



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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INQUIRY INTO DEVELOPING QUEENSLAND'S RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH GREY NOMAD TOURISM

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

FRIDAY, 20 AUGUST 2010

Brisbane

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Committee met at 8.33 am

CHAIR: I welcome everybody to this morning's hearing. I call this public hearing of the Economic Development Committee to order. I start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land upon which this hearing is assembled and the custodians of the sacred lands of our state.

The committee is conducting this hearing pursuant to the resolution of the Queensland Legislative Assembly of April 2009 that appointed it. This resolution requires the committee to monitor and report on issues in the policy areas of employment, infrastructure, transport, trade, industry development, agriculture and tourism. Today's hearing is to assist us with our inquiry into developing Queensland's rural and regional communities through grey nomad tourism.

The committee is considering such issues as the infrastructure requirements for grey nomads, the marketing and promotion of Queensland to potential grey nomad visitors, the role of government in facilitating grey nomad tourism in Queensland, and the utilisation of grey nomad skills and labour in rural and regional Queensland. The committee's hearing today is to stimulate debate and allow the committee to consider views put forward by interested groups and individuals.

My name is Evan Moorhead, and I am the chair of the committee. I would like to introduce the other members of the committee here today: Mrs Rosemary Menkens, the deputy chair and member for Burdekin; Ms Tracy Davis, the member for Aspley; Mrs Betty Kiernan, the member for Mount Isa; and Ms Jan Jarratt, the member for Whitsunday. We have apologies today from Mr Shane Knuth, the member for Dalrymple, and Mr Jason O'Brien, the member for Cook. We also have apologies from a number of other members, mayors and other officials who were invited to attend as observers. I ask that the list be incorporated into the record of today's proceedings.

APOLOGIES

Ms Barbara Stone MP, member for Springwood

Mr Nick Behrens, General Manager—Policy, Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Mr Kym Leech, No Boundaries

Ms Carolyn Knudsen, Manager Tourism Arts Culture, South Burnett Regional Council

Mr Carl Manton, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Goondiwindi Regional Council

Ms Carol Lapworth, Queensland representative, Auswide Motorhome Club Inc.

Mr Richard Williams, Chair, Volunteering Queensland

Mr Phil Brumley, General Manager, Governance and Community Services, Central Highlands Regional Council

Ms Jo Evans, TerrEstrial Information Centre Manager, Etheridge Shire Council

Mayor Ray Brown, Dalby Regional Council

Mr Mike Horan MP, member for Toowoomba South

Mr Alan Brown, Ipswich City Council

Ms Liz Cunningham MP, member for Gladstone

Mayor Peter Taylor, Toowoomba Regional Council

Mr Howard Hobbs MP, member for Warrego

Hon. Stephen Robertson MP, Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade

Mr Ray Stevens MP, member for Mermaid Beach

Hon. Karen Struthers MP, Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women

Ms Vicky Darling MP, member for Sandgate

Ms Barbara Stone MP, member for Springwood

Mayor Bill Shannon, Cassowary Coast Regional Council

Ms Lindy Nelson-Carr MP, member for Mundingburra

Cr Lyn McLaughlin, Mayor, Burdekin Shire Council

Mr Peter Dowling MP, member for Redlands

Mr Mark Ryan MP, member for Morayfield

Mayor Peter Taylor, Toowoomba Regional Council

Ms Ros Bates MP, member for Mudgeeraba

Mr Evereld Compton, National Seniors Australia

Mr Tim Nicholls MP, member for Clayfield

Mr John-Paul Langbroek MP, Leader of the Opposition and member for Surfers Paradise

Mr Curtis Pitt MP, member for Mulgrave

Mr Ray Hopper MP, member for Condamine

CHAIR: The proceedings today are lawful proceedings of the parliament and subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing orders. As such, I remind all visitors that any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded in accordance with standing order 206. Before proceeding to our first group of witnesses, on behalf of the committee I would like to respond to some concerns expressed about the committee's decision to accept and table a further submission from Caravanning Queensland.

The committee’s hearing today is an opportunity for the committee to seek further information on submissions to the inquiry. This hearing is a fact-finding process rather than a process for determining disputes between industry stakeholders. Caravanning Queensland wrote to the committee advising that they wished to provide the committee’s hearing with further material at the hearing. The committee was concerned to ensure that other witnesses were not caught by surprise but were aware of the CQ material prior to giving evidence. The committee insisted that any new material should be provided in writing so that other witnesses had fair warning and an opportunity to respond.

The committee understands that there are some strongly held views on grey nomad tourism. However, the committee is only concerned to ensure that it can receive as much relevant information as possible before considering how the government can best support grey nomad tourism. The committee has resolved that this statement be published and distributed to persons who have raised concerns with the committee. That being said, we will move on to our first group of witnesses from local government.

Witnesses will have been provided with guidelines for witnesses appearing before parliamentary committees adopted by the Legislative Assembly. Have the witnesses had a chance to read those guidelines? For the *Hansard* record, I note that all witnesses have read the guidelines. Under the guidelines, you may object to answering any questions put to you on the grounds that the question is personal and not relevant or that the answer may incriminate you. The committee will not require you to take an oath or affirmation. However, we expect our witnesses will respect the solemnity of the proceedings.

It is our intention to keep to the times on the hearing program. We will finish at 3.30 pm, if not before. To assist us in keeping to the program, please keep your answers succinct. You do have the option of taking questions on notice if you do not have the material required in front of you. If you do so, we ask that you provide those answers to the committee by 30 August 2010. I ask our witnesses to state their names and positions for the record.

BURGESS, Mr Alan, Manager, Economic Development Group, Redland City Council

HINE, Mr John, Economic Development Officer, Blackall-Tambo Regional Council

HOFFMAN, Mr Greg, Director, Policy and Representation, Local Government Association of Queensland

NORMAN, Ms Beth, Executive Officer/Project Coordinator, Local Government Association of Queensland

PITT, Mr Mark, Chief Executive Officer, North Burnett Regional Council

SEARLE, Ms Naomi, Manager of Economic Development, Bundaberg Regional Council

WOODHOUSE, Cr Paul, Mayor, McKinlay Shire Council

CHAIR: We might start by providing each of the submitters a chance to make a two-minute statement to cover any new material you want to raise or highlight any salient points from your submissions. We will begin with Mr Hoffman.

Mr Hoffman: Chair, the submission of the association addresses the infrastructure aspect of the committee’s terms of reference and relates in particular to the policy position of the federal government in the changeover from analog to digital television. The submission identifies that across Queensland there are some 150-plus television retransmission facilities operated by local government. This occurs where terrestrial and broadcaster provided services do not provide coverage to many of the small and remote townships across the state. Local government has provided this facility for a number of years.

The policy of the federal government is that, in the changeover from analog to digital television transmission, a number of commercial broadcasters will take responsibility for a few sites—in the order of about 30—but the other sites will in fact be covered by a new satellite provided service. Councils are not, by the policy, to be involved in this process. It is a direct-to-home service, and the relationship in terms of the changeover is one between the federal government and homeowners or commercial businesses.

The federal government policy is in fact actively discouraging local governments from continuing to play a role in rebroadcasting. At this stage the federal government has not indicated that it would prevent that from occurring but certainly it would not provide any financial support for a changeover of retransmission if councils choose to continue to do so. In fact, if councils choose to do that, the Commonwealth will walk away from the provision of subsidies to individual homeowners and commercial operators in terms of the changeover implications—that is, if they do not use the direct-to-home satellite transmission.

What is of concern to us and its implications for tourism in general is that the retransmission facility is the simplest from the point of view of the television consumer or user. You simply need a normal antenna pointed to a retransmission tower and you have your television service. In the event of the closure of those retransmission facilities, every home and, dare I say, every caravan or every motorhome will need its own satellite-receiving facility and will, where it chooses, have to locate the satellite to watch the television broadcast off satellite. The implications of this are many and varied. The concern we have is that for townships in these remote areas the current arrangement is the simplest and the most convenient for most people wishing to watch television in those areas. The same applies to travellers. There are implications in having to equip caravans, motorhomes and the like with satellite-receiving facilities. Admittedly in time the marketplace could well deal with that. However, it is simply not the most convenient of approaches.

I also add that there is no subsidy provided by the Commonwealth government to help the operators of caravan parks, motorhomes and the like—many of which are run by local government—with any subsidy to make the changeover. They as commercial operators are expected to bear the full cost—a cost that will be much greater than if they were in fact doing it off a retransmission facility provided by a local government. So it is a policy issue of the federal government that is at the heart of our concern.

CHAIR: Thank you. Mayor Woodhouse?

Mayor Woodhouse: In addition to our brief submission, I would like to add that we are relative newcomers to the world of tourism, having just opened our tourism facility late last year. It was opened by the Premier. Insofar as that, we are relative latecomers. However, we are in the position now where we can assess what the needs of tourism are for us as a new entity. We are in a unique position. We do not have the maturity of Blackall and Barcaldine, who have been down the tourism track very well for a number of years. Having said that, we are now also experiencing a number of grey nomad tourists who are coming through wanting to know what projects are happening in town and whether they can add any skills or provide assistance to them. I also add that Julia Creek is one of the centres where the Queensland government has a Corrective Services work camp. Of course, the work camp takes the place of a lot of voluntary work around the community.

The McKinlay shire has a very high volunteer rate. It is around 30 per cent of a population of about 1,100, which is extraordinarily high, and it is something we can be proud of. However, we are well aware that we are also going to face some very acute skills shortages over the coming years. Therefore, the question for us, as a rural and remote community, is how we actually match the opportunities provided by grey nomad tourism to the skills shortage which is surely going to hit us in the areas of engineering, accounting and skilled plant hire and operators. There is going to be a great gap. The Australian Bureau of Statistics is projecting there will be 6.4 million people aged between 65 and 84 by 2056. We are all happy to use these outward time frames; however, it is a serious pointer for us insofar as remote communities like Julia Creek are going to experience some very acute skills shortages. We are happy to work with whatever the Economic Development Committee determines insofar as even further investigating where we can actually model best practice in a rural and remote community as well. I would just like to offer that.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mayor Woodhouse. We appreciate you making your way down here today. Mr Hine, would you like to make a comment?

Mr Hine: Thanks very much. A key issue for us is developing new tourism product for people to come and spend an extra night or two. The thing that continually crops up is the cost and availability of public liability insurance. One local operator claims that half of the cost of people using his attraction is public liability insurance, but that is second-hand information, I have to add. Public liability insurance is an ongoing issue. One suggestion is that we can somehow link a new tourist product under the council umbrella and therefore use the council liability, but that then opens up a risk issue for the council.

Another issue is the caravan park policy. There really is a need for more bush camping type facilities. I would agree with the Caravan Parks Association about the impact on truck stops, which is a real issue. I would also agree with the caravan association about the need for consistent local regulations.

Can I take up a point made by the mayor of the McKinlay shire. I had a meeting yesterday with people from TAFE Open Learning. Currently, the TAFE budget is aimed at people getting certificate IVs and above, which for most of Queensland is very relevant. However, work done by the AgriFood skills council shows that much of Western Queensland and similar regions elsewhere in Australia do not need that kind of high-level certificate so shorter courses are more relevant. However, the TAFE system has no budget for that so you have to charge commercial prices. We will be writing to the Minister for Education and Training on that. So that skills issue is really a critical one. While the current TAFE policy is appropriate for 99 per cent of the Queensland population, it may not be appropriate for Western Queensland.

CHAIR: Okay. Mr Pitt, thank you for joining us. Have you had an opportunity to read the witness guidelines?

Mr Pitt: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you have an opening two-minute statement for the committee?

Mr Pitt: Thank you. First of all, I apologise for arriving late. I forget sometimes the Brisbane traffic and time frames. I am the chief executive officer of the North Burnett Regional Council.

My mayor and councillors have asked me to express our gratitude and thanks to the committee for looking into this matter. Tourism, and particularly grey nomad tourism, is of significant interest to us and all of our communities. One of the points I was going to talk about in my introduction, and it will support the previous speaker, is the skills matrix and the skills services that are being offered through grey nomads as they come through.

Our council has embarked on a project which we are about to open in October—the RM Williams educational and bush learning centre. Certainly, a pivotal part of the sustainability and economic opportunity of that is actually tapping into the grey nomad market for that volunteer experience. I know that other councils and other sectors have done that very well, and we are starting to collect and learn from what other people have done. Certainly there is that skills issue. In return for offering that transfer of knowledge from the grey nomad, there is the actual tapping them in, either through a short course type approach or some sort of mentoring system. We are particularly looking at quite a heavy Indigenous component with that centre, so it would be an excellent opportunity to foster those sorts of skills.

The other aspect which we mentioned in our submission is services. Sometimes the travelling public are concerned with telecommunications. I realise that this is not necessarily a state issue, but the gap between the centres can be not so much a deterrent but it can cause discomfort for the grey nomad travellers as well as other travellers in terms of safety and that feeling of security. There is then a flow-on effect to health services—that if they get there and they need prescriptions or they need some form of health services then those services are available for them.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Pitt. Ms Searle?

Ms Searle: The Bundaberg Regional Council recognises the importance of grey nomad tourism to both regional and rural areas in Queensland. Last year, the caravan and camping accommodation sector rose three per cent compared to the last year in the Bundaberg region. I recognise the contribution and summary and statements that the other witnesses have made and I want to reiterate a couple of those points.

It is our observation that most of the infrastructure requirements of grey nomads really revolve around three main areas—roadways, waste disposal and signage. The council already commits a large amount of funds towards these areas, but we do face increasing financial constraints. We are also facing increasing pressure from grey nomads to provide more recreational public dumping points at regional gateways, public parks and transit stops, as well as additional welcome signage and directional signage. However, these financial constraints are really limiting our ability to provide this.

The council owns and operates holiday parks and other tourist facilities within the Bundaberg region. However, one of the biggest issues that we face is unauthorised stays on public and sometimes private land throughout Queensland, more so in the Bundaberg region specifically, by grey nomads and other users. Our major concerns about endorsing any sorts of stays on public and private land revolve around sewage and greywater disposal, rubbish disposal, toilet facilities, risk management, public safety and security, fire control and safety, and the commercial viability of existing commercial activities.

We also believe that a greater opportunity exists for collaboration between governments to market to this area, and we would welcome any sort of initiative within this area. Once again, I would reiterate the importance of the skills shortage in regional and rural areas and the important fact that grey nomads can assist in this area. We recognise the grey nomad teacher employment strategy; however, we wonder whether this can be increased and expanded into other areas such as social services, nursing and other human service areas.

CHAIR: Thank you. We might move into committee questions and I will start. I think most witnesses have identified some of the infrastructure needs that there are for grey nomads. I suppose one of the key questions I am trying to get my head around is: if they are not being provided, why isn't there a commercial imperative to provide them, either through a council business unit or a private provider? If there is a significant need, why aren't those needs being met? Should they be met by the private sector, or should they be met by councils and the state government, or should they be met by the government? This is what I do not understand. Bundaberg is quite an interesting example because the council owns most of the caravan parks and holiday parks. Why aren't we catering for some of those needs for the lower end of the motorhome market who just want basic products?

Ms Searle: I guess because we operate commercial business units of council and local governments have increasing pressures on finances. The ability to deliver infrastructure across the region, not just for the ratepayers but also for the tourists, is becoming increasingly important. However, for our commercial operations to remain viable to be able to provide funds to provide the infrastructure for our ratepayers, we require the grey nomads to use our existing facilities. Providing those facilities outside of those commercial areas is financially unviable for council.

Mr Hine: There are a number of issues that I see, in that many small business people lack the skills to manage a bigger business. Many of the small businesses have fairly small retained earnings, because the capacity and the willingness of grey nomads to pay limits their capacity to have sufficient retained earnings to invest. Also, certainly in Western Queensland, building costs are very, very high.

Mayor Woodhouse: From our point of view, we are negotiating a withdrawal process insofar as our ownership of the caravan park infrastructure goes. We are developing the caravan park in sync with an increase in tourist numbers, insofar as we have developed to a stage where we can actually withdraw from Brisbane

and create a commercial opportunity for a private investor. We understand that, given the variances in seasonal tourism rates, any commercial operator cannot come in straight off the grass and put this investment in place, so we are doing that.

We are also finding, even at a limited stage, that a lot of the motorhome owners are seeking a different experience rather than the average caravan park which demands the infrastructure. A lot of the motorhome owners are choosing the riverine or creek bank experiences we are providing and a lot of them are going down there. They come into town wanting to stay for the one night and they end up staying, in one case, for five weeks; those people are currently still there.

We are finding that there are different experiences that the industry demands, but we are also very aware of the fact that there is a commercial opportunity for a private investor down the track, as long as we do the commercial infrastructure—the costly business—upfront and do a negotiated withdrawal process. We are also doing that in conjunction with the local traditional owner group, the Mitakoodi, and they are very confident with that. It is a multifaceted approach as far as we are concerned, but we see a private opportunity.

Mr Hoffman: I would add that the television retransmission services that councils undertake are usually absorbed within council’s rating structures and the costs are recovered through property owners. Insofar as caravan parks and motorhomes are owned by commercial operators, then they through their rating costs are contributing to the costs of the television rebroadcast.

In addition to television, the retransmission facilities also transmit radio, so that provides not just the entertainment that perhaps television provides but also the necessary news and information which is very important to travellers in relation to weather and road conditions. It is not just an entertainment service; it is a pretty important information service. Our submission is simply saying that we would want to see the federal government’s policy being a little more flexible and a little more sympathetic to the circumstances of the many and varied communities that are involved here—in that it may be a better option for a retransmission. So a Commonwealth policy which simply says, ‘We are not interested in supporting the continuation of retransmission,’ perhaps needs to be changed.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mrs MENKENS: When it comes to grey nomad tourism, I believe that councils are totally at the forefront but there is a very, very wide variance naturally across every area. Even today, we are looking at a comparison of coastal councils and far western councils. As councils, you provide a lot of services for free, such as the dump points, power and water, and in different variances. I am interested in your comments on the benefits that you believe the community gets from this. In some communities, some community members are a little bit concerned about ratepayers’ costs going out and wondering what they get back for it. I would be very interested in your comments on what benefits you believe the council and the community are receiving.

Mayor Woodhouse: Again, in our case it is in its infancy. There is an expectation by the community that we had to get on with tourism, so that is another factor. The community itself is prepared to support our entry into tourism for probably a number of years while it is being developed and, as such, is willing to accept that there are going to be some development costs in developing that industry in conjunction with reasonable processes like the Overlander’s Way, the central highway and the rest of the tourism products that have been developed.

In its early stages there was an estimation by some who make up a de facto chamber of commerce that last year the average tourist left behind \$125 per person per day, which was a significant start for the likes of Julia Creek. As far as that person who has now stayed five weeks and just about bought the butcher shop out, there are significant benefits for the town as well. I am not sure we can measure those in terms of a financial benefit but perhaps we can in terms of a residual benefit to the community, because that person is now offering their talent in their area to the community as well. So they are filling a position which would have otherwise not been filled.

Mrs KIERNAN: I have a follow-on question for Mayor Woodhouse, and it is probably directed to all the councils. I am Betty Kiernan, the member for Mount Isa—a big part of the world. My question relates to the distances between centres. I notice when I get around on the roads in my electorate that caravanners as well as motorhome people are choosing to park off the road or choosing to park in rest areas designed for trucks. We have what we call the ‘main roads caravan park’ which is fairly substantial between Mount Isa and Cloncurry. During the winter months that facility is just chock-a-block. It almost needs a parking attendant for the number of people who want to stay there. That always causes angst with local authorities in respect of people parking in areas that are not really designed for caravanners or for motorhomes. With the distances between communities, I like the idea of embracing tourism. Obviously with that comes an impact on infrastructure, but in respect of people parking outside of areas what is council’s feelings on that?

Mayor Woodhouse: That is probably one of the negative aspects insofar as a lot of these truck stops were set up for a particular purpose and that is for driver fatigue. For one reason or another—mainly, I guess, to do with where they find themselves at a certain time of day, the cost of the next caravan park, the cost of the next community or for reasons of security—we find that these truck stops get filled up

towards the end of the afternoon by caravanners and motorhomes. There is a significant cost to the government in that case insofar as local governments are the service providers who clean these facilities and who do the gardening and the landscaping.

That is probably one of the negative ones, but I am not too sure how we would solve that one either. It is a really difficult one. We also know that every time someone goes missing along the highway our caravan parks get full, because nobody has the security in those truck stops anymore, or they feel less secure in those truck stops than they do in a community in a caravan park. I take the point. A lot of motorhomes are very self-sufficient now and very high class. Some of them are a lot better than my young son's accommodation that we have given him lately. When you walk inside them there is everything bar a pool room. They are self-sustaining, but they are a burden for one reason or another on the traditional reason why driver fatigue stops were established. I know that it is creating a little bit of angst between the users of the road as well—the heavy vehicle drivers themselves and the caravanners, which is probably not a healthy environment on the roads.

CHAIR: Mr Burgess, have you had a chance to read the witness guidelines?

Mr Burgess: No, I have not, sorry.

CHAIR: Can you have a quick read of that? We will go to the next question and then I will have a question for you.

Ms DAVIS: My interest is in the use of showgrounds by councils when there is overflow with commercial operators. I would be interested to know how many councils use showgrounds for that overflow. How are they maintained? What facilities or services would be offered to those who choose to use the showgrounds? Is there a time limit that might be placed on grey nomads or other drive tourists when those showgrounds are open?

