

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

Dr Alana Thomson, Senior Lecturer, and

Dr Ashleigh-Jane Thompson, Senior Lecturer, La Trobe University; and

Dr Millicent Kennelly, Senior Lecturer, Department of Tourism, Sport and Hotel Management (*via videoconference*), Griffith University.

The CHAIR: Thank you for appearing today. 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. 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.

Alana THOMSON: I will start. Alana Thomson, from La Trobe Business School.

Ashleigh-Jane THOMPSON: Ashleigh-Jane Thompson, from La Trobe Business School.

Millicent KENNELLY: Millicent Kennelly, from Griffith Business School.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will also allow the committee members to introduce themselves for the record. I am David Limbrick, the Chair.

Michael GALEA: Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Sarah Mansfield, Member for Western Victoria.

Joe McCRACKEN: Joe McCracken, Western Victoria.

Melina BATH: Melina Bath. Hello. Eastern Victoria.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Northern Victoria.

Tom McINTOSH: Tom McIntosh, Eastern Victoria Region.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Jacinta Ermacora, Western Victoria Region.

The CHAIR: We may have Mr Davis there as well.

David DAVIS: David Davis.

The CHAIR: Excellent. I am not sure how you want to structure it, with three of you, but we welcome you to make your opening comments and ask that they be kept to around about 10 minutes. Please proceed.

Alana THOMSON: Thanks, Chair. On our process, to streamline I will present a couple of slides that we have got prepared for today, and then when we get to question time, I will defer to Ash and Millicent and see who can best answer your questions.

The CHAIR: Sure.

Visual presentation.

Alana THOMSON: Perfect. I will begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands that we meet on today.

The scope of what we are presenting today is an overview of our Bendigo and central Victoria community survey that we ran in conjunction with Sports Focus, the regional sports assembly for Bendigo and central Victoria. As a brief introduction, we have up on the slide an overview of the work that we do in this space, to give you an idea of our interest and motivation for doing this work. The three of us have been working over the last decade in the sport management and event space. Our work is published in top recognised international journals. Our work is known here in Australia academically and internationally as well.

Next slide. I have got a couple of projects that Millie and I have worked on collectively. Between us we have been part of projects to the value of over a few hundred thousand dollars, competitive consulting projects looking at sport and event impacts and legacies.

Next slide. In addition to that, I will just flag that Ashleigh and I are at La Trobe Business School. Millie is on the Gold Coast. We all teach research in the area of sport and event management – that is our bread and butter. This project came about from a conversation I had with the executive officer of Sports Focus. I had done some local media back in 2022 when the event was announced. I had been asked predominantly by local media, ‘Is three years enough to secure legacy?’ So I spoke in the media around my research and my insights on that. Sports Focus came to us and said, ‘Is there work that you’ve done in the past that can help us inform a legacy strategy and capacity building for the local sport community?’ We said, ‘Given the unique nature and the delivery of this event, there are not a lot of case studies out there in the literature of a regional co-host model. We can work with you to develop up a bit of a survey, and let’s see what the community thinks the opportunities are and what the gaps might be to work on over the next three years and think about that legacy period too.’ There is a lot of detail up here, and I can talk to that if there is interest after the presentation.

I guess from our perspective as academics, I just want to highlight that the project was unfunded. We used our discretionary research time to work on this out of interest in the case study, the ability to contribute to the body of knowledge but also importantly for the three of us to be able to secure social impact in the communities that we are working with. Given that La Trobe has a footprint in this region, it was a really great connection. We co-designed that survey. It ran at the beginning of 2023. It attracted 120 responses – not typically wonderful in survey research. But given the population – it went out particularly to people involved in sport – we actually think 120 is pretty representative of the Bendigo and central Victoria community. People that responded were highly engaged in sport. They play, they volunteer – it seems like every spare minute is spent on sport.

We identified nine themes. I will flash through them in the next couple of slides. There were four main categories that we put them into. Given the low response rate by the local migrant community, First Nations community and young people in the survey, we had planned to do some focus groups in mid-2023. In terms of the time line of that, we had ethical clearance ready to go, and then the event was cancelled. So for us it was a little bit disappointing to see that all of this work had gone in unfunded – and then what do we do with it? We had actually taken community time to inform that survey. I will talk in a minute about how we kind of closed the loop with that.

The survey findings we categorised into the strengths, the challenges that the community saw and then the potential positives and the potential negatives that they identified as well. Really clear themes came through. Community considered that there are some good facilities in the area and there are others that are relatively easy to upgrade. The real local passion for sport in Bendigo and central Victoria and the track record in hosting other sport events as well were some things that came through quite strongly. There were quite a lot of challenges, but we could group them under two main themes here. Access to adequate facilities – while a strength was that there were some good facilities in the region, there was also recognition that to stage an international-level sport event there were going to need to be some definite upgrades, also to secure that legacy in terms of the sport participation post event, to make sure that those venues were going to be fit for purpose not just for hosting international sport events but for community use as well.

