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PP:pp
Doc ID:DOC/21/31166

Mr Patrick O'Brien
Committee Manager
Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament of Victoria, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Mr O'Brien

Re: Loddon Shire Council submission to the inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors

Loddon Shire Council would like to take this opportunity to provide feedback to the inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and event sectors.

The majority of the tourism sector within Loddon Shire fits the description of "Sole Traders". During the pandemic, there was limited funding support for this sector other than the program made available in September 2020, where the Victorian Government announced the \$100 million Sole Trader Support Fund to provide extra support to eligible non-employing sole trader businesses to survive the impacts of continued COVID-19 shutdown restrictions. This support funding was a grant of \$3,000.

The criteria for eligibility in the Sole Trader Support Fund excluded a number of Loddon Shire businesses that could reopen with a COVIDSafe Plan in the second step in the 'How we work in regional Victoria' road map. It is considered that this was inequitable, as no other funding opportunities were available during the pandemic for this sector.

The tourism businesses in Loddon Shire who were able to apply for the funding were grateful for this support but wished it was available earlier, even if in two instalments of \$1,500, to assist with the overheads of their business.

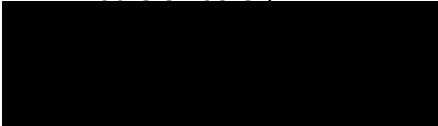
Loddon Shire has large events, but not to the significance of metropolitan events. These events foster community spirit and stimulate the local economy through extended visitor nights, eateries and visiting tourist attractions.

The events in Loddon Shire are organised by voluntary committees. During the COVID-19 pandemic twenty-five major events were cancelled, which usually bring two or more bed nights per visitor to Loddon Shire. This is an estimated total loss to the economy of \$1,471,000.

Loddon Shire Council and voluntary committees are aware of the importance of COVIDSafe Event Plans. Council does not have the resources to assist community groups with developing plans for events. Currently for any event above tier 3, cancellation has occurred for the second year in a row, for example, the Rheola Charity Carnival.

One suggestion for consideration by the State Government to assist councils would be to provide funding to educate voluntary committees in the development of a COVIDSafe Event Plan for major events. This in turn will recommence tier 2 events, return the extended visitor bed nights, creating jobs and stimulate the region's economy.

Yours sincerely



Phil Pinyon
Chief Executive Officer

14 April 2021