Mr Hine: The Blackall showgrounds are used as an overflow and are maintained by the council. They use the toilet facilities that are there for the show people, but there is an ongoing tension between the council and the commercial caravan park owner over the use of the showgrounds and the use of a very pleasant green area by the river. The conundrum which council faces is that, yes, we acknowledge the competition with the commercial operator, particularly in the shoulder season. The other point is that the people staying at the showgrounds and by the riverbank use the businesses in the main street. So there is a real crunch there. As a part-time grey nomad, my preference is to stay by the riverbank in my fully self-contained vehicle.

Mr Pitt: In answering that, I will go back to your earlier question as well about the commercial imperative. It is interesting: we have an amalgum. In one of our communities the local show society has set itself up as a de facto grey nomad helper, if I can put it like that, and for a small donation it allows people to stay on the showgrounds, which is technically still council owned and operated. We are trying to sort out those wonderful local community issues such as leases, planning and things like that. We have commercial operators, and council owns a significant number of caravan parks within our area.

With regard to the commercial imperative, last financial year for this budget we did a review of our caravan park operations and noted that we were running at a significant loss. We had been getting complaints from commercial operators that our fees were too cheap as well as a range of issues like that which kept the travelling tourists very happy as well as those who stay in the area for three months. In reviewing the fees, we moved them up to a very base minimal commercial rate this year in looking to have the parks break even. Whilst we have received a bit of feedback from the travelling public such as, 'We stay here three months and we may not do that now because the fees have gone up,' in keeping the fees artificially low council has become the de facto social housing provider in its caravan park. Sometimes with the grey nomad issue you cannot easily separate the impact of what you do with it from the other amalgum of issues that we face in rural areas. The flow-on effect is that when you look at a number of our social housing programs there are no waiting lists because they are all in the caravan parks paying \$60 a week, or they were. There is a range of impacts that flow from things you do with the tourism industry.

Regarding the community benefit, the local businesses are very supportive of the nomads. Five of our six towns are RV friendly, and there is strong community support for the economic benefit that they bring.

Ms Searle: The Bundaberg Regional Council utilises showgrounds when events are held for the overflow of caravanning and RVs. However, we recognise the commercial viability of other tourist operations and holiday park or caravan park facilities. They are very important small businesses to our region. They contribute to our local economy. They employ people. They encourage visitors to our region. They promote local attractions. They also invest capital and cash flow into our regional economies. We do not see the provision of overflow parking and overnight stay as a viable option, not only as operators of holiday parks but also for the other commercial operators within the region.

CHAIR: Mr Burgess, have you had a chance to read those guidelines?

Mr Burgess: Yes, I have.

CHAIR: Your submission differs greatly from some of the other councils. I think one reason for that is that you are the only relatively urban council that has made a submission. The Redland City Council submission talks about discouraging dump points because they encourage illegal staying in rest areas and parking spots. Can you give us some more information about that? Do you have any examples? How else do you think we can attract grey nomads and deal with those issues that you raise?

Mr Burgess: I guess the dump point is one that is fairly specific to us in that council-run caravan parks are mostly on North Stradbroke Island. We have six caravan parks on North Stradbroke Island plus two beach camping areas. I think for the grey nomads the issue of dumping is more a mainland one. Unfortunately, we do not get enough grey nomads across to North Stradbroke Island as much as we would like to have them, but the issue we have is that there are only a few caravan parks on the mainland side on Redland city. Therefore, we do get a little bit of camping in the park. We do not really want to encourage that. We do not have an active program of discouraging it, I would say, but we do not encourage it. Certainly we do not encourage anybody to stay more than one night in a non-caravan park area.

Again, we are not on the highway so we do not get those problems which have been discussed here of people pulling over on the side of the road and stopping and staying. People generally come to us as a destination. So for us the issue of the dumps should be done at the caravan parks, because we want to encourage people to go there rather than just stop where they know there is a dump and then use the dump. That is our main issue.

Ms JARRATT: To further explore these issues, it appears from the submissions we have read that there is almost a different set of local laws for every council area. There might be a good reason for that, because it is a bit circumstantial depending on whether you are an urban or a non-urban area. Mr Hoffman, perhaps you could address this. Is there any move in the LGAQ to bring a code of conduct or some commonality to the local laws when it comes to these issues of camping, caravanning and RV use in towns?

Mr Hoffman: I am not aware of any move. We have certainly not had a request of us in that regard. The approach normally taken to deal with something of this nature or any matter that is common to all councils is a model local law. The Department of Infrastructure and Planning through the Local Government Services division is the keeper of the keys on the model laws. Many councils either adopt the model laws or take them and with some modification apply them. This gives you a more consistent approach to the local laws in relation to those matters. If, by your question, you are implying that you are aware of very significant differences and that is posing problems, then it certainly would be worthwhile proposing to the department that it investigate the establishment or the creation of a model local law which would in time provide a basis for a more consistent approach, if that were seen as important.

Mrs MENKENS: A suggestion has been put to the committee that perhaps we should also be looking at the value of the resources of those particular regions and the value of the resources that are being used up by tourists. By resources I would be looking at fishing stocks and numbers of people using swimming pools. Maybe it might be an area where there are very severe water restrictions. Would you have any comments to make on that? Is there a situation where the grey nomads or the tourists are actually being asked to contribute to the provision of these resources?

Mr Burgess: It is about balance. I understand what you are saying about there being an impact. Every person who comes or goes has an impact. I think the economic benefits generally outweigh those impacts, particularly in our case of North Stradbroke Island. I think North Stradbroke Island will become an area that is solely reliant on tourism for its income. At the moment there is a little bit of mining but the state government is closing that. So it will have to transition to a tourism economy.

There are lots of natural attractions. When it becomes a national park the tourist will pay to go in there. They will pay for the upkeep and the maintenance of the environment. In many respects, it is a positive way to go. Certainly from an awareness point of view, North Stradbroke Island is one of the best places for the land based watching of whales. It seems a little irrelevant, but it is a way of highlighting the environmental value of whales and the environment. People will come to see those sorts of things and will have minimal impact on the environment.

Mayor Woodhouse: From our perspective, we have a population density of one person per four hectares. The impact of tourists is very minimal. We can manage the likes of the waterholes. We find tourists go out to them and pull out their chairs and set-up a table and sit under the stars and perhaps if they are lucky enough catch one or two fish. The local waterholes are well managed by the locals themselves. They will acknowledge if tourism has an impact on those waterholes. We have set up some tourist routes which take in some safe fishing waterholes and where you are likely to catch a real live fish and not a plastic one that we can put back in later on. We see minimal impact at this point of time. In so far as the infrastructure in town goes, we welcome any added pressure on the likes of our swimming pools. They are used on a fee basis anyway.

Mr Hine: On the issue of swimming pools, the artesian spa at the Blackall pool is a major attraction in its own right. Some people actually come to Blackall for up to two months in the winter. That is not only a major revenue contributor to the swimming pool but to the rest of town as well.

Mr Hoffman: A similar facility exists at Mitchell for the Maranoa Regional Council. It is very popular. But they are fee for service. Where there is infrastructure of substance and people are using it in numbers you would start to get a critical mass. The economics look much better to build and support them when there are significant users.

Ms JARRATT: The benefit of the tourist factor of the grey nomad or travelling visitors is a really interesting one. As I see it, it is a two-way street. Obviously the travellers are after the experience of the area that they are going through and bodies like the councils are looking for an economic benefit from that. How do you enhance the benefits that each of you gain from it? There are two ways of increasing your benefit. One is to increase the length of stay that people have in an area—and thereby naturally they need to restock and spend some more money in your town or area—or to increase the yield, that being the amount of money they are spending. From what I am reading, the seniors in this travelling group either have a lower capacity to pay or an unwillingness to pay entry prices into tourist attractions that others of us might not even blink at.

I am wondering how you can actually grow the benefit? I am thinking of things like cultural tourism. I think a lot of travellers love to absorb themselves in the culture. That includes Indigenous culture. I know that overseas visitors are really keen to become involved in and see the Indigenous culture of Australia.

The other thing that occurs to me that could enhance this is farm stays—that is, the ability to stay in an area for an extended length of time and actually become involved in the local community or the primary production of the area. On the other side is how we develop the private investment in this area so that it is not a burden on the councils and so the outlay is being shared by the private community. I wonder whether you have any comments on that or any further ideas on how we can add value to what you are getting out of this tourism?

Ms Searle: Bundaberg Regional Council quite clearly sees a benefit in investing in tourism product within the region. We have recently constructed the \$7.5 million Hinkler Hall of Aviation interpretive facility. We recognise that interpretive facilities and experiential tourism is increasingly important within the tourism industry. The way we can most effectively disburse the costs of marketing and product development within the region is through collaboration with existing industry members and also within government through Tourism Queensland, regional tourism bodies and forming partnerships in producing product within the region.

Mr Hine: Getting back to farm stays, what we hear—whether it is real or not—is the issue around public liability insurance.

Ms DAVIS: The Queensland government made a submission and on page 10 it suggested that there is more research required on grey nomad tourism and the most effective way of doing this would be through collecting local data. How would you see this happening? How would you collect that data locally?

Mayor Woodhouse: Collection of the local data insofar as—

Ms DAVIS: Did you want me to clarify what I was saying?

Mayor Woodhouse: Yes.

Ms DAVIS: My understanding from the government submission was that it would look at local councils being the collectors of data on grey nomad tourism. How would you practically go about getting that information and giving that feedback?

Mayor Woodhouse: We are in the early development phase. I am very much interested in the potential of grey nomad tourism to replace a lot of our skill shortages which we are going to face in the future. What we would do is capture the data at the point of entry—that is, at the caravan parks, the motorhomes down by the creek and out in the sporting precinct. We would get a snapshot of the skills they have to offer, how long they are going to stay—we can determine that through the caravan park figures, but perhaps not for the ones down at the creek—how they actually see a change in lifestyle as being of benefit to them.

We could capture that data in a physical sense. We could do it electronically. I think the best way for us to do it at this point in time would be to go knocking on doors and saying, ‘Why did you come here? What skills do you have to offer? Why did you stay any longer than you thought you wanted to? Are you feeling sad to be away from home? Would you be able to live in a small community like this for perhaps six months at a time?’ For us those are the important aspects.

Mr Hoffman: The question prompted me to recall that some two years ago we signed an agreement with the centre for excellence in tourism at Griffith University which was a means by which a program that it has developed called ‘Pathways to tourism’ could be taken to local government. It is a day long program that provides information to councils as to how they can explore, identify and perhaps provide for tourism opportunities within their areas. A number of councils have in the past 12 months availed themselves of that program. We simply enable it. We do not provide it as an organisation. We use the facilities available through Griffith University.

That of itself provides a means by which communities—local governments in particular but perhaps more broadly communities—can become more familiar with what the opportunities might be, how they might leverage on local features or characteristics that could be expanded into tourism opportunities. That might be worth further examination on the part of the committee.

CHAIR: In rural and regional Queensland local government is often a major employer. During the amalgamation debates we were reminded of that many times. I was wondering whether as major employers councils have programs in place to employ grey nomads and whether you have flexible work models that allow you to employ people for six months of the year? Is that something that councils are working on as part of their workforce strategy?

Mayor Woodhouse: From our perspective, yes it is. We have to do that because, as I said, we know we are facing the wrong end of the gun. We have to develop those models now insofar as those models will work for us in the future. We are working on those. There could be a shared position—a six months turnaround. We may introduce flexibility in that area as well.

Mr Pitt: This is very much in the infancy stages for us. As I mentioned earlier, the RM Williams Centre is an area where we have identified that we can particularly use the skills of grey nomads. With the amalgamation we have ended up with quite a large number of staff across the region. As it is, I will not say that we are overserved, but we have adequate staff. Skilled based areas are quite a different issue. With the juggling and retraining of our current staff, it has not been imperative for us to do that. Now there could be an opportunity to identify a specific skill set that is needed.

Mr Hoffman: I do not think there are too many impediments to the employment arrangements that can be applied to engage people in tourism within communities. With the ageing of the population people are moving from full-time employment to part-time employment or for that matter to volunteering. It does create a pool or resource for productive use within the tourism sector. I guess the issue is the skills that enable people to be more effective. They bring goodwill, good intentions and enthusiasm, but skills might create the opportunity to provide a better experience for the tourist or the promotion of people with skills. That is another dimension of the promotion of tourism that could be looked at.

Mrs MENKENS: This may or may not be applicable to any of your areas. Are we missing out on grey nomad tourism in Indigenous communities? Are there opportunities there that are perhaps not being developed?

Mr Pitt: I am probably repeating myself, but that is a good point. As noted with the RM William Centre, the Indigenous component is very pivotal to it—that is, the traineeships and the opportunities that we can offer the Indigenous community and the partnership MOU the council has established with them. There is a flow-on effect. Hopefully we can utilise the grey nomads when it comes to skill sets. We can target the whole community but particularly the Indigenous community. An education strategy is going to be a component of it. Teaching skills is a really good point and a really strong component that needs to be developed.

Mayor Woodhouse: I will also elaborate on Ms Jarratt's earlier question because I think the two are related. We find ourselves in the position of having no Indigenous connection and actually having to engineer that connection ourselves at this point in time. We are involved in that at present. There are significant opportunities there.

The local group is more than keen. But if I can elaborate on Ms Jarratt's earlier question, insofar as connection back to rural properties and farm stays and the rest, as you can see by my arm it is quite a risky business being out on the—

Ms JARRATT: Was that a bull?

Mayor Woodhouse: No, it was a kangaroo actually.

CHAIR: I thought it might have been another councillor.

Mayor Woodhouse: Relations between the state and local government are often risky.

CHAIR: Not with your local member I hear.

Mayor Woodhouse: Inherently the business of being on a place is risky, so I think it is an exposure to the operations of a place for the old tourist. But we are finding significant numbers of backpackers coming out now and staying on places. So while it is not the grey nomads sector, it is the backpackers. They are taking the place, dare I say it, of long-term employment, which I do not think is a bad thing. They come out to have an experience, they come in, do the work and go. Apart from that, if they were not there then the average producer would try to do that work by themselves and risk the disruption of the family unit.

Ms JARRATT: It is great that that opportunity is not being overlooked. True, there is a bit of a skills drain from some of these areas. I guess volunteering is the other aspect that has been touched on this morning. I do not know whether you are aware, but there was a very recent announcement that Volunteering Queensland is now working in partnership with the government to set up a page on its main website for areas that have festivals in particular and events so that people travelling around on the circuit might well be able to assist in a volunteer capacity at some of these events and festivals. I think that is a really good start to setting up some sort of regular contact with volunteers. Most of the submissions have acknowledged the need to start to formalise a process. They have acknowledged that, yes, the volunteers bring some skills to the area but do not quite know how to tap into them, and perhaps that is one really good way of doing it. The other way that occurs to me is that the council's own website—and most councils have them these days—might have a section for volunteer positions that might be available either on a regular basis or on a periodic basis. I wonder whether any of you have such information on your websites.

Mr Burgess: We run fairly extensive programs for bushcare volunteers. We also encourage volunteers in our visitor information centres. Normally they are more local obviously than the visitors, but certainly the locals provide a vast resource of information about the area and are very useful in the visitor information centres.

Ms Searle: Certainly when we have major events in the regions such as the Childers Festival of Cultures and the Wide Bay Australia International Airshow we promote volunteering and have identified avenues to access grey nomads through websites.

Mr Hoffman: I cannot answer the question in terms of whether councils’ websites do this. Some may well. Through one of our business operations we support over half of the websites that councils have. We as an association can certainly take on board the promotion of an area in relation to the ability for people to register as a volunteer for that area. That might be one way of enabling that to occur. So I will take that on board.

CHAIR: Thank you. That is all the time we have allotted for local government witnesses. I thank you all for attending today. I must say that in the 18 months that our committee has been going we have been very appreciative of the involvement of local government. Every inquiry we have had local government has been a major submitter and contributor to our process. So thank you, particularly to those of you who have travelled some way to come here. We very much appreciate it. Thank you. We will now move on to our next witness, Caravanning Queensland.

BENSON, Mr Tony, Government Liaison Officer, Caravanning Queensland

CHAIR: Our next witness is Tony Benson from Caravanning Queensland. Mr Benson, you will have been provided with a copy of the guidelines for witnesses appearing before parliamentary committees adopted by the Legislative Assembly. Have you had an opportunity to read those guidelines?

Mr Benson: Yes, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: As I have said before, under those guidelines you may object to answering any questions put to you on the grounds the question is personal and not relevant or that the answer may incriminate you. We do not require an oath or affirmation, but we expect witnesses to respect the solemnity of the proceedings. If you do take the opportunity to take a question on notice, we would appreciate it if you could provide that answer to the committee by 30 August.

Mr Benson: Mr Chairman, I wish to declare before the committee that I have no affiliation, either personally or business wise, with any member of the committee at present.

CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Benson, would you like to provide the committee with a short opening statement of about two minutes?

Mr Benson: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. Firstly, thanks very much for this opportunity. Our association is very excited about this initiative. It is the first time that we have been consulted in a meaningful way concerning anything to do with tourism and the road based tourism sector in Queensland. As you would be aware, there is a view by some that there should be an alternative to commercial caravan parks for operators of recreational vehicles. Our association agrees, but a level playing field would be nice. The simple facts are that when a lobby group approaches a local government with a view to obtaining benefits for their members they are approaching and lobbying the regulating authority which is responsible for the regulation and administration of the local caravan parks. We see this as an issue of morality rather than an issue of competitive neutrality.

We ask you to consider two issues. The first is that we provide a service and we provide a function to tourism. The second issue is simply that our industry not only provides a service to tourism in Queensland but also provides a platform for almost all of the tourism promotion that occurs in order to make this sector of the tourism industry work throughout the state. I ask you to think for a moment: do you know of any other organisation that is so proactive and hands-on in Queensland when it comes to promotion and generation of such a service for road based tourism? So when you talk about the viability of our industry, you are not only talking about the viability of an industry that provides a service; you are also talking about the only major means of promotion of land based tourism in Queensland.

There is something else that has to be said, and that is this: any inappropriate use of crown land at this point in time under circumstances where direct detriment is caused to members of our association is something that cannot be allowed to continue. For any law to be successful it must be able to be enforced. Our association would like to see the universal adoption of an overflow policy by state government and would like to see it applied across the whole of the state under circumstances where it does not kill off parks but gets rid of the current constraints so that we can get on with the business of promoting tourism. At the present time this is simply not possible. Any further detriment to our member parks in Queensland is a direct detriment to grey tourism. I am now prepared to take questions.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Benson. Several of the submissions that the committee has received suggest that due to the self-contained nature of motorhomes grey nomads do not require all of the same services and facilities offered by caravan parks such as swimming pools and children's playgrounds. Is there a need for caravan park operators to alter their services and prices to meet the demand of grey nomad travellers?

Mr Benson: Mr Chairman, that is exactly what our industry is doing as we speak. There has been a lot of talk about the all-singing, all-dancing four- and five-star approach to caravan parks. The simple facts of life are it is a business of supply and demand to meet the needs of tourism. If you want to find jumping pillows and kiddies' playpens and climbing things and you-beaut swimming pools, take a drive up the coast. But I would certainly invite everyone to go west of the Great Dividing Range and start counting jumping pillows out there. I do not think you will be using too many fingers to get to the end of the exercise. It is supply and demand. I think the supplementary submission outlines the figures. We try to cater for everyone. You would no more build a five-star park in the main street of Blackall, which was mentioned before, than probably go to the moon.

CHAIR: But there seems to be an overwhelming amount of evidence that we have had about grey nomads wanting a very simple product. They do not necessarily want the same equipment as the more traditional caravan market; they simply want a bit of ground, a bit of space and somewhere to dump their waste. Are caravan park operators providing that option?

Mr Benson: Caravan park owners have tried to provide it, but the take-up rate has been something less than disappointing. I could take you to a park in Maryborough where there was a space made available for very cheap camping for a period of a couple of years with an almost zero take-up rate. It is not for lack of trying. However, to be fair and to be honest in response to your question, times have changed and are continuing to change. The notion of self-containment is good, but my understanding of the cold, hard facts of life are that to be self-contained a 20-litre snap-top bucket and a porta potty will probably see

you almost the way to qualification. That is fine. I am not knocking the term or the notion. But the cold, hard facts of life are that batteries run flat, potable water tanks run empty, blackwater tanks fill up, greywater tanks fill up and at some point in time, even with the best-laid plans of mice and men, some resort to modern-day facilities has to be made, whether it be to charge-up batteries, fill up potable water tanks or empty waste tanks.

The irony of the whole thing is that when you compare a commercial caravan park operation to what a self-contained grey nomad might need the facilities are there in the park in the first place. That is not to say that I am denigrating anyone who is a self-contained grey nomad, but the facts are that our operators—these are the facts of life—are paying very handsomely for the right to provide the facilities, and they are doing it under circumstances where they have been obliged to do it by regulation and law. The honest answer to your question is that it boils down to a matter of degree. It is supply and demand and we have to respond as best we can.

Ms DAVIS: I refer to annexure C of the supplementary submission that you made relating to land tax. Could you please explain to us how Queensland’s land tax impacts on caravan parks?