There are also another range of factors affecting current operational capacities. We are very aware as people in the sport management space that sport across Australia is facing a whole range of barriers, and that impacts on the potential that people see to secure legacies. Some of those might be the current safeguarding work that is being rolled out, so there are increased administrative duties being put on volunteers and the capacity for people

to deal with those increased demands. Access to volunteers – the trend is in Australia we have got less and less people volunteering and those people that are volunteering are doing more and more hours. Participation numbers across sports kind of varied, but that was considered: if we have low participation numbers, there is not a critical mass to grow from. Also, there was lack of access to elite opportunities in the regions and lots of people travelling great distances to participate.

On the potential negatives, I guess we will flag as well, as researchers, that some were not surprising. What we did think, though, is just how well informed the local community were in terms of understanding the event impacts and legacies. That is not what we are familiar with in other communities that we have worked with. They considered that there was going to be great disruption to some sports around games time. They were worried that the investment was going to be focused on the event delivery rather than being shared across regional sports. There was a concern that volunteers would be time switching, so instead of attracting more volunteers we would actually have volunteers going and working on an event and not having backfill in the community sport space. There was also a potential for less people generally to be participating post event due to cost-of-living pressures, which continue to be pertinent.

We were encouraged by the diversity in thoughts and opinions around what could be potential positive impacts: the benefits of those new and upgraded facilities for the long term for both mass sport and elite sport; the opportunity to re-energise the sports sector in acknowledgement that COVID had really hit regional sports and that this was an opportunity to uplift; opportunities to generate revenue for sports; opportunities to upskill and broaden the experiences of volunteers and also potentially recruit more volunteers; the opportunity to promote inclusion and diversity, noting that the Comm Games is one of the only fully integrated sport events for people with disabilities, so that opportunity to see that in the community and be able to model it; encouraging greater sport participation across the board; attracting elite performers into the regions; inspiring community passion for sport, so those magical ephemeral feelings that come around the hosting of an event like this; and the potential for Bendigo, given that growth in capacity, to host events into the future.

So what does it mean? We had different text messages come through the morning that the event was to be announced as cancelled. What did that mean for us? We were just about ready to report these findings back to the community, so we did have a bit of an urgent meeting to say, ‘What do we do with this now?’ The key thing for that is Sports Focus, our partner in this project, were very keen to thank people for participating in the survey. Their job here is to engage with the community, and we do not want to annoy the community by not acknowledging their time in these things. Also, in terms of what we said before on our commitment to social impact, what can we take away from this that is actually going to be useful to the community? Reflecting on that, we determined that those strengths that the community identified remain. That is part of sport in Bendigo and central Victoria. There are a number of challenges that, with or without the event, continue to need to be addressed, and we need to do that in ways that are responsive to the community, rather than event led. So the cancellation of the event opens an opportunity to have some different discussions around what sport development can look like. Negative impacts are obviously unlikely, but a lot of those issues raised remain important to be considered in the future development.

There are just some notes here. That \$2 billion investment package – there is a commitment to continuing to invest in some of those facility upgrades, so certainly some of those positive impacts that the community were looking for will be realised in terms of those tangible opportunities and some programming, but not all of the things that were addressed in our survey are directly addressed by that \$2 billion investment package. With the cancellation of the games, from a cost–benefit scenario there also could be some missed opportunities that come through not hosting an event of that scale and engagement.

What it does open up is an opportunity to identify sport events with a better strategic fit, so there might be event profiles that better fit the host region or that offer more accessibility in terms of integrating with volunteer programs or employment opportunities and things like this. When we are delivering something like a Commonwealth Games it is an international-level sport event that comes with certain expectations. That sometimes means that those social outcome opportunities we are looking for get put to the side while we deliver an international-standard event. We have got some examples there. The university games and the masters games become more localised events that can better integrate with the kinds of things that the local community might be looking to achieve.

That is it; we are finished. Thank you. I have some other details in there, so I am happy to elaborate on any of what we have talked about.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for that presentation. I would like to start. One thing that you mentioned in there, just on that last slide, was the inspiration piece. Now, we heard evidence and we have seen in the business case for the games that one of the significant benefits that was outlined was this idea that there would be large health benefits to the community, not through the infrastructure but through the fact of having the games themselves, and especially to younger people and volunteers and stuff as they become more interested in participating in sports – they see new heroes, I suppose, and then they get involved in sports. I have got a couple of questions on that. Firstly, is that a real thing and a real benefit that is well understood? Secondly, now that the games are not going ahead, is that an opportunity that is lost, or is there a way that it still may be possible to have that benefit that was outlined in the business case?

