chinese whispers, but on those sorts of lines – that we were going to get the Commonwealth Games. I know people cannot commit a long way out, but they had a pretty good indication about what they were doing, from my point of view. It would have been good to have the clarity and the communication along the way to say, ‘Yes, this is what we are doing. Yes, we are going to support you. Yes, go ahead and do those in-kind earthworks. Yes, you guys get organised and all that sort of stuff.’ That is what I would have liked. I think that is something they could have done a lot better. And also the cancellation was very poor; I do not know how you can put it any other way.

Sarah MANSFIELD: You have spoken a bit about what you would like to see from the legacy funding. If you could get anything you wanted, what would that look like?

Ken BALCOMBE: The original layout was three Olympic trench layouts, and there was a big shot curtain that we had in the background as well – that catches the lead, and it gives you a perfect background for shooting as well. The shot curtain has been taken away; there is about a million dollars of shot curtain, so we can understand that. The third Olympic trench layout would have been nice to have. There is a universal trench and an Olympic trench. Universal trench builds up to Olympic trench, so you only use five of the traps instead of 15. Universal trench has taken off in Australia, so they are starting to get really good numbers now. To have that third Olympic trench layout with universal trench built into it – and we were getting inquiries. There is a universal trench series which goes around Australia, and the guy who runs it is from Melbourne. He was

already asking questions: ‘If you get the three Olympic trench layouts, we are really looking and would be excited to have one of the universal trench series at your club at Morwell.’ And that is an Australian thing; that would have been a really great thing to have. It gives you down-the-line shooting, it gives you a universal trench and it also gives you Olympic trench, so that would have been nice to have, with the shot curtain.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Okay All right. That is all from me. Thank you.

Ken BALCOMBE: No worries.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Davis.

David DAVIS: Thank you, Ken. I think it has been a marvellous presentation, and I wanted to just ask questions a bit further about that meeting with Harriet Shing. She has promised a lot, it seems to me, at this point but has not actually delivered finally anything yet. Is that right, or is there some money that has actually been paid over?

Ken BALCOMBE: No. The two things which hurt us at the end of our relocation project, because we were at the bottom of the barrel of our money – she gave us a commitment that she was going to cover the cost of the extra works that we had to do for the down-the-line trap houses and the road entry. They were the only two things we went to her with. There was about 30 grand’s worth, so we went to her with that, because obviously we had to get money off members to keep the whole show running, but that did not happen.

David DAVIS: You have not got the money yet?

Ken BALCOMBE: No, no.

David DAVIS: Frankly, we will try to hurry Ms Shing along and get her pay the money that she is due to pay.

Ken BALCOMBE: That was in June–July last year, July–August sort of thing, so I am not holding any great hope.

David DAVIS: We will all collectively raise it in the Parliament next week and hope that Ms Shing has a change of heart very quickly, because she has not covered herself in glory on this.

Michael GALEA: I am not sure if there is a need for a change of heart if she has already committed to it, but yes.

David DAVIS: Well, she has got to do it; she has actually got to do it, not talk about it. She has actually got to deliver the money.

Michael GALEA: Which is what she said she will do.

David DAVIS: But she has not done it.

Ken BALCOMBE: No worries.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Davis. I would just like to ask one final question. One of the things that many were excited about was that Para shooting would be included.

Ken BALCOMBE: Sorry, there was going to be pistol as well.

The CHAIR: And pistol as well. Have there been any pistol shooting facilities built at the club or any Para shooting facilities? Was there any work done on that?

Ken BALCOMBE: No. The pistol shooting was a portable range. A question at the start was: would you like to have that at your club? As you probably know, with different clubs and different disciplines, everybody has trouble getting along.

David DAVIS: Ms Shing, I think, was going to lead the way on the Para shooting.

Ken BALCOMBE: I would like to have seen us use the facility in a broader range, not just for our club but to get the pistol guys there as well, and maybe we could have had some cost benefit and all that sort of stuff. But that generally does not work, so we passed on that. With the Para shooting stuff, part of our original design from our shooting sports facilities program was to put in wheelchair access paths to every layout and to the club and all the way around, so that is the work that was done there, and the Para shooting was part of the Olympic trench layouts.

The CHAIR: Okay, so Para shooters can still take part and can still join your club, and the facilities are there for them to participate.

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes, 100 per cent. We have got a nice rail out the front and disabled access, so we are accommodating for that.

The CHAIR: Are there any other any other clubs that have that sort of access for disabled people?

Ken BALCOMBE: Yes, the Melbourne Gun Club does, but, like everything, it gets down to money.

The CHAIR: Yes, it is very expensive.

Ken BALCOMBE: To build the access path and the access rail and all that sort of stuff was a bit of money for our club. With the amount of concrete that went to build the wheelchair access paths and all that sort of stuff, it becomes quite significant.

The CHAIR: Have you had many Para shooters come along to the club since you have had those facilities?

Ken BALCOMBE: There is one guy from Bairnsdale who lost his leg in a car accident, and he would not shoot in winter because he would get bogged on the grass in his electric wheelchair. But now –

The CHAIR: He has got a concrete path.

Ken BALCOMBE: he can go from one end to the other, so that is a positive.

The CHAIR: That is excellent. Thank you so much for appearing today and giving your extensive evidence and your story about what has happened. You will receive a copy of the transcript for your review in about a week, and after that it will be published on the website. The committee will now adjourn for the day.

Committee adjourned.