Mr Benson: To be honest, it is subjective. You cannot really condense it into 30 seconds but, broadly speaking, the arrangements are these—and this is a very broad outline: if a commercial park has a capacity for greater than 50 per cent permanent residency then they can seek an exemption from the provision of land tax. Not all parks have that capacity. Broadly speaking, we have three types of parks: we have a strictly tourist park, we have a mixed business park—which might be a combination of tourists and permanent RTA, or on-site van type accommodation—and it might be a three-way combination involving a component of manufactured homes. Generally, with a manufactured home park, where 100 per cent of the park is dedicated to that singular purpose of manufactured homes, they will be exempt from land tax. They will not be affected by it. The big problem comes when you get a park situated in a tourism belt, if you like—in close proximity to the coast. They are not going to have a permanent component greater than 50 per cent. So they are fair game for the land tax issue. That is when they have to start paying. That is all under review at the moment and that is another subject in itself, but it is another impost that has to be accounted for.

The big problem with the commercial parks industry is that they need large blocks of land to run a singular business. I call it a low-yield business. I do not even know whether the term qualifies or not but, in my mind, you need large acreage to run a single business. The penalty you pay for it is that the value of the land might just happen to become greater than what it is worth to run a caravan park. That is when you get a demise situation. Unfortunately—and I was going through this with our CEO within the last couple of days where we looked back through the history of the parks industry in Queensland—my CEO, who has been around since day dot as far as the industry is concerned, can think of only one park that has not succumbed to extinction through something other than development. There is no short answer to the question but I hope that has addressed what you are looking for.

Mrs KIERNAN: Firstly, thank you for this very comprehensive submission that you have put to us for consideration. I note that in part of your submission you mention that the occupancy rate for member parks across Queensland is approximately 44 per cent, with an annual across Australia of around 50 per cent. I come from an area where many of our parks, particularly in the resource communities such as Cloncurry and Mount Isa, are heavily impacted on by permanent residents. I thank my colleague for the question about the land tax. Many of our parks are converting to permanent because it has taken up the slack of housing, particularly in resource communities. There is a greater need for an overflow policy of some sort simply because tourists cannot get into the parks. So we need to be looking at different strategies within these communities. I am just wondering—and, again, you have presented a fairly comprehensive overflow policy—where you are at with that, particularly in relation to resource communities.

Mr Benson: Thanks very much for the opportunity to answer that, because that goes right to the heart of where I see this committee investigating. Our overflow policy is the start of a horse trade. That is as simply as I can put it. There is no formal process in Queensland that provides a machinery section for government, whether that be local or state, to take this up at the present time. The irony is that I can take to you places in Queensland now where overflow policies are working. One was mentioned earlier by the gentleman from the Blackall-Tambo council. Do you know the shame of that? The overflow arrangement in Blackall is illegal. Our park is a party to that agreement, but the minister has never approved a secondary purpose of use of the land. We have been screaming into the wilderness as an industry with our policies to try to get somebody to listen to the notion of overflow. It is not a hard issue. We could overhaul this industry and turn it around and be a you-beaut force to be reckoned with in terms of tourism with a little bit of smarts. I cannot put it any plainer than that. Our overflow is meant to be purely nothing more than the start of a horse trade to get a local agreement in place.

I heard another gentleman talk about litigation. I would like to think that a member park of our association who is doing the referral job for the local council, promoting local tourism and using a council facility or a community facility for the good of tourism, is doing it, one, legally, and, two, under circumstances where they are not going to get whacked with this big hammer called litigation if somebody should get hurt or injured or whatever on the complex. We have very good reason for having done what we have done. I could take you to Karumba—I could take you to any number of other places—where it is working informally.

Then there is the issue of when you refer someone. Not all our parks can accommodate all types of vehicles, and I am sure later in the day you will hear about big rigs and large combinations—that sort of thing. Our policy recognises that. We are the first one to put up our hand and say, ‘We can’t accommodate everyone who comes to our front gate.’ There has to be a degree of reasonableness with this whole issue. We do not want to be the sole provider. We do not want to see people not having the bush experience. For heaven’s sake, you have our independent camping policy before you. That is part of our industry. Caravanning Queensland has two heads: one head is called the Caravan Parks Association of Queensland; the other head is the Caravan Trade and Industry Association. They are the providers, they are the retailers, the sellers of RVs, if you like—caravans, motorhomes or whatever. We fly in formation. We would no more cut off the right hand to service the left hand than vice versa. So, yes, we have this thing in our head that we also agree with independent camping but, for heaven’s sake, not at the letterbox at the front of the caravan park. That is a moral issue.

I can take you to Nanango, which is a classic example. For years Tipperary Flat on the side of the highway sat there as a rest stop, if you like, for want of a better expression. After a couple of years of lobbying, the then council, which no longer exists, decided to put up a 20-hour placard and sign. That also happened to comply with a couple of clubs’ philosophies in relation to the matter at the time. The immorality of it is that that is located about 150 metres from the only two commercial parks in town. You do not have to be Einstein to work out that it has not done the parks any favours. Nanango is not the hub of the universe in terms of CBDs and business centres. We have people there trying to survive in business and that is probably a classic example of what I am talking about. It gets down to proximity and degrees.

Ms JARRATT: I might change the direction of the conversation just for a minute, although that was obviously very important. One of the issues that is coming through a lot of the submissions is the fact that there really is not a very reliable set of data around the grey nomad industry, for want of a better word. What does your association do to help collect that data and do you think there is a greater role that you could play in that regard?

Mr Benson: I think that is one of the great shames of it. I have alluded to the fact that the data is unreliable. I will say that here again now and put it on the record. I have ABS reports here—I am sure everyone in the room has read them at different times—but when they do not include parks with fewer than 40 powered sites, without looking up the figures that is missing nearly 22 per cent of our parks industry in Queensland. That is the degree of inaccuracy.

Statistics can be made to tell any story you want to be told. In terms of the business of our parks, you have to remember that when we talk to our parks, even if we have a divisional meeting, we might have 20 parks represented in one room. They might join in this fraternal like-minded environment of being fellow parkies and working with each other for the good of the park business in that region but, at the end of the day, they are competitors. So for us to get statistics in a meaningful way, we have to be a little bit obtuse about the way we do it. I do not mean underhanded; I mean that we have to be a bit respectful and do it in a way where people can have some degree of anonymity. As I said in the submission material, you have to be mindful of the value of the park. Generally, when referring to the value of the park you are talking about someone’s retirement.

I think there is an absolute desperate need for reliable statistical data. I think that is central to this whole process. I will put my hand on heart now and say that our industry would bend over backwards to be a participant in that process if we thought for one second that it could help the industry in Queensland. Our industry is about tourism first and caravan parks second. Without tourism, we do not exist. We are unashamedly tourism ambassadors and we will scream that to the world.

CHAIR: I want to follow on from one of your points about competition. There has been a lot of debate and submissions about this competition between councils and showgrounds versus caravan parks. But it seems to me that a lot of the competitors for caravan parks are not necessarily councils and showgrounds but they are the neighbouring town or they are the local camping area. We keep getting this notion of either/or, whereas there are actually a whole lot of competitors with caravan parks, not just showgrounds. Is that the case? In that environment, do you think showgrounds are the only source of competition for caravan parks?

Mr Benson: The first part of the answer to that question is that we have recognised three broad scenarios. Let us for a moment talk about, say, a semirural environment. Some towns have no caravan parks but a showground. Other towns might have a showground but no caravan park and the lucky one down the road might have both—they might have a caravan park and a showground. We have tried to build our policies around those contingencies. DERM has a policy in relation to the showgrounds. It was mentioned in somebody else’s submission that we might have had a hand in DERM policy in relation to the showgrounds. Yes, we did. I made a submission to DERM because I thought they had made a mistake. Their first showground policy limited it to a stay of three days. We have made a submission to DERM to extend it to seven days so that people would not automatically hook up to this point of eviction and then leave town. So let me plead guilty to that little anomaly before I move on.

Getting back to the question, our policy tries to address that. If a town has a community facility like a sports oval or a showground but no commercial caravan park that is trying to stay in existence in the commercial world, we are quite happy to turn and walk away, which is what we do now. A classic example close to Brisbane is Samford. There is wholesale camping in the showground at Samford. We would be

hypocrites as an industry to run the flag up the pole and start moaning about Samford. There is no caravan park out there. It is providing a service. It is only where you get areas of direct conflict in the use of those facilities—inappropriately, I stress—and in those circumstances where it has a damaging effect. That is where it becomes an issue for us, because it is bread-and-butter stuff that we are talking about.

Ms DAVIS: Thank you. You acknowledged earlier that some of your member parks are not able to take particular types of tourists as they come through. I am interested to know whether those member caravan parks offer services to those tourists who do not actually stay within their bounds? Do they provide fee-for-service for water or for dumping?

Mr Benson: We will go back to Blackall again for that. That seems to be the flavour of the day. In Blackall—and I am not familiar with the current policy, although I would be extremely surprised if this has changed—the policy on the part of the park operators is that if that park is full and they engage the overflow procedure, which is documented with the local council, then they give people a voucher to put on the dashboard so that they can go around to the showgrounds, park there, plug into power, have their hot and cold showers and all that type of thing. They were also given one other thing. They were given an invite to come back to the park at what is loosely called 'beer o'clock' in the outback for the singsong, the bush poetry, the billy tea and damper—whatever happens to be going on that night. Were they being treated inclusively? Yes.

That particular park is not a big park. It does not take a long time to fill that park. If the owners of that park were sitting here now they would tell you the exact same story. There is an inclusive approach to that. If they get something that is too big or unwieldy or they are full, yes, they will flick them over to the showgrounds as per the overflow agreement, but that does not mean those people become social lepers to the park operators; they are quite welcome to come back and be an inclusive part of the evening's events.

Ms DAVIS: You spoke of some instances where there might be a caravan park and no showgrounds or vice versa. In the instance where there is only a caravan park, in the main do your members offer that service to tourists going through if their vehicles are not compatible with the size of the park?

Mr Benson: Just so I am sure of the question, do you mean in terms of facilities like dump points or whatever?

Ms DAVIS: Yes.

Mr Benson: There would be some that do, and I am certainly aware of others that do not. When you look at a water bill that I got for a medium sized park on the Sunshine Coast yesterday afternoon for \$46,000 for a six-month period where, ironically, he is almost paying more for the privilege of putting waste to the sewerage than drawing potable water from the reticulated system, then things like volumes of waste going through dump points and potable water taps located next to them for cleaning down and sanitation purposes take on a whole new shape. Turning on a tap on the Sunshine Coast might cost you X value—whatever dollar value you want to put on it—but if you go, for example, to Warwick—what is the current capacity of Leslie Dam? I would imagine it would be nine per cent or 10 per cent. Would the caravans parks in Warwick, say, be prepared to offer a free service?

Ms DAVIS: I did not suggest at any time that it would be offered for free. I asked whether your members might offer those services as a commercial opportunity.

Mr Benson: Sorry, my apologies. I misunderstood. Yes, I am aware of some that do and, to be totally honest in my answer, I am aware of some that do not.

Ms JARRATT: Again, I take a different direction. You mentioned in your submission that you do not believe that Tourism Queensland does an adequate job of promoting grey nomad tourism. What more do you think it could do or should do to assist the industry?

Mr Benson: Anything that we can talk them into doing. I am in the process of organising a film shoot for October of this year. It is going to put a fairly significant part of Queensland on national television. That is part of our strategy. We will require government assistance for that—that will also involve Tourism Queensland—which I am happy to announce I am getting at this very moment. Even in a perfect world it would not be enough. Tourism is something that you just keep plugging away at. I would love to give you a wholesome, rounded-off answer. Whatever it is that we have at the moment, in my opinion, is not enough. I think we can do a lot better than we are doing.

Mrs KIERNAN: It is probably a follow-up to a question asked by Ms Jarratt earlier about Tourism Queensland announcing starting a database of festivals. How do you feel your members would react to that? Obviously, if these festivals are on at various times that would attract people into the communities so that they can contribute through volunteering at that festival. How do you feel that would go over with your members, who are the caravan park owners?

Mr Benson: I think that is great. We are doing that now but in a slightly different way, if you like. When we go to Southern Downs we time it to correspond closely with things like Jumpers and Jazz festival or Apple and Grape Harvest Festival. Maryborough recently was a follow-on from the street market and the park festival. We are doing it now, but it would be a welcome initiative. We certainly would welcome something like that because anything we can build into a program of promotion would be good.

Mrs KIERNAN: Many of the councils—and I will cite the McKinlay shire, and Mayor Woodhouse is with us today. Their major event is the Dirt and Dust Festival and people come into town for it. In relation to that linkage of attracting people into the parks, do you think special rates during those peak periods would be required?

Mr Benson: In a situation where you are going to attract a big crowd to, if you like, a one-off or an annual event, a couple of things need to be addressed. Firstly, in a lot of those circumstances our parks do not have the capacity to cater for all the people who are going to arrive. I think that has to be acknowledged for a start. Under those circumstances our mind goes to overflow. A classic example is the Warwick Rodeo. Ironically, the management of that overflow arrangement during that very busy, hectic time for that city is principally organised by one of our parks. In terms of people not being able to fit into a caravan park during such an event, our policy says, 'Go and use what facility you have to in order to make tourism work.' That is the philosophical statement in our policy. It is not a case of standing there with a ouija board counting the number of people who are blasphemously going into a non-commercial park environment. We do not subscribe to that. If it means tourism for a centre, hey, that is what it is all about.

CHAIR: It seems to me that one of the challenges in this sector is that both caravan parks and councils are used to this notion of tourism where someone goes from home to a destination and then returns home, whereas the nature of this type of tourism is that people will visit many destinations in one trip. That seems to require a greater degree of cooperation between councils but also between caravan parks. Is there some way that caravan parks could work together to maybe provide packages or maybe work with route marketing rather than destination marketing? That seems to be something that is missing from this debate—marketing a route rather than a destination.

Mr Benson: We try to do that with our marketing. The best example would be the series we got to air on Channel 7 the year before last about what we call the 'little big', when everyone talks about doing the 'big one' around the block or around Australia. Our little big one was Brisbane, Gladstone, Mount Morgan, Burnett Highway, Cania Gorge and back to Brisbane. That involved such a strategy.

Inside our industry there are chains—management chains—just to mention a couple: Big 4, Top Tourist and Family Parks of Australia. They are already doing that inside their chains. If they are going outback, our parks unashamedly make referrals between themselves. You will get parks in Charleville referring to parks in Ilfracombe and Longreach. That is part of how the system works. Our front offices, hopefully, have the referral tourism propaganda, or the material, to get those people interested in the local attractions. It would not be the first time I have walked into a park's front office and seen that the operator was shocked to find out they had just been unknowingly collaborating with a park up to 500 kilometres away by cross-referencing clients and did not even know they were doing it.

CHAIR: If you go overseas, particularly to places like Europe, you can get on to a website and you can plan, 'Day 1, I will travel from here to here and then I will stay at this hotel and then the following day I will go from here to here.' You can plan your entire trip on one website. There does not seem to be that same ability with this type of tourism. There is no one place you can go to and say, 'I'm going to stay three days at Charleville, and on the Thursday or the Friday I am going to go over to Ilfracombe.'

Mr Benson: With respect, there is; it is called Caravanning Queensland. If you go to our website there is an interactive screen that will facilitate you throughout Queensland.

CHAIR: But can you book sites, check availability and those sorts of things?

Mr Benson: There will be in the near future. At the moment it is not that interactive, but if you are dealing with a chain, it is; it is already available. There have been a lot of advancements in that type of technology. We, like many others, are still catching up with it.

Ms DAVIS: On page 11 of the Queensland government's submission it acknowledges that infrastructure is required to support grey nomad tourism, including people who have special needs or a disability. I am interested in knowing what your member parks offer those people who may have special needs or a disability?

Mr Benson: One of the unfortunate things that I have seen with this inquiry so far—and I am going to say this at the risk of invoking someone's wrath—is the fact that not all grey tourists, whatever that term means—and I am yet to see a definition—are able-bodied people who either drive a self-propelled caravan, namely a motorhome by legal definition, or tow a caravan. There are some people out there in the real world who opt for road based tourism and use caravan parks, for example, as their working base. One of the many reasons cabins have evolved is that once there were on-site vans that no-one could access anyway, unless they had the physical ability to get into quite a constricted space. Now there are cabins. A lot of local governments are putting on building code requirements such that a minimum number conform with requirements of people with special needs. I am thinking of one in particular on the Atherton Tableland which would be probably the best example I have ever seen: full ramp wheelchair access, level ground, wheelies can go straight into the shower, hand holds—the whole thing. We are very mindful of that because there is a number of clients out there who need that on a daily basis. Again, it gets back to supply and demand.

Ms DAVIS: I understand that supply-and-demand aspect, but in the main do you find that most of your members do provide disability access to ablution blocks and the like?

Mr Benson: The honest answer to that would be that the majority probably do not because of historical situations. If you are talking about a business that has been there for a long time, unless there has been an identified need to upgrade—you have to remember that they are licensed to the standard that is set by the local government, which then applies a building code. For somebody to go and put in a facility in a caravan park in Queensland—and unfortunately there are 74 different versions of this—it all depends where you go in Queensland and what the local government requires. I would love to say that, yes, they are all friendly to that extent, but I know that the answer is otherwise.

The other problem with that is that when you get those chains I spoke about before such as Big 4, Top Tourist or FPA trying to manage large numbers of parks across Queensland, you have this recurring nightmare called inequality or inequity across 74 different local government regions. How does ‘Mr Big 4’ or ‘Mr Top Tourist’ address a uniform code across 74 different jurisdictions all with different approaches? They do not even have to apply the local law. As you heard before, they can write their own. That is a real problem.

CHAIR: In danger of moving back into the conflicted territory of land use, the Ombudsman report into the Barcaldine incident talks about this process of land use management plans and how that could be undertaken. It does not seem to me that councils have taken up that opportunity to do that planning. Is there an opportunity for caravan park owners, show societies and councils to work together on these land use management plans to address those issues of competitive neutrality? At the moment it seems that those land use management plans have been put in the too-hard basket.

Mr Benson: You have just come to the epicentre of this whole issue. My honest answer to that is no. I think it has to be a state driven initiative, because it is as good as the individuals at ground zero. If that could happen times 74, I would say, yes, let’s do it. The problem in places that have been identified in other submissions is the fact that other people have different ideas. You have to remember that my idea of overflow might be different to somebody down the road. It is all about equity and making it work locally.

CHAIR: Isn’t there an issue though that the competitive tensions for a market will depend on every individual town? The issue in Samford is quite different to the issue in Blackall, which is different again to the issue in Barcaldine.

Mr Benson: Yes.

CHAIR: Isn’t that something that is best solved by local businesses, local caravan park owners and local councils?

Mr Benson: In the case of Barcaldine, no. It has not worked. I can open up this folder and show you a draft copy of our overflow agreement, which was put to council in 100 per cent good spirit with a view to putting it before the minister for approval for a secondary purpose of use. That never saw the light of day. It did not leave town with the draft management plan to go before the minister. I know that for a fact because I have the minutes of the meeting. That is an analytical example of what you have to set up to make this work properly. Remember that we are talking about running operations where people are subject to potential litigation, workplace health and safety and all of these types of things.

I cannot agree with the notion that it is totally a local issue that can be solved in 74 different ways or in different ways. I think it has to be state driven. We have to have some uniformity and we have to have some ground rules. In the case of Barcaldine, as you saw from the annexure, it plainly has not worked. The unfortunate downside to that situation is that the Land Act does not have an enforcement provision. We are talking about a law that is unenforceable. We wish it was enforceable. To be fair, I have heard opponents of our industry mouth the same words. So, no, I think there has to be some uniformity. If you are talking about real tourism and driving it forward, I think there have to be benchmarks and they have to be set so that people know where they stand. I do not see it working individually. I really do not. That is what our current problem is.

CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Benson, for your time today and for your submissions. We appreciate the opportunity to go over those issues with you. The committee will now break for morning tea.

Proceedings suspended from 10.18 am to 10.36 am

ANDERSON, Mr Graham, Queensland Representative, Auswide Motorhome Club

HAMER, Mr Frans, Private capacity

KIPPING, Mr Ken, AM, Director, Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia

OSBORNE, Mr John, Chief Executive Officer, Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia

REBGETZ, Mr Gary, Queensland State Representative and Past Chairman, Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia

CHAIR: I think most of the witnesses were here for my opening statement this morning. Have the witnesses had an opportunity to read the witness guidelines provided to them by the committee staff? For the *Hansard* record, all witnesses have read the guidelines. Do any witnesses have anything further to add about who they represent?

Mr Kipping: I am also CMCA’s consumer representative.

Mr Hamer: I am a private presenter and I am a full-time grey nomad.

CHAIR: Under the guidelines, you may object to answering any questions put to you on the grounds that the question is personal and not relevant or that the answer may incriminate you. The committee will not require you to take an oath or affirmation but asks you to respect the proceedings here today. I ask you to keep your answers succinct so that we can get through more questions if possible. If you do choose to take a question on notice, we would appreciate it if you could provide the committee with the answer by 30 August. We will give each of the submitters an opportunity to make a brief opening statement. We will begin with Mr Anderson.