Alana THOMSON: That is a really wonderful question. I think I might throw to Millie for this, just acknowledging that Millicent is a co-investigator on an ARC-funded project looking at legacy around the Brisbane Olympics and engaging particularly those people that are not participating in sport already. So I think she is probably best versed to respond to your question.

Millicent KENNELLY: Thanks for the question. I am going to respond referring to academic evidence, so apologies for the academic speak.

The CHAIR: No, no. I am very interested in that, actually.

Millicent KENNELLY: You asked the question: can these events actually create sport participation outcomes and health benefits, and the empirical evidence at this stage is a bit indecisive about that point. The evidence that we have to date suggests that these large-scale sport events do not typically automatically engender health benefits. What we have also noticed is that there are sections of our community that are already experiencing barriers to participation, and hosting a large-scale event does not necessarily remove those barriers. So for marginalised groups in our community, the act of holding a large-scale event does not immediately mean that they can whip down to a local community centre and start participating in sport.

Some evidence does suggest that we see people that are already engaged in sport engaging more, so it is almost like the opportunity to engage escalates for people that are already participating. However, we do have some evidence that suggests that with really intentional strategic leveraging we can create changes in sport participation outcomes as a result of these events. We have seen some evidence of this being delivered on a small scale – so perhaps not the mass scale that is being touted but definitely on a small scale. Part of our intention underlying this project was to start that process of engaging with the Bendigo community, to talk to people about where they perceive opportunities to build that strategic intent and to give people an opportunity to be part of co-creating strategic plans to benefit everybody and get participation happening in the Bendigo and greater Victoria area.

As Alana mentioned, there were a couple of marginalised groups in the community that we had not got to speaking to at the point that the games were cancelled, and we were particularly interested in trying to involve those people in that process to try and deliver these benefits. So, yes, back to your original question: the evidence is a bit rocky at this stage.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Kennelly. Just to clarify for the record, because this is actually a really, really important point around this inquiry because there was a lot of weight put in the business case on these benefits: would I be correct in stating, from what you just said, that the evidence is not clear on the certainty of delivering that type of benefit and therefore potentially less weight should be put on that type of benefit when considering a business case? Would that be a fair –

Millicent KENNELLY: I believe that would be fair. I would say that the evidence is not crystal clear yet and that although it is possible it should not be a central promise until we find a way, through research, to actually ensure that those sport participation and health benefits can occur through hosting events.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Alana THOMSON: Chair, could I add something to that as well?

The CHAIR: Yes. Certainly.

Alana THOMSON: I am not sure exactly of the context of the business case you are referring to, but I think what falls down a lot in terms of the business case is this automatic assumption that hosting the event will secure those outcomes. So what Millie is saying is that we need the planning and we need the resourcing and also the capacity in the work that we do. What we highlight – and I have a paper published on this – is the disconnect between the event organisers. We would have had national or state-level sport organisations involved in the planning and delivery of the event, but this kind of legacy that we are talking about, sport participation, happens at the community level, so the people responsible for delivering that outcome are often not included in the planning and strategic operations around it. So there is quite a disconnect.

The CHAIR: Yes. We have heard much evidence to that effect.

Alana THOMSON: Also I just flag the idea that already a lot of those community clubs here are facing challenges in delivering the sport that they are already delivering, and to ask a sport club to bring another netball team's worth of kids in – or football – actually puts a lot of pressure on the club, to do that.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Alana THOMSON: It is quite different to a tourism setting, where selling more bed nights is a good thing and there is an economic imperative. In a sports sense bringing more people into a club actually puts pressure on staff, facilities and those kinds of things.

The CHAIR: Understood. Mr McCracken.

Joe McCracken: Hello. Thank you for the work that you have done. I know a lot of the work throughout the survey was done during the preparation and cancellation of the Comm Games. Are you able to provide us with the survey, for us to all have a look at, that you have done?

Alana THOMSON: The survey tool that people were asked?

Joe McCracken: I would love to see the questions but also the results that you have been able to compile.

Alana THOMSON: Yes. We have got some preliminary reports that we can share. Our high-level findings I presented today are available on the La Trobe website, so I can share those with you, but we do have a little bit more detailed content behind that.

Joe McCracken: Any other documents that you are able to provide to the committee I would be fascinated to pore over and have a look at too, so if you are able to provide those –

Alana THOMSON: Yes.

Joe McCracken: that would be fantastic. Thanks. I guess with all that going on, and you were doing your research, did you have any role with the government in terms of offering advice and that sort of thing to them?