Mr Anderson: I would like to thank the committee for inviting us to put in a written submission and also to make this brief submission. I would like to go more on personal experience, because that is where I believe the rubber hits the road. About 10 years ago when I was at Airlie Beach I noticed a backpackers’ sign right in the middle of the main street—‘Accommodation \$8 per night.’ More recently I have seen it at \$13 in the main street. The next day we were on a cruise boat to Whitehaven Beach. We were sitting next to a group of backpackers. I said, ‘I suppose you’re all staying at the cheap \$8 accommodation.’ They said, ‘We sure are.’ I said, ‘Gee, you’re travelling Australia on the cheap.’ They said, ‘No, we’re not. We’ve been here four days and we’ve spent over \$300.’ I asked, ‘On what?’ They said, ‘Scenic flights to Hayman Island, meals at restaurants and now this boat trip. We just don’t want to spend our money on accommodation—a room and a bed for the night.’

During that same holiday we were involved in a questionnaire survey of a group of tourists on who spent the most money in Australia—Americans, English, Germans, Japanese, backpackers et cetera. At that time the country was flooded with plane loads of Japanese which was good for the country. Most of us named them as the biggest spenders. But, no, government statistics showed that it was backpackers. We were shocked. We asked how come. He explained that they stayed an average of six months. Therefore, over that period they spent a far greater amount of money and more evenly across the country, not just at Surfers Paradise and Port Douglas.

We are similar to backpackers. We have already invested a lot of money in self-contained motorhomes. Therefore, the least we have to spend on overnighting the more of our budget we can spend in other areas evenly across the community. We are different to caravans of course. If we go shopping or go to restaurants and shows, our motorhome is our transport. If the show finishes at 11 or midnight, where do we go? A caravan park, if they will let us in and then risk being abused by sleeping residents—as our motorhomes are usually diesels—or just somewhere we can go and park? The question is: what makes the most sense?

I could show you a photo of two identical motorhomes and ask you to spot the difference and you would not be able to. One is a fully self-contained motorhome empty and parked. The other is a self-contained motorhome with two people asleep. Where is the problem? A place to park for the night—that is what we are asking for.

Mr Osborne: The Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia, the CMCA, would be in this country the largest consumer group for the grey nomad recreational vehicle, touring segment of drive tourism in Queensland. We have close to 59,000 members. On average, 800 new members join each month. We are the so-called baby boomers. We are the bubble that is coming. We are coming ready or not. When we survey our members, our members tell us that the state they want to visit is Queensland. This is the most popular state. So they are coming to Queensland. Queensland needs to be ready for this growing group.

Technology—and I think the committee has already acknowledged this—is allowing this group a different experience on the road. Yes, they do use caravan parks. We do not want to see any caravan parks closed. In fact, we have no evidence that any caravan parks have closed in Queensland due to the Brisbane

activities of showgrounds and racecourses being used by this group. We are aware that some have closed, but that is a commercial decision and it has been because of the value of the caravan park and it has been redeveloped.

We are against government regulation attempting to force us to use a product we do not want. We have a vehicle that allows us to stay in places not thought of 50 years ago, and our members want to be there. When I speak about our members—58,000 members—that membership actually is enlarged now to include caravans. The CMCA speaks for motouring Australia, which includes a number of RV clubs including caravan clubs that want the same message sent to government: that we as a growing group have expectations. Our members are organised. They are using similar vehicles. More and more caravans are now self-contained because that is what the market is asking for. So we are going to see much more of this.

If government wants to capture this market—and it is not just economic—you are also looking at capturing the willingness of this group to provide employment, whether paid or unpaid volunteers. This group has a community based ethos embedded within it. They are prepared to give something back to the community, because of the age group that you are looking at. If you can tap into this resource, this is sustainable. This is not just a one-off visit to Queensland. If they work and they have a good time, there is every likelihood that they will come back next year. They are already trained in the role. It is already embedded into the planning of whatever employment it is, and it will happen over a number of years.

They talk about their experiences. They have needs. We have spoken about truck stops and whatever. There is a safety aspect here. This older age group become tired early in the afternoon if they are on the road and they need somewhere to stop. They do not want to stay in truck stops. Could you imagine a truck leaving or arriving at two o'clock in the morning? They do not want that noise. They prefer not to be there, but there is a safety element here too.

As far as infrastructure is concerned, with self-containment they do not need a lot of infrastructure so the government does not have to fork out a lot of money for infrastructure for this growing group. This group may actually peak in 20 or 30 years and then come down, and then what do you do with all that infrastructure? The infrastructure does not have to be expensive, so that is part of the answer.

CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Hamer.

Mr Hamer: I am actually one of the grey nomads that you are inquiring into. I am a full-time traveller. I am fully self-contained. Contrary to the previous speaker, we can stay out for at least a month. We are currently touring Western Australia and we are spending a significant amount of time volunteering there. We are also part of the Outback Volunteering network.

I would like to talk to the committee about the way we travel. There does not seem to have been a description of the way the grey nomads you are trying to capture travel. There are really two markets, and unfortunately the caravan park lobby has not recognised those two markets. The average time spent in a caravan park is about two days a week. There is one market who stay in free camps, inexpensive camps or just bush camps and want the experience. There is the other market who predominantly would have the four-week holiday a year who go to a caravan park, or even the ones who tour and stay predominantly in caravan parks. You need to understand the size of that second market that does not, regardless of what happens, stay in caravan parks all the time.

There are a number of publications on the market. The Boiling Billy ones have free bush campsites and there is a book for every state. There is the likes of Precious Campsites for Western Australia and the Northern Territory. There is also the most popular one, which is *Camps Australia Wide*. Chairman, if I may, I would like to table *Camps Australia Wide* because it will give you an indication of the extent of the free camps.

CHAIR: Leave is granted.

Mr Hamer: The circulation of this—I am allowed to tell you by the publisher—is in the order of 150,000. If you add to that the Boiling Billies and all the other ones and the Hema maps with the campsites on them, you would have at least 200,000 caravans, motorhomes and camping vans driving around this country staying at those campsites other than caravan parks. Unfortunately, there is not the recognition of that second market. They want to stay in showgrounds, they want to stay in campsites and there is absolutely no point in the caravan park lobby wanting to strengthen section 52 of the Land Act to force us into the caravan parks, because when we are forced to do so we simply drive straight through that town and that town misses out on the economic benefit of our spending. If you could just keep that in mind: there is a market there that does not use caravan parks.

CHAIR: That is where I wanted to start my questioning. If there is a second market—and that seems to be a fairly consistent theme: that there is a market that is not being accommodated for—why do you think it is not seen as a commercial opportunity by business owners and caravan park owners? Why isn't the private sector trying to provide those facilities that you are asking for?

Mr Hamer: I would have to say that the only private sector business that does not recognise that second market is the caravan park industry, unfortunately. All of the other businesses in the towns recognise that. Barcaldine is an example of them wanting to have them stay at the camping ground.

CHAIR: I want to talk in terms of the infrastructure. I think you were saying that they do not need a great deal but they do need some. Why isn't there a commercial opportunity for someone to provide that to grey nomads?

Mr Kipping: I would say a lot of the commercial enterprises are unaware of the size of this market. The government now is becoming aware of the size of the market, and I call them the travelling bank accounts. Also, I must compliment the Queensland government, both the Premier and certainly Minister Wallace, for the support they have given to dump points to date. They would lead Australia in my opinion on supporting the RV travellers.

I think there is a great opportunity to harness the travelling bank accounts, you might say, or the nomads. Somebody on the panel this morning raised tying in events. I have had a preliminary meeting with John O'Sullivan from Queensland Events, and he is very keen to try to tap in and tie together. That sort of thing can go right around Australia; it is not just here, they will be coming from right around Australia. So while they are in Queensland, we need to make their trips very worthwhile, make them enjoyable and get them to stay longer where we can in the regional centres. I compliment that young man too, because he was on the ball. He just about pounced on me at a function.

CHAIR: I suppose what I am asking is: why isn't there an operator out there saying, 'Here's a basic product. We'll charge you the basic fee that you want to pay and you can dump, use the water and get the electricity. That is the product we are offering.' Most of the submitters seem to be saying that that is what they are looking for but no-one is providing it. Why is no-one providing it?

Mr Kipping: The councils are doing that. Even in the Burdekin, Home Hill, the mayor up there has taken this by the horns and she has really done a great job. People stay there and spend. She was telling me that the feedback they are getting from the chamber of commerce is, 'Don't let them go.' It has been very successful. Those towns, cities and regions that have embraced this are doing very well.

Mr Hamer: You are alluding to caravan parks and—

CHAIR: Anybody.

Ms JARRATT: Commercial.

CHAIR: A commercial operator.

Mr Hamer: The commercial operators, being mainly the caravan parks, firstly, have not recognised the second market. Secondly, particularly in the rural and regional areas, those caravan parks were developed a considerable time ago and simply do not have the room to be able to offer open space without the facilities. Thirdly, they have a mentality of yield, unfortunately: the higher the yield, the better. A \$10 or a \$5 stay does not fit into that business plan.

Ms JARRATT: Just to go on from that, let me go back to the backpacker analogy that was used because I am the member for Whitsunday and I am well aware of the backpacker industry. The one thing you did gloss over a bit was that, sure, the backpackers do not spend a lot of money on where they stay but they do spend a lot of money on the experiences they engage in when in the area. The money spent by the grey nomad or the travelling visitor sector seems to be on their vehicle. We have submissions to say that they are even unhappy with a \$16 entry fee to go into something like the wool wash centre at Blackall. So they are not really contributing to the economy of the local area by their experiences; they are sort of more transitory and not spending as they go. I am not sure that analogy really follows all the way through. It is the accommodation. The people in the towns or the caravan park operators are looking for some commercial return on the actual service provision of accommodation. If you don't get that, what does the town get?

Mr Anderson: Once again, I will share a personal experience. We went to Carnarvon Gorge and we were making our way to the gorge near Monto and it started raining at Biloela. We thought, 'We can't go to Cania Gorge in rain.' We were told not to go there so we had to look for somewhere to stay. We asked the locals and they said, 'The railway station is empty. You can park there for the night.' We stayed two nights. While we were there, we filled up with fuel, \$100; my wife unfortunately found Rockmans, which was closing down, so that was another \$180 spent there; and we went to the RSL for the night. We left two days later. We were never intending to stay there, we intended just to look at the town and pass through, but \$300 later we moved out. How can you say that we do not spend money in the community and spread it around?

Ms JARRATT: What local tourism product did you partake of while you were in that area? Did you look for what you could do, or was it an incidental shopping type of experience?

Mr Anderson: My memory is a bit short but I think it was an ostrich farm we went to, a commercial thing there. My wife reminded me of that this morning. We spent an entry fee there and enjoyed the ostrich farm. We spend money. We just do not want to spend it on accommodation.

Mr Hamer: You could say there is a choice. Most of the travellers have a budget. We either spend it in caravan parks or in town but that budget is spent. We have also heard the statements from caravan parks that these travellers stock up at home, go away for four weeks, do not buy any supplies on the way and then come home again and stock up at home. Have you ever tried to get four weeks of supplies into a bar fridge? We have to stock up every four days. We buy wherever we are. If we are somewhere where it is time to stock up or it is time to buy something and we do not want to stay in that caravan park, we simply drive past and stay elsewhere.

Mr Rebgetz: I have been doing this for some 10 years now. Over the years, we have done many surveys through Balfour Consulting, who work for government and therefore I am advocating they are a very reputable company. In the early days in about 2004 or 2005, we did some surveys in conjunction with Queensland tourism. They had input into the surveys so the surveys reflected our spending patterns, and those surveys did reveal that we did spend on tourist attractions. All of us do visit tourist attractions as we travel. My wife and I have travelled for years and it is part of the experience. The Waltzing Matilda Centre at Winton is a prime example. We all go there. They make it easy for us to go there because we can stop there with our big rigs, so there is a lot of relativity in this. At the present moment the CMCA is in the final stage of surveying North Queensland, and that will be out in the next few weeks. That was particularly targeted at, and a lot of thought was given to, surveying various areas to show the impact of the grey nomad market in certain situations. When that is released, we will definitely pass that on to the committee.

Ms DAVIS: I confess that caravanning is not an activity that I undertook when I was a young person nor as an adult. Much is being spoken of today about where you want to spend your dollar, whether it is on staying in a park or whether it is on the local economy through retail or tourist attractions. I have no understanding of how much it costs per night to stay at a caravan site. I expect that it will vary depending on the location—for example, whether it is in a tourist hub or whether it is out west. A lot of the submissions that we have received talk about grey nomads touring during the off-peak or shoulder months. Could you give me some idea of what, on average, an overnight stay in a caravan park might cost?

Mr Hamer: As I said, I am a full-time traveller, and we do stay in caravan parks as well. Generally in the rural areas or the outback areas—it does not matter whether it is Western Australia, South Australia or Queensland—the parks vary from between \$20 to \$22 and \$30 to \$35, and that depends on the season. If you go to popular destinations during the school holidays and during the Christmas period, some of the beachfront ones for just a powered site can be \$80. Generally in the shoulder season they are about \$35 or so. It varies, obviously. Where caravan parks are going to be full for the season, as popular destinations for a particular season, it can be up to \$80.

Mrs KIERNAN: As the member for Mount Isa, I represent a third of the state. I have 14 local authorities in my electorate, so it is a massive piece of Queensland. I want to talk about roads and health. I also want to come back to the infrastructure in communities. Two key issues within my electorate are roads, particularly arterial roads, and health. I do not know which question to ask first. I will probably ask about dump points.

I have looked at each of your surveys and you have said in one of them that, yes, more are needed. A motorhome-friendly country town would be a town with a dump point in it. I also note the recommendation—and I am very pleased to be part of a government that has recognised this, and I have worked very closely with Minister Wallace. I surveyed my electorate and I have to tell you that every town in my electorate wants a dump point. I got over 100 responses to a survey right across my electorate.

I notice in the campervan and motorhome submission—submission No. 72—there are five spots that you have recommended. We have identified them through our surveying and I will be taking that to the minister. Do you believe that is one of the key issues? I notice that in one of your surveys you said it was a crucial area. I guess this is probably partly self-interest so I can go back and lobby for all of my communities, but do you believe that is something that is really required in smaller communities, particularly in vast places such as where I come from?

Mr Osborne: Your question is whether dump points are a key infrastructure requirement by this group, and the answer is, yes, they are. This group needs to dispose responsibly of their greywater and blackwater. A number of years ago in Australia there were very few dump points. The CMCA recognised the need for more dump points right across Australia. Queensland has been the most proactive state on this issue by granting us a quarter of a million dollars over five years for dump points. Your government, through Minister Craig Wallace, has recognised the importance of this issue. So, yes, our members will gravitate to these dump points.

We provide our members with the data. We have a Geo-Wiki, which is a web based search engine, where members can plan their trips and they know where dump points are, amongst many other things, and they will gravitate to those towns that have a dump point. To have a dump point—a flat piece of ground, possibly with a tap—is basically all they need.

Ms DAVIS: I asked an earlier witness about infrastructure for people with a disability or special needs. We would like your comments as to whether you think either commercial operators and/or councils are providing the facilities that some of your members may require in order to make their travelling experience more pleasant.

Mr Kipping: It is a very important issue that you raise. As you know, our organisation is entirely volunteer based. With all those members at times it is like herding cats, but they are working very well together. The wife of one of our directors has a motorised wheelchair or buggy to get around. It is amazing how these people get around Australia and get out and see the sights. As John said earlier, they do want to see the country in its natural state.

The caravan parks have some facilities. I think they need more. Again, that is probably expensive. Maybe that is something the government could assist with that would help. But we need more friendly sites for those who are a little disadvantaged. A lot of the stops now—and Minister Wallace and I have talked

about this—have ramps leading up to the toilets, even at roadside stops where it is reasonably friendly to people who have difficulties getting around. That is a good start. I think we are all looking at improving the experience for travellers, and that is one important issue. I think a fair bit of it is underway. I would like to see more consultation, but it is very important that the government talk to the actual consumers, not just big business. We are the actual people who travel, and without us there are no caravan parks and there is certainly no manufacturing industry of motorhomes and caravans in Australia.

CHAIR: I have a question which is directed to all of you in your capacity as grey nomads rather than representatives. A lot of the submissions are saying that grey nomads will often spend a few days in a caravan park and a few days outside a caravan park. Why are you making that decision to stay outside of a caravan park and why do you then stay in a caravan park? What are the incentives to stay in a caravan park and why do you do that when you do?

Mr Hamer: Can I give an example of one of our recent stays. It was in Wongan Hills in Western Australia. It is an RV-friendly town. It was the first one declared in Western Australia. It had both free camping and a caravan park. The caravan park was the main supporter of the application for RV-friendly towns because she saw that if the place became popular she would also get extra business. We stayed two days in the free camp. It was very nice. We walked around town, and it is a very nice little town. It is known amongst the travelling community as a great place to stay, so we stayed three days at the caravan park as well. We did that simply because we wanted to be in town to have a bit more convenience. That second market that I discussed, which generally mainly ‘free-camps’, also stays in caravan parks. But when we do not want to, we will drive through that town that forces us in.

Ms JARRATT: We have heard from some of our submitters, particularly some of the councils, that they do not provide or they do not encourage staying outside of caravan parks or organised areas because of certain risk factors including and not limited to the risk of fire. I can certainly understand this in some of our outback areas where fire is a particular risk. I wonder what your comment is about that. I perfectly well understand the desire to go and stay where there is nobody else around and where you have some freedom and independence, but is it fair to ask the local authority, or the state government for that matter, to pick up the risk that something might go wrong, be it an accident, a fire or something like that?

Mr Rebgetz: That is a very interesting question. In the case of fire, our vehicles are safer on the road than in a caravan park. One of the issues with caravan parks is that they were built in the 1950s and 1960s, and our vehicles are getting too big for some of the sites. When we are in caravan parks, particularly in Western Queensland, we are pushed in real tight and we are verging one on the other. There is not enough room between the vehicles.

Late last year in Victoria there was a fire in a caravan park and three caravans were burnt down. With the motorhome there is the capacity to drive it out and therefore save the motorhome as a vehicle. That brought in the next scenario—that the emergency vehicles could not get in because it was blocked as it was just too tightly packed. There needs to be a set of standards in caravan parks that cater for rigs. A good example is in Ingham, where we camp on the footpath and throw the leads over to get a spot, and we are just jammed in. We believe we are safer out on the highway, because we have fire extinguishers and we are parked far enough apart most times to affect only one vehicle.

Ms JARRATT: I guess that extends to things like rubbish collection. Are you willing to say that all independent RV, motorhome or campervan people are so responsible that they would never cause a fire or leave litter or any other damage to the environment that somebody else has to pay to fix up?

Mr Osborne: We cannot give the committee an undertaking that all of our members do the right thing. In any large group there will always be a few individuals who will not do the right thing, but the CMCA can give to the committee an undertaking that the vast majority of our members do the right thing. They are proud of their club. They are also proud of their country. It is the age demographic that we are looking at. They are more inclined to clean up the rubbish when they arrive at the rest area than leave rubbish behind. The last thing they want is another motorhome to come up and see rubbish around their vehicle and point the finger at them.

Mr Hamer: There are always comments particularly about roadside rest areas and truck rest areas where there is so much rubbish. That rubbish is deposited by the truckies including the toilet paper and everything else. It is not the motorhomes.

Mr Kipping: Not all our membership are wealthy. I think we have to allow for ordinary Australians who want to see their country. We ought to have some low-cost stopping places which are safe where they can go around and see their country. They do spend money. It may not be as much as some who have far more funds, but they all have to eat, drink and fill up their vehicles. We should not discourage the average battler going around in his or her retirement seeing their country. We want to try to allow for them, too—not just the larger vehicles that are fully self-contained and can stay out for a long period of time. There is a mixed bag and we have to try to cater for all Australians, not just those with larger vehicles.

Mr Rebgetz: I do all the LGA conferences every year. One thing is noted. Those regional councils that let us stay applaud us and our members for how tidy we leave rest areas. Bear in mind, that we as an organisation are very triple bottom line accountable and very green tourists. We promote this very heavily so it is part of our members’ psyche.

Ms DAVIS: Mr Hamer, on page 20 of your submission you stated that unlike New Zealand there is no universal criteria for RV containment in Australia. Could you explain why a universal criteria for RV self-containment is beneficial? Would only RVs that have been declared self-contained be able to stay at places other than caravan parks?

Mr Hamer: I differ here with the CMCA which has the LNT program. There has to be some sort of criteria for what is required in a self-contained vehicle. If we are going to allow there to be more and more areas where we can camp in self-contained vehicles then that has to be consistent throughout the country. What I said in my submission is that Queensland could take the lead there and use a similar system to the New Zealand system where a specification for a self-contained vehicle is in place. It is then easy for that to be part of the inspection process for registration.

In Western Australia I saw a camper trailer with a LNT badge. That is what made me make these comments about that. He was happy to sell them for \$5 each. That is what made me think that we should make it part of the registration process. At least then a ranger or whoever can see that it is a valid self-contained vehicle.

There is an ability to have camp grounds or rest areas or places to stay for a day or two for people with self-contained vehicles and they do not need the caravan parks. They simply want to stay somewhere and we need to be guaranteed that they are not going to leave a mess.

CHAIR: Could I ask the CMCA to comment on this as well. It is a pretty important point—that is, who should be able to stay outside caravan parks without facilities. How do we know that there is integrity in the self-containment recognition program? How can we be assured that those people who are declared self-contained are capable of staying outside caravan parks without causing environmental or other risks?

Mr Osborne: Our self-containment policy is our leave-no-trace policy. A self-contained vehicle is able to capture its grey and black water. The volume of that depends on the size of the vehicle. There is no way that a controlling entity would know how much liquid a vehicle is carrying when it arrives. It could be full. We believe the onus is actually on the individual rather than on the vehicle. The onus is on the individual to leave no trace. A person could own a self-contained vehicle but still do the wrong thing. It is up to the individual. The individual signs a code of conduct that the CMCA manages.

CHAIR: I understand that, but I suppose my worry is that the CMCA is asking the government to ensure that you can access places that have no facilities. In order to be sure that we can do that, the government and councils need to be given some confidence that those vehicles are self-contained. How does government have that confidence?

Mr Osborne: When someone applies for LNT, self-containment, under the code they have to give us a full description of their vehicle. We are not going to give self-containment to a pop top camper trailer. That is not going to happen. If they lie in their application there is very little we can do about that until a member advises national headquarters of that. We will investigate why there is an LNT sticker—one of our copyrighted stickers—on a pop-top camper trailer which is clearly not self-contained. We will investigate that.

Mrs KIERNAN: As I said before, two areas of interest for me are roads and health services. I have been looking at the various submissions that have been put to the committee. The rating is from least important to having suitable services where people are travelling. The CMCA has cited that 24-hour medical services are critical and pharmacies are imperative. Coming from a very big electorate I know full well that those services are not in all of our communities. In places like Karumba a small clinic is impacted by the increase in population from 600 residents to 5,000 people during peak periods. I am wondering about the realistic expectation—and this is not just directed at your members but everyone in general—that they are going to have access to those two particular services. I am asking for some comment on that.

Mr Rebgetz: I have a little bit of knowledge on this. I am on the HCC at Townsville Hospital. I am also on the Patient Safety Quality Committee of Queensland Health down here in Brisbane. The regional director based in Cairns who looks after all the regional health services is very well aware of the issues facing the grey nomad market as is Queensland Health overall. They are endeavouring to enhance regional health, as you well know, to cater for these needs. Unfortunately, because of staff issues and all the other issues that are facing Queensland Health it takes time.

Bear in mind that our members are very astute. I am a transplant patient. I know I have to have cyclosporin. I also know that cyclosporin is not available in regional towns. Therefore we go to our doctor and say, 'We are going away for six months, can we have six months supply of drugs.' My drugs come from the hospital. I go to the hospital and say that I need these drugs and I get them. Most of us are very well aware of this. The emergency drugs we may need if we get caught out. In most cases we find a pharmacy can get them within 24 hours.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service helps us out from time to time. That is why our organisation and other grey nomads support the Royal Flying Doctor Service—for that one-off. It is a concern. It is a problem, but I think that we know where we are going. We know the issues. I think that Queensland Health is on top of it as well as it can be.

Mr Hamer: As you are aware, my submission says the opposite in terms of the need for health care. Can I just reassure the member for Mount Isa that you are not going to reduce the travellers in your area because you do not have a hospital. It gives the impression that we hobble from one hospital town to Brisbane

another. The majority of us are quite able bodied. We do volunteering. We do not depend on knowing where the next hospital is in case we cark it. Those who do need facilities simply make sure that they go to those towns that have those facilities or, as Gary says, they have the necessary medication with them. It is not an issue.

Mr Kipping: This is all about being a good consumer and about informed choice. We are informing our membership of the facilities of that region or that town or that shire. It is up to the travelling consumer to make that choice. If their health is other than good they will possibly go and visit that town but not stay as long as they would have if they knew there was good medical support. It is up to them. Our role is to give information. It is up to the consumer. I do not know about hobble, Frans, I think they would roll from town to town.

Ms JARRATT: It is good to know that our grey nomads are not only able bodied but also well informed. A lot of you are also from professional backgrounds. This raises an interesting issue. That is the potential for mentoring programs for some of our businesses in more remote areas. One of the submissions pointed to the fact that it is very difficult to get consultants out to these areas or to get good business advice in these small towns. Do you know of any organisations that actually offer a portal or a way of contributing professional assistance to business people in towns around the state?

Mr Hamer: As you can see from my submission, I am a semiretired management consultant. In answer to your question, no. If we could find even volunteering opportunities for mentoring in regional towns—we are going through that—we would be happy to help. But we have not been able to find them. They do not seem to be advertised. They are not on websites. It is the same for volunteering. Outback Volunteering has a good website. If we can incorporate this sort of mentoring requirement on a website or websites somewhere then I for one would certainly be happy to participate in the program.

Mr Kipping: There have been surveys of this. We were involved in it. Gary may like to comment further later. A lot of our members are either Rotarians or in Lions or in service clubs. When they go to these regions and towns they certainly do get involved. That is certainly the case if they stay for a while. I was amazed at how many talented people—as I said, I have only been doing this for six years or so—there are in CMCA and on the road generally.

The bulk of them—which is much greater than the majority—are very willing to put back into the communities they visit. For example, when we had a rally in Tasmania—there were about a thousand motorhomes there—the ladies knitted a whole lot of warm clothing and took it around to the nursing homes. They always put back in. I think there is a pool of talent that could be harnessed in these regions.

I like the idea someone raised earlier about putting some effort into the Indigenous community. Maybe there is an opportunity for the Indigenous communities to set-up a tourist type business and these people could visit. Some may like to assist where they can.

I think the idea of this consultation is excellent. I think we should be talking more with the caravan park industry. I think we can turn the situation around to benefit all travelling consumers and certainly government and certainly the regions we are trying to serve.

Mr Rebgetz: With regard to volunteering, about 4 to 5 years ago Tony Charters was given a grant by DEEDI to look at the volunteering market of grey nomads. Tony did a trial run in Townsville. That was quite successful but then it seemed to die. It may be pertinent to talk to DEEDI about that volunteering program and follow it through.

Another hat I wear is that I am on the board of NQ Small Business. We work very closely with Mungulla Station outside Ingham, an Aboriginal corporation, to enhance their tourism prospects. We are working with Palm Island. We are in the process of trying to get them to do a couple of small tourism businesses. We are working with the Aboriginal corporation in the Burdekin. There are things going on out there. We had approaches from other Indigenous parties. We are only a small organisation and government funded. It is a timing and money issue, but it is happening.

CHAIR: I think one of the things the committee has been struggling with is that there is not a great deal of reliable data on how many grey nomads there are, how they work, how much they spend and what they contribute. How do you think that data could be gathered?

Mr Osborne: We are available to help government because we do carry out surveys, and I think the committee has already been advised that we are in the process of finalising our latest survey of grey nomads. This is an expensive exercise for a not-for-profit organisation, as you can imagine, because we are actually contracting an organisation to do it for us. If the LGA was to go to its members, it should be the local government in the towns to actually do the surveys. It requires a doorknock in that someone needs to go up to the vehicle with the survey form, talk to the individual, have it completed, come back half an hour later—not tomorrow—and pick up the survey form, and that could be done state-wide.

Mr Hamer: I go back to the two markets. Most of the statistics of travellers have been taken in caravan parks. As I indicated, there are a couple of hundred thousand out there who are not in caravan parks. The difficulty for getting valid statistics on the travelling market as a whole is that they are not captured in any data collection system because they are not around. The ABS and Tourism Queensland do it by phone. When we are travelling during a lot of the year, we are not going to get a call on a landline, are we? The data collected in caravan parks, which seems to be the logical place to get the information, is simply looking at that market. It is the larger second market that is very difficult to capture, and I am afraid I do not have an answer on how to, because how do you capture data from itinerants?

Mr Rebgetz: A suggestion to the committee is to maybe use tourist information centres. A lot of us go there to find out where to go and what to do.

CHAIR: Given the time, do any of you have any further issues that you want to quickly address before we close?

Mr Hamer: Yes, Mr Chairman. I would just like to address a couple of statements made by a previous witness from Caravanning Queensland. For years they have been saying that their industry is under threat and there is a viability problem. If I may, I seek leave to table some documents which give the actual statistics. IBISWorld do industry statistics. They are a highly respected company for their independence. The caravan industry's profit level is 17.9 per cent of turnover which, from my business broking background, is a very healthy profit level. If they keep asking for the monopoly of driving that second market into the caravan parks, if they need that assistance, they cannot justify it, because you have to consider also that IBISWorld compares that to the tourism sector as a whole which has 17.8 per cent return on turnover. So the caravan park industry is as viable as the entire tourism industry. So forget about the fact that they are going broke. I would like to table that.

CHAIR: Leave is granted for you to table that, yes.

Mr Hamer: Additionally, there is another association that is responsible for caravan parks Australia-wide. I want to table the statements made by their CEO when he said that our industry has proven that it is practically recession-proof and that in the midst of shrinking revenue levels across-the-board in almost all our competitive markets the caravan and holiday park industry continues to boom.

CHAIR: Leave is granted for the tabling of that document also.

Mr Kipping: Mr Chairman, I think the question you asked earlier about why the local government groups are not meeting their needs is right on the money. These people want to travel and they want to come. Queensland is poised to take advantage of a great opportunity. What you have to do is try and at least give them a fair go in their travelling and provide some facilities and safe areas if they need to stop. That is very important. We do not want to be closing off inland routes in regions in Central Queensland, because that is only going to mean that all of the travellers will go up the coast, clog the traffic and cause a lot of problems. The travellers are coming. It is up to government and regions to meet their requirements, within reason, and all will benefit economically.

CHAIR: Mr Anderson, do you have anything further that you want to add to anything you have said?

Mr Anderson: No, I think I have pretty well covered it. Thank you.

Mr Hamer: Mr Chairman, can I make one final point?

CHAIR: Very quickly.

Mr Hamer: Queensland is competing against the rest of the states. Currently it is losing. From what I have seen in the other states, you are losing the market to them because it is easier to travel and it is easier to stay in the likes of South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria. Western Australia is repealing regulation 49, which has a similar restriction to the Land Act, and more and more people are going to go there.

CHAIR: The committee has read some of that in the submission. I thank all of the witnesses for their time here today. We very much appreciate both your submissions and your time here. We will now move on to our next witness, QTIC with Mr Daniel Gschwind.

GSCHWIND, Mr Daniel, Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Tourism Industry Council

CHAIR: Thank you for coming back. I think we were blessed with your presence last year as well. Have you had the opportunity to read the committee witness guidelines provided to you by the committee?

Mr Gschwind: Yes, I have.

CHAIR: Under those guidelines you are entitled to object to answering any question put to you on the grounds that it is personal and not relevant or that it may tend to incriminate you. The committee does not ask that you swear an oath or affirmation but does expect you to respect the solemnity of today's proceedings. It is our intention to keep to the times on the hearing program as best we can. If you do choose to take a question on notice and provide an answer later, we would appreciate it if you could provide that answer by 30 August. Would you like to make a brief opening statement, Mr Gschwind?

Mr Gschwind: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. Our organisation representing tourism operators from around the state certainly welcomes your interest in this matter. We recognise this as an opportunity perhaps to boost further the benefits that flow from one particular part of the tourism industry. So we encourage your committee to maintain this interest and take steps that would support the objectives of most of the people who have made submissions here and people who have a stake in this issue. I want to make some opening comments further to that. The tourism industry, as you would all know from probably most of your electorates given where you come from, has experienced a fairly torrid time. The last 18 months to two years have been difficult for a number of reasons for our industry. Operators in some areas have struggled more than others. Some have been pushed to the brink of financial viability. Others have done relatively better.

The upshot of the last two years certainly has been that Queensland—which is still recognised, and we like to think remains, as the top tourism state in Australia—has actually lost market share. We have gone a bit backwards, and the figures are supported by Tourism Queensland's own research and data. We have gone backwards in the intrastate market—that is, Queenslanders travelling within Queensland—and we have gone backwards in the interstate market—that is, Australians travelling to Queensland from other states. That has created an issue for many regional towns in particular where domestic tourism is relatively more important than international tourism perhaps.

Only this week we have been given some research from Roy Morgan which supports the findings of Tourism Queensland that Queensland is losing a little bit of appeal versus other destinations within Australia. That is obviously cause for alarm for us and for the industry. The same research by Roy Morgan coincidentally also suggests that what people are seeking increasingly across all market segments are natural experiences, being in touch with local culture, perhaps less crowded experiences. All of those kinds of things we could supply very well in Queensland, notwithstanding that we appear to be not meeting their expectations or perhaps not communicating the message very well to them.

In amongst all of that fairly gloomy picture it is true to say that older travellers—grey nomadic or otherwise—have remained relatively steady as a market segment. They have performed relatively better as travellers. They have been less affected, it appears, by the external events that have influenced other market segments. That is also particularly evident in the caravan and camping sector, and there is not much specific data, as you have alluded to before, and certainly not enough recent data to support strongly what I have just said. However, there is fairly reasonable anecdotal data to suggest that. Some caravan parks—I did not hear the statements from the caravan industry this morning—are doing reasonably well in some regions. Sales of caravans are also doing reasonably well, and also perhaps most recently and tellingly for the future is that attendance at caravan shows around the country is very strong, suggesting that the interest remains and we are in for a strong future.

Of course, that long-term trend and strong potential for the future is also supported by what we all know about the demographic trends in Australia. Some years ago the ABS said that, compared to 1995, in 2020 we will have twice as many people aged over 65 than we currently have. It stands to reason on current trends that those people in 2020-21 will be healthier, potentially wealthier and certainly more likely to travel than the same cohort today or in the past. So the potential is there, and that is how we see the place of this inquiry. The potential is there. It is looking at a market that has shown relatively strong resilience and certainly offers opportunities, particularly for regional Queensland, and offers opportunities beyond perhaps the most obvious commercial income.

It also offers opportunities on the issue that you raised in the last session in terms of employment, boosting labour pools and adding skills to regional areas which might be in need, and I am happy to talk more about that. That has a context, if you like, for how we see this issue. I also want to say that I thought the very summary paper that was provided by the committee captured very well in the few words and sentences what this is about and what the opportunities are, so congratulations for that. You have received our very brief submission. I am not sure whether you want me to go through anything in particular or whether I should just wait for the questions.

CHAIR: We might go to questions, I think. It seems that the tourism industry has not really grasped the change for this new market—that is, we are still marketing things that were working maybe 10 years ago and that this is a new market. It has particularly been left to smaller local governments in rural and regional communities that may be struggling with, for the first time, being in that first level of tourism marketing. How do we do that? How do we get to work with rural and regional councils in marketing to this market?

Mr Gschwind: The assessment you make is true, I think, because we all struggle with change, we all struggle with a world that is evolving continuously. It obviously places before us individually, and particularly out in the regions where perhaps access to expertise is more difficult, real challenges. The only way out of that, I think, is by pooling the resources more efficiently, that is, the resources that the state government has in a broad sense in terms of business support and in terms of expertise—and there is a lot out there, particularly provided through DEEDI and its offices regionally—and also through more specialised agencies like Tourism Queensland, which is doing a great job working with individual operators at our end and with regions as well to boost it but also with organisations like ours, the Queensland Tourism Industry Council.

What we have to do particularly better I think—and we are as an organisation very much focused on this now—is work with local councils. Local councils, of course, are very often the gatekeepers in terms of local regulation, in terms of local infrastructure and in terms of local marketing. I will be honest with you: they probably have been neglected in some cases by the tourism infrastructure—the organisations that support tourism. So we have deliberately made efforts in recent months and last year to engage more effectively with the Local Government Association and also include local councils as organisations even in our membership. So we have now a growing number of local councils who are joining our organisation, which is a not-for-profit organisation, as members and we want to work with them generally and their tourism officers, where they exist, and their economic development officers more effectively to capture that. It is a complex issue. It is not just a case of employing a student who can draw up a pretty ad. That is not marketing. That is not promotion. We have a far more complicated world.

There are logistical issues. For instance, the grey nomads may not pick up television, they may not have a mobile phone to listen to or they may have special requests in terms of internet access. All of those issues have to be addressed and solutions have to be found to communicate effectively. That is true for every market. We have gradually learned how to communicate with younger people through social networking media and so on. We have to do the same for the grey and greying nomads and make sure that we tap into them the right way.

I like the point that was made previously about the importance of visitor centres. That is fundamentally important—that face-to-face point where many people, not just caravan drivers, will stop and make contact. We have neglected that a little bit. We have caught up. The state government, to its credit, is running an accreditation program for visitor centres. We support it very strongly. We try to bring expertise into those centres. There is a whole range of opportunities in this particular case and others.

Ms JARRATT: Mr Gschwind, as an industry advocacy group, no doubt among your membership you either have or would like to have both caravan owners and councils. I am not sure whether in the time you have been here you have picked up that there is some tension around the issue of a council's role in opening up showgrounds and other council lands particularly to motorhome and RV drivers. Do you think as an industry body there might be a role for the QTIC to step in and perhaps guide this issue through to a satisfactory outcome because, surely, that is what we need to do?

Mr Gschwind: I thought you might ask me about something like that. I welcome the trust and faith you have notionally placed in us in solving an issue that, apparently, has agitated the minds of people for some time. First of all, I want to say that, as an industry and as an industry body, we welcome the broad range of people who might want to visit Queensland however they want to do this. That is clearly in our interest. We want to be a welcoming state and I think we by and large are a welcoming state. So we have to make sure that we do not miss opportunities and we have to make sure that we are even-handed, if you like, in that approach.

In relation to the specific issue you raised, there are obviously areas where it is impossible to stay in a commercial caravan park and, clearly, people would like to stay in some of those areas. In some cases, the state government, through the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, provides campgrounds. You pay and you go and stay in a campground. In other areas, as you have alluded to, councils make available their facilities to some extent. I think the rule that should be applied here is that whatever service is provided should be costed appropriately no matter who is responsible for covering the cost. If it is a council providing campgrounds with whatever facilities might go with it, the council would do well in considering what does it actually cost to provide these services and, perhaps more to the point, what would it cost if the council were operating like a business. If nothing else, it would otherwise challenge one of the principles of government, and which government subscribes to, which is competitive neutrality.

If a caravan operator is close to or nearby an area where the council provides such services, then anybody would have some sympathy with such an operator feeling aggrieved if there is outright competition from a 'competitor' who does not have to perhaps comply with a whole raft of conditions and a whole raft of financial tax obligations, for instance. The same argument would arise if, for instance, the council said, 'We have many council vehicles that we do not use so often. Why don't we just ferry people around as taxis free of charge or use the council canteen to provide sandwiches next to a commercial sandwich shop?' It would cause some grief, I suspect.

I hear what the representatives before me said—they would rather not spend so much on accommodation, they would rather spend it in shops and restaurants. Me too. I have just been on a holiday. I would have quite liked not to have spent money on my accommodation. I would have happily spent the same amount in a shop or a restaurant. I could probably rustle up 500 backpackers in the next Brisbane

two hours who would happily testify that they would stay longer and spend all the money they have here in Brisbane if the council put camp beds in the town hall for free. That argument is true for anybody who travels. I subscribe to that. I agree with it. It is true. Councils have to ask themselves: what is justifiable in terms of subsidising one particular service over another? I think that is what the councils have to ask themselves.

Ms DAVIS: In your submission you talk about DERM sewerage licence fees and the impact that that has on local operators. Given your statements earlier that there are enough matters for local operators to deal with regularly and tax obligations, can you tell me how that is impacting on their businesses?

Mr Gschwind: It is impacting through a change in the way the fees are raised. At the beginning of last year through the EPA there was a change in those licence fees and it only became apparent to us and the operators in the course of the year when the licences were due what was actually happening. What it meant for many operators who happened to be in need of such a licence was that their licence fee was going from \$500 to \$10,500, or more. We raised this issue and I will cut to the chase. We have had several pieces of correspondence since then in response to our concerns and, most recently, a letter dated 28 July from the environment minister. I am happy to table it if that is appropriate. I am not sure if it is in an internal loop, or something, but the letter says—

I am pleased to advise that the department has completed this review—

That is of the licences we have questioned—

and I have approved—

That is the minister—

the addition of two new licence categories for low risk sewage treatment plants. These two new categories have been deemed lower risk because they do not emit their treated effluent to waters and instead release it to absorption trenches or infiltration beds... Advice from the department suggests that many small operators will be able to transition to the new lower fee category on that basis.

We obviously welcome that. We have not replied yet. We do not know what the decrease will be in those fees so we, I guess, have our fingers crossed. We are encouraged by the fact that there has been a response now after some considerable time and we hope that the result will lower that exposure. But we raised it as one example of a raft of compliance costs that fall on small business.

CHAIR: Leave has been granted for the tabling of that. One of the challenges that I see in this area is that the tourism industry largely works on attracting people who will pay for accommodation and then visit tourist operations, whereas in this sort of tourism market the main beneficiaries are local traders. It is the local service station, the local corner store, the local clothes shop rather than necessarily the professional tourism operators. How does the tourism industry engage with these businesses that are not traditionally considered tourist operators but have such a significant stake in tourism in these regional towns?

Mr Gschwind: I wish I had a really perfect answer to that question. We try to make people aware that they are in the tourism industry in what they do—the newsagent, the laundry service, the greengrocer. All of those businesses in many regions are largely dependent on visitors and we try to make them aware of it. We try to engage them in it. In some areas that is a little bit easier—those areas where tourism is relatively more prominent, say the Gold Coast. The council on the Gold Coast has seen fit to contribute very substantially in terms of ratepayers' money to the promotion of tourism because, by and large, the population understands that tourism is relatively important.