Alana THOMSON: I will say no. Before I came back to the academic setting I worked as a principal policy officer, AO7 level, for the Queensland government on the 2018 Commonwealth Games. I left that position in the lead-up and went and worked at Griffith University, who were the official partner for the 2018 Commonwealth Games, so I was heavily involved there. But I will say here, no; we got picked up by Sports Focus because they read my content in a media article. Stuart, the executive officer, invited me to a meeting that he had with one of Jacinta Allan's policy advisers, so I attended that. I had a meeting with the Sports Focus executive officer and a policy adviser for about 15 minutes in a coffee shop in Ballarat when I was visiting for work, and that was the extent of it.

Joe McCracken: Okay. Do you have any idea about when that might have been? You might have to look through your calendar. I am happy for you to take it on notice if you want to get an idea.

Alana THOMSON: I was down here for the RoadNats event in Ballarat, so it would have been in January last year, I think.

Joe McCRACKEN: January last year, okay.

Alana THOMSON: During that week, yes. Like we have talked about here, what we know from the research, what the research is telling us – things that we want to be thinking about if we really want to have local community sport in a position where they can use the motivation of the event to attract and retain people in sport.

Joe McCRACKEN: So that was basically the only contact you had with government per se? Okay.

Alana THOMSON: As the research team, yes.

Joe McCRACKEN: As a research team, okay. No contact with ministers or anything like that?

Alana THOMSON: No.

Joe McCRACKEN: Okay. That is cool. When the cancellation happened mid last year, what was your reaction given your experience particularly with the Queensland games?

Alana THOMSON: I think we were all shocked. The three of us specialise in sport management and event management, and it is quite an unprecedented decision.

Joe McCRACKEN: Unprecedented in what way? Can you unpack that?

Alana THOMSON: I think what we are used to in the research is seeing events run over budget. That is quite common. So that would typically be the headline that you would see around the hosting of an event – that the budget has blown out – not that a state like Victoria, with a reputation for hosting sport events, would make that decision a year after announcing that they had won it.

Joe McCRACKEN: Yes. Okay. You are not the only ones who were shocked.

Alana THOMSON: I will add to that as well in this setting. I think as well – and I speak for the three of us in this – while we had not necessarily been out talking to individual sports, we had a good connection with Sports Focus, who were the conduit. While there has been that kind of balanced appraisal through the survey – we know there is going to be a negative impact – but we think overall there will be some positives. Knowing what we know of sports in the regions – how much they are struggling – I think this event could have been life changing for a lot of people, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and something to revamp and really become a catalyst to achieve all of those things that we listed on the slide. Without it, I guess my gut feeling is that there would have been a lot of disappointment and hurt at the community level.

Joe McCRACKEN: That is the anecdotal evidence I pick up as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you all for joining us. You mentioned of some of the concerns that the community would have had around the games, particularly around the building of infrastructure that might have been more to deliver an event rather than the legacy for that community. I am curious to know: did you get much feedback from the community on the sorts of legacy infrastructure or services that they wanted to see?

Millicent KENNELLY: I would just say that because the survey captured a wide range of viewpoints in the community and we had representatives from a range of different sports it was hard to pick out a specific venue or facility that people were seeking. I think that by and large people were thinking about their own sport when they responded, so there were obviously some thoughts around how their chosen sport could benefit. But I do not think our survey captured a whole-of-community sense of ‘If we had to whittle it down, what facilities or services we would most like to see?’

Michael GALEA: Sure.

Alana THOMSON: Some of the things I recall off the top of my mind are things like car parking, lighting and then also the non-Commonwealth Games sports. So I think we had a few people from equestrian sports completing the survey with the opportunistic mindset I think to leverage the event and say, 'While we don't have equestrian necessarily, that is a locally relevant sport. Are there ways that we could facilitate this opportunity to showcase that sport?' – so some entrepreneurial thinking, which was great to see. But I think the stand-outs for me were less about 'We need a stadium and we need a this and we need a that' and more about what we need around our existing facilities to better support people participating in that legacy period.

Ashleigh-Jane THOMPSON: I think it was definitely the community-level focus that came around how we achieve that longer term participation around supporting that infrastructure, as opposed to 'Let's build a brand new stadium and that's going to be great'.

Michael GALEA: Sure. And in a similar vein, you have listed the first potential issue being disruption to existing local sporting calendars. Was that placed first because that was a pretty predominant issue that was raised?

Alana THOMSON: Absolutely. Let me elaborate on that. We see that a lot in event impact research. People are very conscious of 'How is this event going to impact on me?' We have done similar work around the Road Nats in Ballarat: 'How is it going to impact on me?' In the academic sense there is a very common model that is used. Now I am going to forget what it is called – social exchange?