I think we could do a lot better. There is no question about it. The moment in time when businesses generally understand how much dependent they are on tourism is when tourism stops. We have seen numerous occasions where that has happened—where in one region or state-wide suddenly the tourism flow has stopped and everybody has suddenly realised, 'I'm in the tourism business' because they do not get the revenue. But can I just add one more thing? I do not have it with me because I only saw it yesterday, but Tourism Queensland conducted research this year into what they call social indicators. That is an assessment precisely into that question you raise—how aware are people of what tourism does to them, what is their view of tourism in Queensland, obviously. I am sure that research could be supplied.

I found it very interesting and I was actually surprised that a majority of Queenslanders across all regions view tourism very positively. They recognise that it has potentially some impacts but a vast majority understand that it benefits not only their local and state economies but, interestingly, that it makes their own lives more—I cannot remember the words used, but nicer, if you like. There were more facilities for them. It creates a more interesting community. So I was encouraged, because it almost contradicted my fear that, like you suggest, many businesses and many individuals do not understand how important tourism is. That research seemed to suggest that people do actually understand.

CHAIR: Often there is an expectation, though, that those businesses engaged directly in tourism will contribute to either local infrastructure or local marketing. I know that this happens particularly on the Gold Coast. Is there some way that we could engage more businesses by getting them to contribute to that collective marketing of tourism which will bring returns to their business?

Mr Gschwind: Yes, we as an organisation have always encouraged and continue to encourage councils to consider—for lack of a better word—a levy type of system, where financially businesses would all share the burden of driving tourism visitation into their community. As you say, it is not just the hotel or motel or the caravan park that benefits from it; it is all the other people surrounding it. So we encourage

that. We do not have a policy of advocating it aggressively state-wide, because we understand that in some council areas that would probably be inappropriate. If tourism plays a very insignificant role, I suspect ratepayers, the community and local businesses would not take kindly to a tourism levy. It may need to be handled judiciously but as a principle we definitely support that those commercial operators, tourism or otherwise, who benefit from visitors coming into the community should also contribute to its promotion.

Mrs KIERNAN: In your submission you have identified that grey nomads are essentially road-travelling tourists. Having a further look at the Queensland government’s submission that they responded to—and hopefully this will clarify that I do not think all of our grey nomads are hobbling from hospital to hospital—this may clear up some new language through marketing promotion and promotion of Tourism Queensland’s approach. They are considering grey nomads as ‘mature connectors’, ‘mature social fun seekers’ and ‘mature active explorers’. Just going back to the comments in your submission, firstly, how would we promote this and, secondly, how do we gauge if it is effective?

Mr Gschwind: To engage and promote more along those lines, it is probably true across all age brackets, to be honest with you. But with the older folk, which includes me almost now, we have to find new means and new tools; you are absolutely right.

One point I would like to make is that it goes back to the coordination of all stakeholders in this, because it may well not be the tourism-promoting body that reaches those potential travellers. It may be somebody entirely different. Just off the top of my head, it may be an insurance company who deals specifically with that age bracket. It may be councils. It may be some other social network or maybe the health system. Why not? The health system is encouraging people to get out there and be active to avoid being sick. So why not engage the care infrastructure in promoting a visit to some regions? It is perfectly reasonable, in my mind. We talk about health tourism all the time. So why not engage the doctors to suggest to their elderly patients, ‘You may be a bit down and not feeling so great. But I am sure if you travel up to Queensland you would feel a whole heap better very soon’?

I am not trying to say it as flippantly as it may sound. However, I think it is very important for us to not so much think about how we would like to promote, market and advertise but ask ourselves, ‘What do these people actually listen to and who do they listen to?’ Perhaps it is their relatives who have moved up or their kids who have moved up for a job in Queensland. Why not get to them and say, ‘Get your mum and dad up here’? There are all sorts of ways we could probably communicate more effectively and it goes back to my answer to your question, Mr Chairman. We have to make sure that we are all talking in the same way—that is, the councils, the promoting bodies, the individual tourism suppliers and organisations like ours.

Ms DAVIS: I note that in the Queensland government submission DEEDI funded an industry liaison officer with QTIC whose role was to promote mature-age strategies in the tourism and retail sectors across Queensland. Can you tell me what that officer has actually done to promote these strategies?

Mr Gschwind: That relates to the employment aspect of the mature-age people. How could we go about tapping into a potential labour pool that is clearly growing when every other labour pool is clearly shrinking? We have had this officer in place now for some time to work through strategies as a pilot, if you like. How do we engage with those people who might be coming back into the workforce or who might wish to continue in the workforce in another capacity? Similarly and importantly, how do we engage with employers who may not be used to employing anybody but young graduates or young job seekers? How do we convince the employers that it may be quite a good idea to employ somebody over 50, 60 or 70, God forbid? We did actually place somebody over 70 recently. How do we encourage the employers to see the benefits of employing somebody perhaps part time under flexible workplace arrangements, perhaps casually or perhaps for a set stint of time?

As employers, we have to become much more creative. Obviously, in that context we are always keen to see the state and the federal government provide workplace arrangements that allow that. We have to become more creative on the employer side, but we also have to make sure that the mature-age people have the confidence in some cases to re-engage. A great deal of the effort that we have undertaken recently goes into this confidence thing. We have workshops with older people who are interested in working again. For some of them—for instance, a woman who has looked after the children for 25 years and has disengaged from the workforce—it is not an obvious proposition to get back into a workplace that looks vastly different to what it might have looked like 25 years ago. We try to support that with a bit of knowledge, with a bit of confidence, and tap into that. A lot more work needs to be done.

The project we have been able to conduct with that funding has guided us significantly in how we could do things better. For what it is worth, we are seeking an extension of that program because we think it is worthwhile, because we think it has huge potential and because I think it would be of social benefit as well.

Ms JARRATT: Thank you for that. In your submission, like most submitters, you say

QTIC acknowledges that grey nomads possess a wide range of skilled trades that would be of value in rural and regional communities.

I think we have agreed that, whether it be through paid work or volunteer work, there is an untapped resource coming through our communities. You have also mentioned that QTIC has suggested that the government expand its Harvest Trail initiative. Firstly, I would like you to tell us a little bit more about why

you think that would be good—what it is and why it is a good idea. Also, I mentioned earlier that it has just been announced, in the last day or so, that Queensland Events has a project with Volunteering Queensland to set up information about events and festivals around the state which are perfect for travelling people to become involved in as volunteers. Do you see that as a valuable tool? Can you suggest any tools that you know of or that we might create to enhance this resource?

Mr Gschwind: I think that is generally a big yes to the group of questions there. It was again raised in the previous session with the motorhome association, and we completely agree with them. There are enormous resources travelling around the country—a mobile workforce, if you like. The Harvest Trail initiative we referred to manifests itself in publications such as this book. I am not entirely sure whether there is a new edition. This is 2009 and I am just keeping it as a sample. It is a resource that is financed through the Commonwealth government. It is provided then by a job agency. It lists regionally the employment opportunities for the agricultural sector. It is an extremely valuable resource and I suspect our colleagues from the motorhome association would support that and many of their members would use this resource to guide them through Australia to say, 'In May you can pick this and that here and in August you can do something else somewhere else.' It also contains information about the council and other facilities. It is a fantastic resource.

We have suggested to the Commonwealth government—unsuccessfully so far, I might add—that this resource be boosted to include other employment. Not everybody wants to go fruit and vegetable picking. Some people have expertise that is, frankly, wasted doing that or they may choose to do something else. We think there is an opportunity there to build on something that exists and something that works well and just add other information to it such as perhaps other jobs in tourism—who knows?—and also jobs in other professions. We would suggest that it is worth looking into because it would not require a consultant to think of how we could do it; they are doing it. Let us just boost that with a few pages to make it more punchy.

In relation to how else we do this, we obviously have to—and we are trying at the moment to do this—have a job facilitation portal, a website I guess. There is a website being developed nationally that describes tourism jobs without specific job referrals. That is nearly finished. It is going to be called Discover Tourism and the federal government has funded it. Here in Queensland we have now set up a job referral website. It would be very easy to put a category in there that would perhaps highlight the opportunities for more mature people or people who only seek temporary employment or part-time employment. It is very easy to do this. Now that you have reminded me, we would be very happy to actually investigate how we could do this more effectively and then how we could promote it to perhaps members of the motorhome association. That would be a worthwhile exercise.

CHAIR: I come back to my first question about changing the mindset of industry. It seems that a lot of tourism marketing has traditionally been marketing to people who leave home, travel to a destination and then return, whereas the very nature of this type of tourism is that it has a route or, generally, a lack of a specified time frame. How do we get regional tourism, other organisations or local councils to start marketing a route rather than a destination? If I am from the Logan City Council, I am not going to start advertising for councils down the road; however, there needs to be some way that we advertise 'this is a place on the way to some other place'.

Mr Gschwind: It happens very successfully in some places and in other places perhaps less successfully. The looming threat to that type of work is obviously the creeping parochialism that we still have to overcome in some areas. Some people appear to not understand the principle that you have described, which is that we have to bring people to Australia in the first place or keep them in Australia and then we have to bring them to Queensland. Then we can see how we can sort of guide them around. I think we are getting better at it. We have some great routes in Queensland. We have the Savannah Way and the Matilda Highway. All those initiatives in the outback in particular have been highly successfully and highly suited to that grey nomad market in particular. We just have to continue—and that is again one of the things we are trying to do with local councils—to try to make them understand that together they are much stronger than individually. With all due respect to their council name and location, most of the councils would not be on the hit list of would-be travellers or even the grey nomads. Very few people say, 'I want to go to council so-and-so.' They don't. They say, 'I want to go to the outback,' or, 'I want to go to the Channel Country,' or, 'I want to go and see Central Queensland,' or perhaps they want to see a particular attraction. We have to look at it from their point of view and that is, I guess, what you were saying.

We also have to make sure that the infrastructure and, in some cases, state supported infrastructure supports and encourages that. I talk here about the road signage. It is very important. It is not always obvious to nonlocals. I can testify that, as a driver, it is not obvious in some regions to find your way from A to B, notwithstanding GPS and so on. It is just not obvious. We need to improve the road signage. Importantly, we have to consider what information we could impart through the signs themselves but also perhaps information signs at rest stops and parking bays. What other information could be provided there? How do we link individual visitor information centres? How do we make sure that petrol stations, where most of these people would stop, also know what to say? How do we encourage them to point these people in the right direction? How do we up their skills? How do we make them friendly locals who work in with the local community? At the end of the day when we travel, however we travel, most of us engage not necessarily with tourism professionals but with the person at the newsagent or, as I said, the petrol station. These are the people we need to encourage.

Our organisation runs a program called AussieHost, which, as the name suggests, aims to build a bit of customer friendliness into the participants of the workshops. It is a one-day workshop. When you go through it, you become an AussieHost and you get a badge. It engages people. It used to be primarily aimed at professionals in the tourism industry, but we are very deliberately now rolling this program out to councils, for instance. We have a number of councils who have signed up to this program. They put their council officers and their front-line staff through it. It is very basic, if I can say that. It just reminds people who deal with customers, whoever these customers may be, that it is about them. You have to think about them—what is it that they expect and how do you deal with them, not in a complicated way but in a simple way. We are very keen to roll this out further. We are very keen to work with councils. For that matter, we are keen to work with the state government. There are some state and federal agencies that would do very well, I think, from boosting their front-line customer service mentality. I think that is what we need to do.

Ms DAVIS: In your introduction you spoke about the tourism industry in Queensland being under a bit of stress in recent times but that the grey nomad industry was less affected or impacted at the moment. In his final comments, Mr Hamer—one of the earlier witnesses—said that Queensland though was losing market share in that area to other states like Tasmania, South Australia and Victoria. How do you think then that we can ensure that we do not lose any further market share in the grey nomad industry?

Mr Gschwind: Hopefully by what your committee will sign off on in the end.

Ms JARRATT: No pressure.

Mr Gschwind: That does cover some of the infrastructure points we have collectively made about roads, road signs, road stops, dump points and all the kinds of infrastructure that we have to provide. We also have to clearly make sure that we communicate better. I do not know how relatively in the last 12 months we have fared in that sector. I genuinely do not know whether we have done better or worse. Whatever it is, I am sure we could do better. We have to communicate much better with that sector. We have to make sure that we highlight the attributes that Queensland has to offer.

I would say this to any sector: we must make sure that we do not try to compete just on price, because that is usually the end of the industry and the end of the benefit from whatever we do. We saw this happen on the Gold Coast years ago when suddenly the only argument that seemed to be put forward was, ‘Come here because it is really cheap.’ That is a disaster for the tourism industry. It is a disaster for local communities, I might add. So we have to make sure that in attracting this market and any other market we focus on what is good about coming here.

I heard a question that you put to a previous witness: why do you stay in this park or that park? We have to ask ourselves: how do we make sure that we provide a good service, a good experience, that people actually look for? So we need to look at the consumer demand, knowledge and research. Then we have to ask ourselves: can we supply this? Are we supplying it? If not, what do we have to do more of? Sorry, I am not sure if that answered your question.

Ms DAVIS: That is fine. Unless I have missed it—and I apologise if I have—are you actively engaging with the stakeholders like the other witnesses here in order to identify those things? That appears to me to be the basic matter that is raised by everyone here—that there is a fundamental non-connection. The conversations that need to be had may not be happening between the key stakeholders in order to start moving in the right direction so there is a beneficial outcome to all parties involved.

Mr Gschwind: I am sure that we could all do a lot more. As an organisation, we are not involved directly in the marketing, but we are certainly involved in other things such as coordinating interest, if you like. Yes, we could do a lot more. Maybe your inquiry and the fact that we are sitting here today will prompt us all to do a bit more and seek a bit more collaboration. I think that is fair enough. Certainly, as an organisation, we have engaged with all of those parties before. But there is much more to be done.

Mrs KIERNAN: Just staying with that marketing theme and capturing new markets, Tourism Queensland has identified through some recent figures that just under two million people come into Queensland annually and obviously for all sorts of reasons. But I would hazard a guess, with the destinations they have to come to, that there could be a fair market for international grey nomads. We have talked a little bit about the home grown market—and they all have to come from Victoria apparently. That is probably not true. There is another market out there. Are we really doing our best to get those people out and about?

Mr Gschwind: I am glad you raised this. I had made a note to say something about that very point and I have not. What we witness here with our ageing population and, as I said before, wealthier and healthier trends is obviously mirrored in most industrialised countries around the world. Certainly those countries supply a great number of visitors here. I think there is a lot more potential. If there is any country on the planet, I would think, that could supply a wide environment where you can safely travel, with a language that is commonly understood, then Australia would have to be it.

We have a little bit of that market in some segments. For instance, I think they are called the ‘snowbirders’—Canadian seniors who habitually, apparently, like birds, hence the name, fly south in the winter. Many of them traditionally end up in Queensland apparently.

Mrs KIERNAN: They do.

Mr Gschwind: So they are finding a way of doing it without much assistance. If we probably put a bit more effort into it, I think the potential would have to be enormous. I stress that Australia is still recognised as a very friendly country. It is still the top attribute that international visitors point out as they leave the country in surveys when asked what is the best part of their trip. They do not say it was the Opera House or anything like that. They say, ‘People are really friendly.’ So there is friendliness, combined with a perception and the reality that it is safe here—you probably would not get accosted. And we are healthy—you do not have to take too many vaccinations to come here. All of those attributes are very, very important for that ageing market of course.

We have a competitive advantage, I would say, in going after it and seeking more of those. If we encourage them to drive motorhomes or some other vehicle, we have to consider of course the health and safety implications. That is very important. We know that overseas travellers have the highest propensity to be engaged in a road accident compared to any other group in Australia. So we would have to consider how we make sure they travel safely and are still alive when they go home. We have to consider those aspects, but I think the potential is enormous.

Mrs MENKENS: I am sorry, Mr Gschwind, I missed your earlier presentation. The Queensland Tourism Industry Council submission states that the recently proposed changes to the land valuation system in Queensland, including the proposed adoption of ‘site value’, has the potential to inflict further operating costs on caravan park businesses. Could you please elaborate on this issue for the committee?

Mr Gschwind: When we wrote the submission we were at the stage that the state government announced that we would go to a site valuation as opposed to the current unimproved capital valuation system. That is pretty much all we knew at that point. There is obviously some technical knowledge of what site valuation means. On that basis we were concerned that any sites—not just caravan parks—that had substantial site works carried out would be valued at a much greater level than currently. That is the obvious concern. If the relative value of those properties goes up, then presumably the eventual land tax and possibly their rates would go up similarly. As a pre-emptive concern, it was of significance to us and it remains of significance.

We wrote a submission to the Department of Infrastructure and Planning and articulated our concerns that we were particularly worried about caravan parks, because in many cases they have relatively vast tracts of land with possible significant site works. We flagged other areas like resort islands, theme parks and a few other types of properties where we have similar concerns. In response to our concerns, we were invited to be part of a working group with the department, and that working group continues to meet. We believe that, with what the department will put to the government eventually, some of our concerns—beyond just that specific one—have been accommodated in terms of the objection process and other aspects of the new legislation.

The department also undertook a number of case studies, I think is the term. They went through the valuation process under the proposed site valuation system on real sites that we submitted to them. The results of that suggested to us that in some areas the impacts were less than we had anticipated, to be honest. In other areas there was a fairly big question mark still in our minds as to whether the impact would be really, really significant. We remain concerned. We do not know exactly what the draft legislation will look like. We have been allowed, under strict confidentiality rules, to have a bit of a look at some of the legislation. We have said and done everything we can to make the government aware of our concerns in relation to caravan parks as well. It is now clearly and obviously in the hands of the department to consider this, as the legislation will be put to cabinet in the near future I think.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Gschwind. They are all the questions the committee has. Do you have anything further you want to add before we finish up?

Mr Gschwind: No, I think I will leave it at that. Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Thank you for your time. We very much appreciate both your submission and your presence here today, and your contribution to previous hearings as well.

Proceedings suspended from 12.27 pm to 1.17 pm

MAGOFFIN, Mr Ken, Director, Grey Nomads Employment

SANSNESS, Mr Drew, Marketing and Sales Manager, Grey Nomads Employment

CHAIR: I call this hearing to order. The committee's proceedings today are conducted pursuant to the resolution of the Queensland Legislative Assembly of April 2009 that appointed it. The proceedings here today are lawful proceedings of the parliament and subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing rules and orders. As such, I remind all visitors that any person admitted to the hearing may be excluded in accordance with those standing orders.

The witnesses should have been provided with guidelines for witnesses appearing before parliamentary committees adopted by the Legislative Assembly, which the committee is bound to follow. Under the guidelines, witnesses may object to answering any question put to them on the grounds that the question is personal and not relevant or that the answer may tend to incriminate them. The committee will not require you to take an oath or affirmation. However, we do expect witnesses to respect the solemnity of the proceedings.

It is our intention to keep to the hearing program published. To assist us in doing that, we would appreciate it if you could keep your answers succinct. If you do take questions on notice, we ask that you provide them to the committee by Monday, 30 August 2010. Can I ask you whether you have had a chance to read the witness guidelines? For the Hansard record, I indicate that the witnesses have read the guidelines. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr Magoffin: Yes. Our organisation is called Grey Nomads Employment. It is specifically directed at forming a link between employers in regional areas and travelling grey nomads. We have set up a two-way database to enable people travelling around to find employment in regional areas of Australia—in this particular instance in Queensland—so those potential employees and employers can link up on this database. We have approximately 2,000 members at the moment, and between January and mid-August our website received a bit over 31,000 hits. In answer to a query here a couple of hours ago—that is, where did they come from?—30,000-and-something came from Australia, 374 from New Zealand, 267 from the USA, and some from Ireland and the UK. In all, people from 72 countries have had a look at that net site in the last six months. There are something like 30,000 people out there directly looking for work in this demographic.

We are specifically titled 'Grey Nomads Employment', but you do not have to be grey, you do not even have to be a nomad for that matter. We will let anybody in. Most people in here qualify, although a few would have to work a bit longer. The idea is to enable people to travel around and plan ahead, which has been raised a few times. People, say, from Melbourne can book ahead and get a job in Brisbane or at the art gallery in Katherine. We have filled the job there about four times. We are well known in Kununurra and other places like that. We had a marketing manager in North Queensland in early June talking to Pam Thomas, from the Townsville Chamber of Commerce, and going to Cairns and places like that to promote our services.

So that is essentially what we are. It is a two-way database. We are not an employment agency. We do not check resumes. We leave it to the prospective employees and employers to contact each other and set up the arrangements. That is essentially what we are. What we are selling out there, if that is the word, is we are saying to people, 'Be a tourist and get paid for it.' Why not? Why not travel around Australia and go to all the places you really want to see. A lot of people get to 60 or 65 and think, 'Wow, I'm out of here,' but then they think, 'Hang on a minute. At 60 or 65, I'm going to live another 20 or 25 years. That is pretty damn scary.' So one of the jobs is we go out there and we scare people. We say, 'If you're going to live that long, look at your super fund. You can see how it's been smashed lately, but you can go out there and top it up.' Why not? These days, if you are 60, 65 or more, you can earn that money and put it straight into your super fund—it is total salary sacrifice. How do I know that? Because what I do in real life—like in a real job—is I am an accountant. We can advise people on how to save on their tax.

So that is what we are selling. We are selling a lifestyle. We are selling tourism. We advertise in the CMCA, in four-wheel drive magazines and things like that. That is what we are selling; we are selling tourism. We want the regional areas to look at all of the people we have available for them to utilise. One of the phrases we use—and a lot of people have taken it up—is that out there is a rich resource of travelling expertise so employers should jump on that. That is what we want to sell to employers.

CHAIR: Thank you for that. That is where I want to start with my first question. There seems to be a great supply, but it does not seem like a lot of employers have got around how to have their demand met by that supply. What do employers need to do to make sure grey nomads are an opportunity that they can take up?

Mr Magoffin: It is a very hard sell, I will say that. Very bluntly, Experience Pays was a program put forward by the Queensland government a couple of years ago, and people here would be aware of that. We put the proposal to Judy Higgins, who was in charge of it at the time, and it took a few months for us to get a link to that site. The feedback I get from people is that it has been pretty disappointing. Employers are still prejudiced against mature-age workers. We do not call them retirees. I tell people to get the 'R' word out of their dictionary, that it does not exist. 'R' means reinvigorating yourself, renewing yourself, revisiting the places you have not been. 'Retire' is not a part of the dictionary anymore.

That is what we say to employers out there. We have a rich resource of travelling expertise. There are a lot of well-qualified, well-experienced people out there so we want the employers to use their services. The Queensland government have been pushing that. I wish they would resurrect their advertising campaign once more. We try to get out to regional areas to get the message across to employers, but it is a bit of a hard sell.

CHAIR: It seems that employers need to be able to integrate into their business model something that says, 'This is a position that we can fill on a casual basis or for six months of the year.' Are employers willing to do that though? It is one thing about getting them on to the idea of employment, but they have to make sure the jobs match what grey nomads can supply.

Mr Magoffin: That is correct. We find that most of the jobs that are filled in regional areas are not very professional, if that is the word. There are not many doctors, dentists and people like that. It is more filling in at caravan parks, art galleries, stores and things like that, but I am sure there is a lot of work that is available. We have had 30,000-odd people in the last six months on our net site looking for work. We know if we put any job on the site, it is hit probably within a matter of hours by four or five people. Every job that goes up there generates another four or five members so the interest is there. We need to get the employers to get more involved.

Mrs MENKENS: Mr Magoffin, I certainly applaud your passion and I have to say that I share that passion too because I believe there is a huge resource amongst our seniors that is not being utilised to the extent that it could be and should be. From that perspective, you mentioned they are not doctors and dentists, but I think the School of the Air and a lot of the schools could benefit. Have you been able to engage some of the more professional people in that area? I know the department of education has been running programs—although this is probably separate to it—where a retired teacher will actually go out to a property and give the mother, who is normally the governess of the children, a break for two or three weeks or a month and it is on a voluntary basis. Have you looked at the school aspect? There are a lot of retired teachers out there.

Mr Magoffin: We have had a look at trying to place specific types of occupations—like running a job of the month or an area of the month so we can promote regional areas. For instance, why would I go to Charters Towers? Not because I grew up there; that is not important.

Mrs MENKENS: It is a good place.

Mr Magoffin: Yes. Why would I go there, or Cairns or some other place if I am calling from Western Australia or Coober Pedy or places like that? I had a meeting here with Gary Francis from the department of education last year. They were desperately looking for more teachers. I asked him, 'How do you advertise to someone who is in Victoria and retired?' He said, 'It's pretty hard.' I told him that we have a vehicle available for them to do it and we wrote a special promo for that to enable them to do it. Then we contacted USQ, which has one of the largest mature-age student bodies in Australia. We contacted the marketing people. There was talk of running a training program in conjunction with USQ and Education Queensland to lure teachers back to Queensland—because there is a desperate shortage—and have them reskilled or retrained. They said, 'Wow. We'd like to be involved.'

Ms JARRATT: I also applaud this program. I think it has great potential, but do you have any evidence on how successful it is? You have talked about the number of hits so people are interested in looking at it, but what evidence do you have of its success?

Mr Magoffin: I have strings of jobs that have been filled across Australia, strings of applicants, strings of people whom we tell, 'This is a two-way database so if you become a member, which costs \$50 per year, you can advertise your own services, not only your skills and experiences.' A lot of people have two sets of skills, such as a school teacher who is also involved with surf-lifesaving part time or something like that. People can advertise their skills, their experiences, where they are coming from or where they would like to be. As was mentioned earlier, you can then plan ahead and plan your trip all the way around Australia.

We have placed probably a couple of hundred jobs in the last year or so. At this last count this morning, we have only 74 of our very brave members who are prepared to advertise their services but there are still nearly 2,000 of them. They are a little bit shy. We say to people, 'The world can't find you unless you post your information on our site.'

Ms DAVIS: On the other side, I was wondering whether you might have a comment regarding a potential loss of benefits or other taxation matters that might dissuade grey nomads from seeking employment out in regional Queensland?

Mr Magoffin: That is a very common question that is raised with our people. Because I am an accountant and tax agent, we often have to answer that question. People say, 'Hang on a minute, my pension is going to suffer if I earn X amount of dollars.' However, under the taxation act if you become an itinerant worker and plan your schedule, you can claim a lot of your expenses back against that income. A lot of people who know the rules pretty well can salary sacrifice whatever they earn straight into their super fund. It is not really rocket science. It is quite easy for them to put the money straight in there and draw it as an allocated pension. Most of these people—of course, we don't call them retirees; they might be called self-funded retirees—are still working well into their 60s and 70s.

CHAIR: My question follows on from the question about planning itinerant work. Would it be more popular for people looking for work if there were accommodation attached to a position? If you said, ‘We have a position for a diesel fitter. They can come and work at the Mount Isa council,’ or whatever the case may be. ‘Bring your caravan. We have a caravan spot for you as well.’ Is there benefit in packaging the spot in the caravan park, which is often hard fought over, and the position?

Mr Magoffin: Most of the employers who advertise on the site are out of town and they tend to say, ‘We have a site for you or, if you don’t have a caravan, we have a cottage,’ or something like that. Most of them say, ‘Bring along your caravan.’ The way it works is that we provide the site for you, probably feed you for a couple of weeks and pay you a small amount of money. That is how most of them work. Some people who go along for a job for a couple of weeks stay for a couple of months. A couple of jobs we have had are almost permanent, because they rotate throughout the year. I have some emails where they say, ‘The job has just been filled,’ because we can monitor the traffic. ‘Someone applied for the job. Sorry you missed out. I’ve got someone.’ They turn up tomorrow, which is fine. But someone then says, ‘I’ll be there in December this year.’ ‘Great, I need someone from December to February.’ Someone else will call and say, ‘I missed that job, but I will be there in March next year,’ and I have copies of them here. They say, ‘March to June, fantastic; I’ll see you then.’ These grey nomads travelling around do not decide, ‘I’ll pack up this afternoon and head to Winton tomorrow.’ It does not work that way. They plan six to 12 months ahead sometimes.

Mrs MENKENS: Your submission talks about the health benefits of part-time work. Would you like to expand on that?

Mr Magoffin: I would. It is a bit scary in a way. People are saying, ‘Hey, I’m going to live a little longer. I’m 65 or 70 and I’m looking at my super fund and I’m maybe going to live to 80.’ As you well know, the old age pension was set in 1909 at age 57. The government of the day made a fortune because not many people got there. It was a good investment; a good policy. These days as people get older other health issues are starting to affect them. Other organisations like WorkAbout Australia offer jobs in areas like Dubbo and Leeton picking fruit. When you are 60, do you want to get up a tree 20 feet in the air and pick mandarins or pick up 20-kilo watermelons in the middle of summer? It is not likely. But there is a lot of other work out there.

Well-known health authorities say, ‘The biggest health problem in Australia by the year 2015 will be dementia.’ Scrap all the others. It is going to be dementia. The authority on that is Dr Michael Valenzuela, who is the research fellow at the School of Psychiatry in the University of New South Wales. He has argued that part-time work after retirement can reduce dementia and Alzheimer’s by up to 63 per cent. He contacted me a year ago and said, ‘I see what you guys are doing. I want to be involved.’ He has contributed health articles to our website. You cannot buy that. He has written a book called *It’s Never too Late to Change your Mind*, and we got a write-up in that. You cannot buy that either.

Ms JARRATT: Being the member for Whitsunday, I live and work in an area that in the past has been heavily affected by the mining industry in the Bowen Basin. At its peak we found it very difficult to get manual workers in the tourism industry—hospitality workers, marine industry workers and that type of labour. I am thinking that with the growth of the Surat and Galilee basins and what is coming in those areas there will probably be great potential to fill some of those low-skill jobs certainly but jobs which pay reasonably well. I am wondering whether you have an antenna hooked into the potential in those areas around the growing mining and gas industry.

Mr Magoffin: We do not have any antennas locked on that industry at the moment. We have a couple of antennas and feelers out with some other training industries. AgForce, based out of Toowoomba, teaches people about cane harvesters and getting licensing for agricultural based equipment. It has approached us directly to run a training program. Thanks very much. We have also been approached by Namoi Cotton. We have a good arrangement with Namoi Cotton, with permanent advertising, because it needs people all year round to go through the harvest system. In conjunction with those organisations, maybe someone in the mining industry—we would dearly like to be involved with them. Some of the mature age workers who do not have special skills who want to do something different—they might have been an accountant and really want to learn how to work a cane harvester—can do one of these courses and get themselves reskilled or retrained. I think those organisations that offer those sorts of facilities are really great. Then we can say to our members, ‘Get yourself reskilled, retrained and rehired.’

Ms DAVIS: In the Queensland government submission it was considering the issue of grey nomads working part time. I would be interested in your comments as to whether you think there would be detriment to local people filling local positions if they are competing with grey nomads.

Mr Magoffin: Good question. I found the problem in Charters Towers a couple of years ago and in Townsville. There was a reluctance by some of the employment agencies to even talk to me. They said, ‘We have our own employment agencies and we have our own people. We need to look after our own people first.’ I thought that was fair enough. It is really good to look after your own people first. But, as the seasons change, bearing in mind that up north it is wintertime and the tourists, or grey armies, are heading up north for travel, how do you advertise the jobs ahead when you say, ‘We are full up this season, but next winter some of our regulars are not coming back. I need people in Charters Towers, Cloncurry, Winton,’ or wherever. ‘We would like those jobs filled. We will advertise them today.’ Because these people plan well ahead, you can fill them well ahead. So the local employment agencies are going to say, ‘That’s fine. How

can we be sure we will fill those vacancies in time for the next season?’ This is the benefit of the organisation that we have at the moment; they can plan ahead. But you are right: the local people should look after their own people first, if you can get the right people at the right time.

CHAIR: You are marketing an opportunity where there is a skills shortage. Often where there is a skills shortage there is a housing shortage as well—for example, in mining communities such as Blackwater, Moura or Moranbah they have skills shortages but they do not have the houses. Is it that you are limited to places that are more remote and that have skills shortages and places for accommodation in caravan parks, or do you think you can help in those places where there are skills shortages and the caravan parks and other places are full?

Mr Magoffin: It is not one of the requirements that you have a caravan, a motorhome or anything of that sort. You can travel around by car for that matter, but we find that in remote areas people like to have grey nomads literally towing the house behind them because of housing shortages. There is nothing to prevent people just driving around picking up jobs as they go, but then they have to find accommodation and very often it is very expensive. A lot of people I do not think would be interested in doing that.

Then you find there are other grey nomads who travel around who do not want to work at all. If you have a Winnebago, you do not want a part-time job anyway. I recollect—and John Osborne from the CMCA may recollect—a couple of years ago I was asked to do a presentation for the CMCA board meeting here in Brisbane. The members then said, ‘Interesting idea, Ken, but we don’t think we need that many jobs for us. But the other services you talk about—assistance and advice on health issues and whatever—our members could be interested in that.’ The CMCA as well as caravanning bodies and others all have their own websites and plenty of advertising material, but we have a lot of members from the CMCA. We advertise in its magazine and on its website.

Mrs MENKENS: Mr Magoffin, earlier you touched on the reluctance of employers in some cases to employ older folk or seniors. From a government perspective and a community perspective, what initiatives should we put in place to improve that perception? Retired people are not looking for 40-hour a week jobs but perhaps one or two hours a week, and there is a great deal of expertise to offer. I think there is a perception that we are going to have to change with the changing demographics of the population, because it is certainly becoming a much more ageing population. Therefore, the importance of those people has to be recognised.

Mr Magoffin: You are quite correct. The head of National Seniors Australia, Michael O’Neill, and Everal Compton, one of the very vocal supporters of mature age workers, have been in the papers recently. I had a chat with Michael O’Neill a little while ago and said, ‘We must have a meeting.’ Apparently there is an election on tomorrow and that has held things up a little. But the government does support mature age workers.

Mrs MENKENS: I think it is a public perception as well that needs to be changed.

Mr Magoffin: It is a public perception. To quote a famous politician, ‘We need to encourage more Australian workers to appreciate the extra benefits that older workers bring to the workplace such as a strong sense of loyalty, reliability and extra depth of insight.’ It is a great quotation. Anyone recollect who said it? The current Prime Minister. And Tony Abbott said something very similar.

A couple of months ago I had a meeting with Craig Emerson, the federal member for Rankin. I said that one of the problems we have with grey nomads is this prejudice against mature age workers. He said, ‘I agree with you.’ I said, ‘What are we going to do about it?’ I recommended that employers be subsidised directly, and we have a plan to do that. I have worked it all out. It has not been costed by Treasury, but we worked it out. Apparently the federal government and the opposition have a plan to subsidise directly mature age workers, which was a great idea. If you pay employers to take on mature age workers, now we are talking money. Now you have my interest. I know it is a monetary thing, but it will entice employers to engage the more mature age worker.

The feedback I get from employers across Australia—and I have only ever met one, by the way, who wandered through Brisbane about a year ago, but I have spoken to hundreds and hundreds of people across Australia—is that they like the mature age worker. They will stay longer. They are not like a backpacker who wants to run around Australia in three weeks. They are more honest; they do not take things with them. Instead of staying a few days, they will often stay two or three weeks or two or three months. Most people when they have employed mature age workers love them and want more of them. That is the feedback I get, but selling it to other people sometimes is a little difficult. I think the government—both state and federal—should be out there selling Experience Pays. The government has worked hard on it and it has probably cost a lot of money. It should do it again.

Ms JARRATT: I will comment on that. I think since the GFC there has been a change of focus from the need to engage mature age workers to a whole new vulnerable group in our society, and that is our young unemployed. I am positive that, with a focus on skilled labour and the shortage of skilled labour, it is only a matter of time before it is back with us. I can assure you from my perspective that that focus on getting mature age workers back into the workforce is not far away.

Mr Magoffin: I think it is a matter that most state and federal governments have to look at. As the population ages we have a demographic bulge. It is a real problem. Some 45 per cent of voters in this election are over 45. National Seniors brought out those figures recently. The younger generation are

going to have to pay an awful lot more money to keep us old buggers alive longer. That is the long and short of it. The government really should encourage people to work a bit longer, not just increase the retirement age to 67. They could keep people working longer or part time or reskill them. Reskilling people gives them more interest in life, they re-engage with society, they top up their super and so on. I think it is an essential financial policy as well as a health policy.

Ms DAVIS: I was wondering what your organisation is doing in terms of making connections with Indigenous communities? Are there opportunities for grey nomads to do some part-time work on a short stay in a community and offer their expertise? Is anything being done by government with you in order to make those connections?

Mr Magoffin: One of our marketing people was up in Townsville and Cairns recently and did make contact with some Indigenous groups to see how we could get involved with them. It is open to anyone who has got any particular skills. We would like to have a look at trying to reskill them through USQ or one of the training organisations. We would like to do something like that.

CHAIR: I think you were here for most of the evidence before. This is a question that I asked most people. This type of tourism is about a route rather than a destination. Rather than going from home to a destination and back, grey nomad tourists may never go home. They may not even have a home. They might just go from destination to destination. Is there a way that employment opportunities can match that—that is, having a package of job opportunities that means that someone can work three weeks here and finish on Friday and start on the Monday at the next job and spend three weeks there? Is there an opportunity for a route package rather than a destination package?

Mr Magoffin: This question was raised earlier. It was addressed by the Tony Charters inquiry in 2006. It was funded by the Queensland government and partly by the federal government. It ran in conjunction with the CMCA. That review by Tony Charters suggested that there should be a contact database for employers and employees in part to specifically plan ahead and match jobs and tourism routes as you travel around Australia. That is what we are involved in setting up at the moment. We would like the regional areas of Australia, the councils and the chambers of commerce to say, 'If you advertise your jobs through this site you will get people coming to your area. You can advertise your region on the site for free.' So if you are going to Winton you can find out what is on in Winton in September or when the flower show or whatever is on. The grey nomads from down south or wherever would look to our site not just for a job but to find out why they should go to Winton or Dirranbandi. They would see that there is something there that they are interested in and they can get a job there, too. You match the tourism to the job and then they will come.

Mrs MENKENS: I realise that from a commercial perspective you are technically an employment agency. You have to sell yourself and your business but also the concept. I think the important thing that you are selling is this concept. You have outlined some of the ways that you are promoting and getting the word out. Do you feel that there are other avenues that are not yet available to you or are more difficult for you to access to promote your concept and your business?

Mr Magoffin: We would like to use other avenues. There are plenty of ways to advertise it. In terms of business, this a not-for-profit organisation. I have put about \$60,000 of my own money into it. It costs a thousand-odd dollars a month to run. We do not get any subsidies and it does not make any money. We are not really an employment agency; we are a two-way database. I would like to advertise much more widely.

We are now getting some voluntary assistance from people like Drew to assist with marketing and to get the name out there. We would like to advertise more jobs. At the end of this month we want to say to employers everywhere that they can advertise their job for free because we know that for every job that goes up there we will get a new member for \$50. I cannot keep paying for this forever. I am funding it from my accountancy business, which is interesting, but it would be nice to break even or make some money out of it one day. We could start going out to employers in regional areas primarily and say, 'It is free, people. Put a free ad up. It will not cost you a cent and you can advertise your town or your region and the beauties about it for free. You can put it in now for something that is happening in November.'

Mrs MENKENS: Do you feel that you are getting as much support as you would like?

Mr Magoffin: No, not by any means. I did a presentation to the Tourism Industry Council a year or so ago. They were quite interested in this. Julie Higgins from the Experience Pays program was interested in this. We do not get any other funding. It would be nice to get it because I would like to advertise in the *Road Ahead* magazine, the NRMA magazine and the other car magazines. Through the CMCA you can advertise in what they call *The Wanderers Mate*, which is a glove box book that all the members have. There is the *4WD Action* magazine for the ones who are not quite grey yet but want to travel.

CHAIR: They will go grey quickly if they drive cars like that.

Mr Magoffin: There are hundreds of magazines you can advertise in. There are retiree magazines and so on. Quite often we are asked, 'Can we write an editorial about you guys for free?' We like free; it is a good price. We have an offer now from the National Seniors in Melbourne. Next year they are having a seminar and conference. They have offered to distribute 20,000 brochures for us. We would like to promote Queensland in that. That would be nice.

Ms JARRATT: The caravan shows are quite popular, I understand. I do not know whether you have thought of setting up a booth at them. I guess you are going to get the people who might want the work, not the people who have the work. Apparently, word of mouth is one of the best ways of advertising anything in this particular sector.

Mr Magoffin: I go to the caravan shows. I have a T-shirt in maroon which says ‘Grey Nomads Employment’. When I go across the border to the Lismore show I have a blue one. You have to watch your politics. We have caps and things like that. People come up to you and say, ‘What is all that about?’ We have brochures that we distribute. My son-in-law and daughter went around Australia last year and distributed a thousand brochures through caravan parks. They ran out by the time they got to Darwin so I sent another 2,000 to them which cleaned me out. They dropped them at caravan parks and shows. We go to the caravan shows.

I went to the one in Sydney just a while ago. They said that half a million people go there in a week or two. It was jam-packed. I tried to put some brochures out. You are not allowed to do that, apparently. I go to car parks where four-wheel drives are, particularly the ones covered in mud with interstate numberplates. I put the brochures under the windshield wipers. One guy caught me one day and said, ‘What do you think you’re doing?’ So I showed him. Fifteen minutes later he said, ‘When do I join up?’

CHAIR: While this inquiry is focused on opportunities in rural and regional areas, I will be a bit parochial about my part of the world. Are there opportunities for grey nomad employment in places like Logan, where you and I are from? This does not seem to be something that is necessarily limited to outback Queensland. People might come from Victoria and be prepared to stop at Beenleigh and work at the local school and have a look at the Gold Coast or the Scenic Rim. Is it limited to rural Queensland or are there opportunities for urban Queensland to take advantage of these opportunities?

Mr Magoffin: There are no limits to it. We have a guy who joined last week who is from Brisbane. He is a retired doctor and his wife is a nurse or something like that. He may want to travel but he is looking for part-time work. I had a discussion with the Beenleigh chamber of commerce president, of which I am member, and Russell Leneham from Quinn & Scattini. We would like to make an offer to the members of the Beenleigh chamber of commerce for the month of September to advertise any jobs they please for free. They might not have a job vacant now, but they might have one in December or March of next year. So that is to lure people to that area if they are passing through Brisbane and want to work for a couple of weeks. There are jobs at the prawn farm in harvest season. There are jobs around there for skilled or unskilled people. It is not restricted to the capital cities.

CHAIR: I think that is all the questions we have for you, Mr Magoffin and Mr Sansness. Do you have anything that you wanted to clarify before we finish your evidence?