Millicent KENNELLY: It might be social exchange theory.

Alana THOMSON: Social exchange theory – there we go. Luckily there are three of us. But it basically says that when people are summing up that cost–benefit they will accept those negative impacts if overall they believe that there are going to be positive outcomes. So we see it a lot around events, people who are, 'Yeah, it's going to be disruptive for a couple of days or a couple of weeks, but you know what – my sport's going to get this' or 'My daughter's going to get to volunteer'. And so we manage that cost–benefit.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. And just lastly as well, this might be going slightly beyond the scope of your research, but if you are aware of any particular research or have any views yourselves, I am curious about the funding relationships that these major events have – and we have talked in previous hearings about the contrast between say Commonwealth Games and Olympic Games where the host takes on the burden and the risk, as opposed to something like a FIFA World Cup, like we saw last year, where it is the actual sporting code that takes on that risk. Do you have any opinions on the best way for major international sporting events to be run or any particular directions you would like to point the committee to?

Alana THOMSON: I do not think we can give you a silver bullet answer to this one. I think in your question you have highlighted that distinction. The Commonwealth Games is a multisport event, and so apart from the Commonwealth Games association it does not sit with any one sport governing body. And so it is quite a different scenario. In terms of I guess what you are getting at – you know, who is footing the bill and underwriting it – there is work done internationally, and Canada have a quite proactive approach to this. They have what I think is called a multiparty agreement, and before any bid is put forward – it is very different to our Australian setting – they have I think about five different stakeholders that need to sign on to that. So that is your provincial and national government and the different governing bodies that come into play. But before a bid is even put forward they have those contractual arrangements set out – who is going to cover what; what is the economic contribution of each party going to be – whereas in Australia one of the main differences is that things are led by state government, and they are often treated as commercial in confidence. And so that initial process is quite different to other models around the world.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thank you, Chair; and thank you very much for being here. I can tell that all three of you are highly professional, and you are looking at that scientific evidence that you have got from your work. I am interested if I can go to you, Ms Thomson. You have come from the Gold Coast. You said you worked on the Commonwealth Games there in 2018. You know, if you look at comparison, did that run over budget on a major scale? And if so, can you remember what that was, harking back into your memory?

Alana THOMSON: Just to clarify, if I could, I was in that role from 2015 to 2016 and then came back to the academic space while the event was on.

Melina BATH: There was preparation for the games during that time?

Alana THOMSON: Yes. Absolutely. In terms of over budget, I would have to take that on notice and check the details for you.

Melina BATH: Was there a sense when you were there that you were going to meet the obligation? I mean, it has come and gone now, but was there scrambling? It feels like there was a scrambling effect in this quest for the 2026 Commonwealth Games. Was there a calmness and strategic work towards that in 2018?

Alana THOMSON: I would not say yes. The area that I was working in predominately was legacy. I was principal policy officer for legacy, which is quite different to the events operation and event delivery. In the space that I was in, it was a challenge, because at that time when I was working there we did not have a fund for legacy, and so a lot of what we were doing was leveraging and relying on goodwill. There was a funding envelope approved in I think the 12 to 18 months before the event, and so more discrete legacy activities could occur that were more than leveraging what would have already happened anyway.

Here, I am not quite sure. The time that I was quoted in the media was on questions around 'Is three years long enough?' I think in any project space and in government projects, three years is long enough to deliver something and secure outcomes.

Melina BATH: Is long enough?

Alana THOMSON: Is long enough, yes. In terms of the funding question, if I can refer to a couple of case studies again internationally, the London Olympics was delivered during a time of austerity, and the Glasgow Commonwealth Games in 2014 were also delivered in a time of austerity. Both of them have got demonstrated legacy outcomes, but they approached it in a quite unique and, again, entrepreneurial way. On my study tour that I did to Glasgow a couple of years after the event, the common phrase that came through from the officials that I spoke to was this idea of 'bend the spend'.

Melina BATH: Bending?

Alana THOMSON: Bend the spend. They did not have a discrete legacy fund to deliver legacy projects, but what they did recognise was that across both the Glasgow council and the Scottish government there were social programs in place that could be aligned with the event. So rather than developing a whole program of legacy policy that needed to be funded to be delivered, they were able to leverage existing social programs. That might have been social housing. Another thing that stood out for me was that they were about to launch recycling green bins in the city. They used that as a focus for legacy: 'This event's going to be sustainable, and we're linking that with our new sustainable bin waste management.' It is very different to the environment that I have experienced here in Australia, where the mentality is that a legacy strategy is something that exists very separately and needs to be funded separately. Rather than looking at how we can creatively and innovatively look at the event and look at what is already happening and use the event to catalyse towards those outcomes, we instead implement a level of policy on top of an event and on top of the programs we are already running as a government. Actually, we know from the research that that approach is not sustainable, and it is better to be looking at what is already happening and how we can boost that in terms of this.

Melina BATH: I have got about 14 more questions that have come out of that very important conversation. I appreciate that. I think my time is up, but we will see if we can come around again. Thank you.

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

Jacinta ERMACORA: Hello. Thank you very much for the work that you have done. Yes, I do feel like we are just touching the edge of the work that you have done and your knowledge. I also feel like we might not do it justice. But just a quick question: because it is a La Trobe University piece of work, it has obviously gone through and met all the academic standards for a piece of research, including the ethics approvals and all of that?

Alana THOMSON: Yes, Jacinta. Thank you. I did mean to put the reference in the slides, but I forgot. At the time that this project commenced I was employed by Federation University. In terms of dividing and conquering the project, our ethics sat with Millie, so that was approved through the Griffith University ethical protocol.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Right. Yes. Fantastic. We can we be 100 per cent confident in the integrity – so into the contents. It feels quite circular in a way but really interesting. It is great to be talking about this because it seems that there is a connection between elite sport and inspiring community sport, but we do not really know the connection entirely of ongoing participation in community sport – do people, you know, show up every Saturday in the rain all their lives because they love their hockey or their netball or whatever – and showcasing sport, perhaps momentarily, the community infrastructure versus not doing it. I think we all kind of know in a gut feeling – and you have done a piece of research to kind of show it – that there would be some benefits to having the games, but we also knew there would be some benefits to not do the games. The priority issues outside of sport also play, like housing, as well. It is like the opportunity cost averted. I am not sure what my question is, but have I got a reasonable take on that?

Alana THOMSON: I think so. From what you have recapped there – and that is what we talk about regularly – sport events, sport development, is a bit of a wicked problem. In solving one, you might actually open up another can of worms. We know that most events like this, every time they kind of get talked about from a policy space there is commentary saying, ‘Oh, this is going to be a reset on sport policy; more people are going to participate.’ The research shows us that what often happens is we host these events and more money gets invested in elite sport, not mass participation sport. So I think that is the distinction between event hosting and then what we want the legacy to be, and those two are not always as connected and aligned as they need to be to support those outcomes.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Thank you. It just really makes me wonder. There was an article written not long after the announcement that the games were not going ahead. I cannot remember her name – I think she was from Sydney. She was suggesting that the model of games is perhaps outdated, and you have mentioned the way Canada perhaps enters into an agreement to do the games, but I note they pulled out as well. So I just wonder. I think your work is really valuable to go that next step around: what is a sustainable model for these sorts of games into the future?

Alana THOMSON: Did you want a response or was that a summary?

Jacinta ERMACORA: Good comment.

Alana THOMSON: I think it would depend who was sitting here. I never played for Australia but I played sport up until I was 35, and then I had a kid and I have not been able to get back into it, because women with children have barriers to sport participation. What we have got to remember is that not everyone is going to want to play for their country, but elite sport still has a role in the system of sport. I do not know that it is going to happen, but it would be interesting to do a without case – let us get rid of all these big sport events; what happens to the system of sport then?

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes, it is not one versus the other, is it? They are linked, but valuing that linkage is complex.

Alana THOMSON: Yes. An example of that would be – look at what the women’s World Cup, the Matildas, have done for women’s sport in Australia. I did my undergraduate 21 years ago. I was speaking at O Week this morning. Twenty-one years ago I could not have thought that it would take 21 years to have women’s sport profiled the way that it is, but it has. We still have work to do. So if we want to look at what is the value of sport, that has a clear value proposition. I think the Commonwealth Games also does as well. It has its set scope and its reach. Millie and I talk quite a lot when we are talking about these things: we have also got to be careful what we expect. I think what I have seen come through in the media and the different accounts is that the more that was expected of this event, the bigger the bill became. We know as well from the research from project management in government in general that the more we want to get out of something, the more it costs. So is that an unfair criticism of the event, or is it that perhaps we expected too much from the event as a magic bullet to solve a whole lot of problems?

Jacinta ERMACORA: Thank you for trying to do justice in my 4-minute slot.

Alana THOMSON: Thank you.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Thanks for your work.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Dr Mansfield.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you. Thank you for appearing today. I am interested in understanding what the intent of the research you did was prior to the cancellation. How did you see that actually informing what was funded in terms of legacy or decisions that were made? Was there a formal mechanism for that to feed into it?

Alana THOMSON: No. I mean, this kind of sprouted because we had a couple of informal conversations, and much like this, Stuart from Sports Focus said, 'Give us what you know,' 'Send us what we can use, what we can inform ourselves with,' and this project really came about from a need for information, a need for an evidence base in this setting, and what we can do to help the community develop that evidence base. I mean, Sports Focus exists regardless of the event. They have a certain remit. How can we inform what they are already doing and tailor that into the event? Like I was talking about before, we are already doing it, let us bend that spend and direct it around the event and see if we can make more out of it. And then, look, I have worked in government around a sport event, and one of my remits was the community engagement angle, and I had all sorts of weird and wonderful proposals come before me in that job. I think with my personal experience as an academic and someone that has worked in government, it was if we can help Sports Focus build an evidence base and put together a bit of a strategic plan, then they would have something to be able to take to government and say, 'Look at what we're doing. It would be really great if you could help support this work over here. This is why we want to do it, and this is what we are trying to achieve.'

In this space around legacy, yes, we have done a lot of work. There is still a lot more that needs to be researched, and some of these questions I would love to be able to answer conclusively. We cannot. The research is not there yet, but I know from my mode of operation that if someone comes to you with a really clear understanding of what their community needs, then they are better positioned to acquire resources to deliver on that. So that is essentially the motivation for the project.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Okay. Now, post the cancellation, you mentioned you had sort of closed the loop, but is this research going to still inform some of those discussions or decisions in any way?

Alana THOMSON: I will be very authentic with you. We have kind of been circling around on this going, 'What do we do with it?' As academics in the world that we live in now, our time is money and we have invested a few weeks of all of our time in it – what is the outcome going to be? We are not quite clear yet on what that is, but we are, aside from this project, progressing other studies relevant to this.

Sarah MANSFIELD: No, that is fine. From what you have heard about the commitments that have been made around legacy investments, do you think that they represent that sort of intentional strategic investment aimed at growing participation that you were talking about, or what does that look like if not?

Alana THOMSON: I feel like I have been talking a lot. Millie, I do not know if you are still online, or Ash, if you want to jump in.

Millicent KENNELLY: I am happy to say something to that. I think some of the social benefits that we were looking at that came out of our survey, it is really hard to understand what kind of funding model would work to actually make them happen. I think often our default setting is to think about money going to infrastructure, like physical, tangible things and measurable things, but a lot of the social benefit that happens at a community level is a little bit harder to quantify.

Alana THOMSON: From what I have read online with the programming that has been committed to or the grant programs that have been committed to, at the moment I have not seen enough detail to compare like with like – if that makes sense. I will say, though, I guess knowing funding in Australian sport generally, things like volunteering are typically not funded the way they need to be to have sustainable impact on the number of volunteers we have. There was one other thing I was going to mention that has just slipped my mind. One of the things that people wanted to see was elite sport in the regions. That is typically not funded. I anticipate sport participation funding is going to be about getting new people participating in a sport. There are maybe a

number of those things up on the screen that would not be funded under these current commitments, but again, I have not seen the detail to know exactly.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you.

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

Tom McINTOSH: Thanks for the discussion. I just wanted to follow on from Ms Ermacora's conversation, just around the best model of funding. I think I missed your answer – whether you did not have a comment on some economic model that helps best set up these types of sporting events going forward. Do you have a comment on that? Last year we had hearings in Melbourne, and we heard from various bodies and whatnot about the way that FIFA is structured and whatnot. I just wanted to follow that line of questioning just as far as the economic structure.

Alana THOMSON: I do not think we have a clear response, Tom. I just mentioned the case study in Canada, where they had a quite different governance style set up before they even bid for the event.

Tom McINTOSH: And to Ms Ermacora's point, they are not proceeding the games. So I suppose it is more about: if no-one is hosting the games, do you see a solution to the potential economic structural issues with the way the games are hosted?

Alana THOMSON: Ashleigh or Millie, do you want to jump in? Every event is different. It is very hard to provide a conclusive response. It is almost like one of those things that – the model should be fit for purpose. In my PhD research I looked at the World Masters Games that was hosted in Sydney in 2009. One of the interviews that I had with the CEO of the International Masters Games Association was along the lines that they were thinking of restructuring their whole process and that the association would also be the event deliverer, because what they feared was that when they signed the host city contract they lost control – an event governing body loses control. That event ends up being whatever the host government want or need it to be, and so you can see those complications again with that alignment. I do not know if there is a one-size-fits-all model. It just becomes I guess a case-by-case implementation. What I am familiar with with this event is that things got added to it. A number of sports got added. The model kept evolving. So from the initial stage to the time that it was cancelled, my understanding and my recollection is that it morphed and evolved and so it was a bit of a moving beast. And I think anything in project delivery or program delivery and government – if it goes through that many evolutions and changes, you are no doubt going to have cost blowouts, if that is what you want to refer to.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes. And I understand there are things like bend the spend, looking at individual situations, that sort of thing, but we are trying to come away with some findings around how the Commonwealth Games delivers a cost-effective – how does it deliver? Is there any recommendation if any nation in the world wants some sort of recommendation or evidence that you have come across? You know, 'Here's a suggestion of how a nation or the association can look to hold a Commonwealth Games,' so that they do occur in the future.

Alana THOMSON: No. I do not have an answer for you. I have an answer for a different question, but I am not sure of time. I do not have a definitive –

Tom McINTOSH: No, no. That is okay. That is a big question, sorry.

Alana THOMSON: I do not have a definitive model. I will say Glasgow was a really wonderful case study in terms of the outcomes that they provided, but they were there with a 10-year strategy. So the investment that they had in venues was shared out across a number of events in a portfolio of events. On the scale of international events the Comm Games is not the Olympics, but it is up there. And so to want to deliver all of that across five host regions in the one event is ambitious. It is ambitious. And I remember when the bid was won I thought, 'That's ambitious.' In other places around world there has been a longer commitment to those kinds of outcomes, and so the investment and the costs are shared over time.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes. And then of course with South Africa pulling out and Birmingham flowing on and someone needing to try and fill the space, perhaps we will not see a Commonwealth Games bid before, if you

are saying 10 years – we might not see anyone looking to host it until whatever, 2026 plus 10 years; 2036 or something might be perhaps advice that nations should take on.

Alana THOMSON: Yes. I mean, to host a Commonwealth Games – you can think about the building blocks – there are a couple of events you might host in advance before you host something like that, typically, if you are looking at it strategically. So it would be that matter of whatever next host city has done a little bit of strategy development in their event hosting is probably a better fit, yes.

Millicent KENNELLY: I would also say the International Olympic Committee has done a lot of work in this space, because a couple of years back you may recall that they got into a sticky situation of not really having that many cities that were interested in bidding. So they have done a lot of restructuring. It obviously has not filtered through to some of the other sporting franchises, but I think there is a recognition from these international sport event owners that they cannot keep pushing the cost of hosting their events exclusively onto the host countries. So there may be a change that occurs at the international level.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes, perhaps this decade we will see a shift and a figuring out of how things are done – if they continue. Okay. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr McIntosh. Mr Davis.

David DAVIS: Chair, thank you. Can I thank the three of you for your evidence. It has been thoughtful and indeed erudite, and I think you have actually put this in a very useful plane for us. In your survey and your work, the published paper that looks at the positives and negatives, I just wondered if you looked at reputational issues. You know, the games were cancelled – and I will just take issue with my colleagues. Canada did not cancel the games; they never actually signed up to them. I think there is actually a quantum difference between investigating hosting games and not proceeding and what happened here in Victoria, where games were signed up for, an agreement was struck and then a year later, roughly, the games were canned. I just thought you might have some comment to make about the reputational impact of that for Victoria internationally.

Alana THOMSON: It is not something we covered in the survey. The survey focused on the sport development scope.

David DAVIS: Yes, I get that. But I just thought, given you in particular have had, obviously, significant experience overseas –

Alana THOMSON: Yes. If I say, anecdotally – did it impact on reputation? Yes, because we know from the event literature and the event research that hosting events is a powerful signal for things like international trade, politics and sports diplomacy. You know, China's recent hosting of events is not an accident; there is a substantial positioning strategy that is going on behind that. So cancelling an event, I think, definitely sends a signal to the world that event governance in Australia, not just Melbourne and Victoria, may be somewhat problematic and uncertain. I know people working on the Brisbane Olympic Games were quite nervous at the time that this broke.

David DAVIS: As you said, I think, it is not uncommon for games to go over budget financially, but I just do not recall one being cancelled outright at this point. Is there any example that you can point to where that has happened in international sport?

Alana THOMSON: Not in this way, no. I think Ashleigh had something to add to the last point.

Ashleigh-Jane THOMPSON: Yes, just to build on Alana's point there, not on this project but on a separate piece of work I am doing around the FIFA Women's World Cup and legacy building and, I guess, the decade of green and gold, a piece of that work is involved in the nation branding that came from this decade of international mega events that we were hosting. So yes, some of that plays into that discussion of our capacity to host international events, particularly when we think about Melbourne and its reputation as being the sporting capital of the world and the implications that might arise then out of withdrawing from hosting an event such as this.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I think we are out of time, Mr Davis.

David DAVIS: All right. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Thank you all for appearing today and contributing to this inquiry. You will receive a copy of the transcript of evidence for review in about a week, before it is published on our website. The committee will now adjourn and reset for the next witness.

Witnesses withdrew.