Mr Magoffin: I will make a brief summary. We want to try to connect potential employees and grey nomad tourists. We want them to come to Queensland. We want them to experience the sights, sounds and smells of Queensland. VicTours says that there is more to the world than reefs, rivers and rainforests. We think that is a pretty good ad for Queensland; I would like to steal it. If we can get the tourists to come here and go to the regional areas, it will improve the economics of that regional area. They will stay longer. They will spend a bit of money. It may not be a lot, as we have heard from other speakers, but they will stay longer. They will contribute to that community with their skills and mentoring. We think that would be an excellent idea for regional areas. We would very much like the regional employers to use our services because from next month it will be free.

CHAIR: Never miss a chance. Thank you for your time today.

CLEARY, Dr Michael, Deputy Director-General, Policy, Strategy and Resourcing, Queensland Health

COOK, Mr Clive, Senior Director, Conservation, Strategy and Planning, Department of Environment and Resource Management

DI SALVO, Mr Vern, Director, State Valuation Service, Department of Environment and Resource Management

HASTIE, Mr Bill, Principal Advisor, Office of Local Government, Department of Infrastructure and Planning

MAGUIRE, Mr Steven, Executive Director, Department of Communities

MALLAM, Ms Jane, Director, Strategy, Research and Government Relations, Tourism Queensland

MALONEY, Mr Tim, Director, Industry Development, Department of Education and Training

MULLER, Mr Neal, General Manager, Tourism Division, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation

NICHOLAS, Mr Graham, Manager, State Land Asset Management, Department of Environment and Resource Management

NICHOLS, Ms Elisa, Director, Environment Regulation, Department of Environment and Resource Management

OLLASON, Mr Bruce, General Manager, Road Safety and System Management Division, Department of Transport and Main Roads

PAPAGEORGIU, Mr Michael, Executive Director, Planning Policy Division, Department of Infrastructure and Planning

TURNER, Mr Bruce, Deputy Director-General, Agriculture, Food and Tourism, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation

CHAIR: The committee's proceedings here today are conducted pursuant to the resolution of the Queensland Legislative Assembly of April 2009 that appointed it. The proceedings here today are lawful proceedings of the parliament and subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing rules and orders. As such, I remind all visitors that any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded in accordance with those standing orders. Witnesses will have been provided with the guidelines for witnesses appearing before parliamentary committees adopted by the Legislative Assembly which the committee is bound to follow. Are there any witnesses who have not had a chance to read those guidelines? The *Hansard* record will note that the witnesses have all read the guidelines.

Under those guidelines you may object to answering a question put to you on the grounds that the question is personal and is not relevant or the answer may tend to incriminate you. The committee does not require you to take an oath or affirmation but does expect you to respect the solemnity of the proceedings today. It is our intention to keep to the hearing program if at all possible, so to assist us in keeping to the program we would appreciate it if you could keep your answers succinct. If you do choose to take a question on notice, we ask that you provide your answers by Monday, 30 August 2010. Would someone like to make an opening statement?

Mr Turner: I understand that I have a statement to make on behalf of all government agencies, if the committee is agreeable to that.

CHAIR: We are in your capable hands.

Mr Turner: Thanks. On behalf of the various government agencies represented here today, we welcome the opportunity to discuss grey nomad tourism issues with the parliamentary Economic Development Committee. Your issues paper examined a number of pressure points for grey nomads and regional communities: marketing, employment and volunteerism; services infrastructure such as health and emergency services; as well as planning and land use issues.

As outlined in our submission to the parliamentary inquiry, grey nomad tourism spans the interests of a number of government agencies—at least eight in total—highlighting the need for a coordinated whole-of-government response. Queensland offers some of the most sought-after regional holiday destinations in Australia. Each year approximately 700,000 touring visitors take advantage of these regional experiences and take a driving trip in Queensland which is more than four days long and includes at least three stopovers. Anecdotal feedback is that for this year it has been quite a bumper year for drive tourism in Queensland’s outback and regional areas.

I now want to give some sort of overview in terms of the work that we are currently doing within my particular agency and then I will touch on the work of other agencies. Minister Lawlor’s Tourism portfolio encompasses DEEDI and the statutory body Tourism Queensland, whose principal role is being the state’s leading creative marketing organisation for tourism. As the name describes, DEEDI is the key Queensland agency for employment and economic development. Tourism is a key economic driver for the state and is directly supported through the department’s various business development and support initiatives. With more than 5,000 staff, the department offers a range of services to individuals and tourism businesses in all regions across the state.

The role of Agriculture, Food and Tourism, of which I am the deputy director-general, leads the government’s tourism industry development agenda through principally the long-term Queensland Tourism Strategy and more recently the Tourism Action Plan to 2012. The latter, developed in consultation with industry, addresses many of the challenges and opportunities offered by grey nomad tourism.

In relation to Tourism Queensland, its focus to date has not been focused on specific demographics but rather Tourism Queensland’s efforts are on promoting experiences that travellers are seeking on their holidays by their needs and wants for a holiday. For example, following the dinosaur footprints or cruising up the coast at their own pace and stopping at deserted beaches or meeting the locals and sharing tips on the best fishing spots are experiences which are enjoyed by all ages, not just grey nomads.

Turning now to some quite specific initiatives that are in place to support grey nomad tourism, Queensland’s wide expanse and long distances between many destinations make the quality and availability of roadside infrastructure extremely important. This infrastructure, such as rest-stop facilities, is vital not only for tourism purposes but also for the broader community. To meet this need, the Bligh government allocated \$1.8 million over three years to establish a Minor Tourism Infrastructure Grants program for minor drive tourism infrastructure such as road signage, roadside picnic areas, amenities and upgrades of existing facilities. Needless to say, this program will have major benefits for grey nomads. So far 15 projects totalling just over half a million dollars have been approved, with a further \$1.2 million still to be spent under the program. In fact, the department is currently finalising the latest round of funding for approval by the minister, so I am told that we have to watch this space.

Complementing this program, tourism opportunity plans have been progressively developed for Queensland’s 10 tourism zones. In a nutshell, these tourism opportunity plans identify infrastructure requirements to support the ongoing sustainable development of tourism in a region as well as identify new tourism products to meet future visitor expectations and demand. To date, nine of these plans have been finalised, with the sole remaining one due for release in October 2010. A couple of examples of projects identified in these plans that support drive tourism and grey nomad tourism include the development of an access road, day use and camping areas and walking trails into the northern section of White Mountains National Park in tropical North Queensland, improved road access and camping accommodation facilities at the Kroombit Tops National Park in Central Queensland, and development of a hinterland touring route around the Bundaberg-Fraser Coast area.

Further, the new ecotourism plan announced in November last year supports the development of new regional tourism product and will see low-impact ecotourism infrastructure developed on demonstration sites in or adjacent to a number of protected areas throughout this state. This initiative focuses on providing environmentally friendly accommodation which should appeal strongly to mature-age visitors, given their strong interest in eco-accommodation and nature based tourism.

The department and Tourism Queensland work collegiately with other agencies in progressing the state’s tourism agenda. On behalf of the other agencies, I want to touch upon some of the relevant issues. In terms of employment, a number of submissions to the inquiry highlighted opportunities for grey nomad tourists to assist with addressing skills shortages for both paid and volunteer employment in communities. In June this year the Bundaberg Regional Council mayor was also reported as saying that the grey nomad market could provide an untapped source of employment for the region, and that there could be opportunities for not only volunteer work but also paid employment. Queensland is already facilitating employment opportunities in this space. Skilling Solutions Queensland, through a one-stop-shop approach delivered by its 16 customer service centres across Queensland, can assist grey nomads to identify their training and career options, as well as opportunities to obtain formal qualifications through recognition of prior learning. Since its inception, it has provided training and career information to over 8,500 Queenslanders within the retirement age demographic.

Further, the state-wide pilot Grey Nomad Teacher Employment Program, which was implemented in 2009 in the Fitzroy/central west, North Queensland and Darling Downs/south-west regions, is aimed at retirees travelling throughout Queensland in caravans or motorhomes to assist boost the supply of temporary and casual teachers in rural, remote and regional locations—and I probably should add urban locations now as well after your inquiries, Mr Chairman. In 2010 this program has been expanded to

include additional regions. The TAFE teacher Skills Treasury established in August 2008 also encourages suitably qualified technical, professional or tradespeople to express their interest in TAFE teaching at institutes across Queensland through a web enabled register.

Volunteering helps to also build strong, healthy and inclusive communities and in 2006 its contribution to Queensland was estimated at around \$13.4 billion. As the committee will be aware, just yesterday Minister Lawlor and Minister Struthers announced a new tourism portal to encourage Queenslanders to volunteer for tourism activities across the state. The web portal, hosted by Volunteering Queensland, will save volunteers valuable time in their search for upcoming events and will help link registered organisations with suitable volunteers. I am happy to say that there are already more than 80 volunteering opportunities posted on the portal. I think DEEDI’s contribution of \$30,000 to Volunteering Queensland to develop a tourism portal will prove to be a very worthwhile investment in this space. For the information of committee members, the web link for the portal is www.tourismvolunteering.com.au. While each of these initiatives is still in their early stages, they are an important part of meeting Queensland’s workforce development requirements and may assist with developing longer stays from the grey nomad tourism sector as well.

With regard to tourism infrastructure, earlier today John Osborne from the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia praised the announcement by Minister Wallace of the government initiative to install an extra 34 dump points around Queensland to help reduce environmental impacts on the major road corridors. While a key infrastructure need, dump points are just one of the bits of the roadside infrastructure puzzle to attract grey nomads to Queensland’s regions. The Department of Transport and Main Roads’s key interest also lies in providing a safe journey through the provision of rest areas to counter fatigue, traveller information to assist with the planning and carrying out of their journey, and signage to provide guidance around the major road system.

As the committee heard through the presentations by Caravanning Queensland and the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia, camping grounds and caravan parks are yet another part of the infrastructure puzzle. But with their land use and planning issues and competing interests, they are a more complex part. DEEDI continues to work with the Department of Environment and Resource Management and the Department of Infrastructure and Planning on the various issues related to camping grounds and caravan parks.

With regard to health services, Queensland Health provides a range of hospital and community based services across the state. Having said this, it should also be noted that the vast majority of primary healthcare services are delivered by general practitioners and that policy regarding general practitioner services rests with the Commonwealth government. In rural areas the primary point of contact is often a rural hospital or community health centre. These services have been and will continue to be used by tourists of all ages, not just grey nomads. Queensland Health also manages 26 multipurpose health services which provide a flexible approach to health and aged-care services in rural and remote Queensland. More of these services are planned.

It is noteworthy that in 2008-09 4.4 per cent of hospital admissions of people aged 65 and over in rural and remote areas were interstate residents. Queensland Health has considered the possible impact of increased tourism. In this regard, there could be opportunities to provide community information by way of targeted strategies to encourage travellers to ensure vaccinations are up to date and that they carry appropriate supplies of prescription medication with them and targeted strategies to encourage travellers to have comprehensive health checks before embarking on long trips. There may also be opportunities for travellers with the right skill mix and appropriate registration to participate in workforce programs.

In conclusion, over the coming years grey nomad tourism will not only continue to grow in size but will become more important as the population ages. The Queensland government recognises this and its various challenges. I hope that today I have outlined what initiatives are in place to ensure Queensland reaps the benefits that grey nomad tourism has to offer to rural and regional economies in Queensland now and into the future. Government agencies are now open for questions!

CHAIR: Thank you. I want to go straight to the infrastructure puzzle and the complex part of it. I am not sure whether Mr Papageorgiou, Mr Di Salvo or someone else might answer it, but I refer to the issue of caravan parks versus campgrounds. We have had submissions particularly around the Barcaldine Regional Council example and the 2007 amendments to the Land Act. Are you able to explain to the committee how those amendments work, what is required of councils and how a township would go about putting in place a system to provide caravan park overflow campgrounds or campgrounds all in one vicinity?

Mr Papageorgiou: I think I can answer part of it. I am not sure that I can give you information on the Land Act. I am not sure if someone else can.

CHAIR: Is there someone from DERM?

Mr Di Salvo: Yes, there is someone here.

Mr Papageorgiou: The key issue in terms of Growth Management Queensland is maintaining the infrastructure for grey nomads in terms of caravan parks and camping grounds as essential infrastructure—that is, maintaining that network across the state. Because so much of it is privately owned, our key focus has been on guidance to councils in planning for these facilities on privately owned land. So we have been looking at mechanisms about regional plans, planning schemes and making decisions on

development applications, because there is pressure on the privately owned caravan parks and campgrounds from other uses—in coastal areas from residential development and in other areas from commercial development. So that has been a key issue about losing the facility.

Councils are a very important provider of campgrounds and overflow areas on their own council owned land and on government land. That is appropriate in the sense that you can get a variety of options for the grey nomads so that there are a variety of services. There are different niches in the market. It becomes a concern in these examples where councils are competing or undercutting or creating a problem with the privately owned facilities, which then might be less viable and subject to closure. So I think that is the key focus. It is good to have the variety of services available, it is good to have a variety of niches within the market and operations and, where there is this conflict, my understanding is that it is best to address it on a case-by-case basis.

If in a particular town there is a very, very seasonal use of the facilities and the council can then assist in terms of making part of its other council facilities available for overflow camping—very basic, but a useful service—that then supports the general range of facilities. If, though, it is on an annual basis throughout the year, persistently undercutting a much more robust service elsewhere in the town, then that is an issue that needs to be resolved locally. How the regulations come into that, I cannot give you—

CHAIR: Yes. Is there someone who can tell the committee about this issue of land use management plans for secondary purpose use of crown land and how a council would resolve that issue of competitive neutrality?

Mr Di Salvo: We have someone here—a colleague of mine from the department who specialises in the Land Act. He might be able to address that. While he is getting ready, the Land Act provides for approval to permit the use of a reserve for a purpose other than the purpose for which a reserve was dedicated. There are two provisos: that the intended use will not diminish the purpose for which the reserve was dedicated or adversely affect any business in the surrounding area.

CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Nicholas, have you had a chance to read the guidelines for witnesses?

Mr Nicholas: Yes, I have.

CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Nicholas has indicated that he has read those guidelines. Are you able to add to Mr Di Salvo’s answer about the use of crown land, if I am using that word correctly, and the way it can be resolved through land use management plans? Can you tell the committee about that?

Mr Nicholas: I will just give you a bit of a background as to, not particularly the Barcaldine issue, but more particularly how the use of showgrounds is provided for within the Land Act. In 2007 there was an amendment to the Land Act to support the greater use of reserves around Queensland. Previously, the Land Act only allowed for a local government to lease land for a caravan park within the reserve but it did not allow the trustee, being the local government itself, to use the land for secondary use. But the amendment to the Land Act provided an amendment which supported the trustee of the reserve to entertain the secondary use of the reserve. It has been primarily put into place to support additional camping facilities where the town itself either does not have the capacity or does not have any facilities at all. It allows for local government to entertain a secondary use for that reserve. That is done through a land management plan process, which is authorised or approved by the minister. The local government has to undertake a community consultation process to get an understanding of the community issues and, importantly, how the introduction of a camping facility on a showground may impact on the businesses in the area.

With the particular issue at Barcaldine, there are a number of commercial caravan parks there. It was very important for the department to understand how the introduction of a camping facility on the showgrounds may impact on those particular commercial facilities. As far as the camping ground goes, it is not meant to be a caravan park. There are very limited facilities—virtually public toilets as far as public health facilities go. There are no kiosks, there are no laundrettes or anything like that on there. It is purely camping with power supply.

The council went through a full community consultation process there, developed their land management plan in conjunction with the department and had to satisfy a range of issues that the department had set out through its secondary use policy. That related to the infrastructure on the site and also the land management plan clearly must stipulate how that camping facility is to be used and for the term of that use. The department’s policy restricts the camping facility to a maximum of three days, but it can extend to seven days depending on the amount of public use of that area and also how the existing caravan parks may be impacted. So if the existing caravan parks are near capacity the local government is able to entertain a longer-term use of the showgrounds, but definitely no more than seven days in any period of time.

CHAIR: The evidence from the campervan owners was that there is not a competition because there are two separate markets. How would a council address that? Could they put in their land management plan to say, ‘The caravan park offers this range of services. We are offering just the basic service that the caravan park does not want to offer?’ Will that meet the test of adverse effect that is required?

Mr Nicholas: In the land management plan for the Barcaldine showgrounds it is very clear that the showgrounds offer only a very limited range of facilities. The council will have a sign at the front gate directing anybody who wants to use the facilities to the commercial caravan parks—so that is the phone numbers and the street addresses. The showgrounds are also charging exactly the same rate as the commercial caravan parks.

CHAIR: Is that the same rate even though it is a very different service?

Mr Nicholas: Yes, it is. The advice the department has is that the council has consulted with the commercial caravan parks to gain an understanding of their basic rate for one night's stay for a powered site. The council introduced exactly that same rate. So there is no direct competition at all and it is quite clear that the facilities that they get are certainly less than they would get in a commercial caravan park. What it appears to be is that the users of the showgrounds like the amenity value being in the wide open spaces. They do not necessarily need all of the facilities of a commercial caravan park, but they are still prepared to pay that base rate.

CHAIR: Okay.

Mrs MENKENS: I will go off on a different tangent. Several submissions discussed the issue of national parks in the context of grey nomad tourism, including camping costs. I think it would be fair to say that costs in national parks are still a reasonably contentious issue for the public. What are the fees to use national parks for camping? Are there time limits on the length of stay? I am not sure exactly who—

Mr Nicholas: I am not able to answer that. It does not appear as though we have anybody from that department who is available to answer that, unfortunately.

Mr Turner: Would you like us to take that on notice and get back to you?

Mrs MENKENS: Yes, I would appreciate it if you could take it on notice. Thank you for that. I think we have a wonderful array of national parks in Queensland and I think it is an important part of all tourism.

Mr Turner: And it probably is an oversight that we do not have anybody here.

CHAIR: Should we be addressing that to DERM?

Mr Turner: Yes.

CHAIR: Back to the old EPA.

Ms JARRATT: It seems to me that we have had a change in our marketplace, if you like, over the past 20 years. Once it was all caravans when we now have a range of holiday homes that are towed or driven around this country and that has brought this tension into the marketplace between caravan parks and other forms of rest stops for these travellers. One of the other areas that seems to be a little contentious is our roadside stop areas. I am just wondering if someone could spell out for the committee the government's policy around the use of roadside rest areas, be they designated truck stops or other form of rest area, and whether or not we welcome self-contained vehicles overnighing or spending even longer times at these sorts of places?

Mr Ollason: With the chair's indulgence, could I just distribute these documents, because they have information about all of the sites around Queensland on the road system?

CHAIR: Yes. Leave is granted to table them.

Mr Ollason: I have a copy for everybody there. The department's policy—and I can only speak for the state controlled network, which are the main arteries around the state, but councils potentially could have some of these rest areas on their own road network—is really about the management of fatigue. So the idea is to have regularly spaced areas—and they vary in size across the network—to give people an opportunity to stop and have a break, have a stretch, check their van, check their loads, that sort of thing. It is not our policy to be providing an alternative camping ground network across the state. You will see on the map that all of the various rest areas are noted. It is quite a big one, I am sorry. If you fold it out there is a section on heavy vehicle rest areas. That map has a lot of information and it is quite relevant to this. It has on there who the controlling authority is. So even on our state controlled road network the majority of those rest areas are controlled by the local government, or it could be national parks, or the various parts of DERM. Some of them are controlled by us. You will also notice for the ones that are controlled by us there is either a red MR or blue MR. The red MR indicates that there is no overnight stopping at all. The blue MR allows a 20-hour stop, which is fundamentally if you arrive in the evening you might want to stay there overnight but you need to be on the road in the morning. We also have a policy that says that within 25 kilometres of any township that does have a commercial caravan park or camping facility that we would only have a red type stopping area. In other words, we do not want to have people staying overnight there; we would expect to see them go on to the next town.

Ms JARRATT: I have a supplementary question. Does it work?

Mr Ollason: Within reason. In a past life I was the district director of the Cairns region of Main Roads. A classic example is the one at Mount Molloy. Thankfully, in a way I guess, it was actually a water reserve so it was controlled by the Mareeba shire council. But as anyone who travels in the north knows, for all intents and purposes it is a very popular stop on the way up to Cape York. It is quite a nice spot on the creek and so forth. There have been issues about trying to enforce that. For a lot of ours that are in remote areas, we do not have people on the road all the time. So enforcement can be a bit of a problem. But we do the best we can and we work in conjunction with local government.

Ms DAVIS: Thank you. I think we all acknowledge the importance of grey nomad tourism, but one of the previous witnesses who is a full-time grey nomad asserted that Queensland was behind the pack in terms of the other states in promoting and providing for grey nomads. I acknowledge the figures that you were delivering earlier in your opening statement. So my question is: do you have any comment on that assertion that we are losing out to other states? Are we doing anything to connect with the other jurisdictions to see what they are doing?

Mr Turner: I will start answering the question and I might ask my colleague on my left here to add some further reflections from a tourism marketing perspective. I think one of the advantages that the southern states have is that they are small. Because communities are together and infrastructure is so much tighter and the population is so much denser, it is an easier challenge for them to address. Our problem is our distances.

I do not think it is the product; I think it is the distances that we have travelling between them. We are very conscious of that and we are working on that given the existing resources that we do have. It is also fair comment to say that some of the local government areas—and Victoria in particular is a classically good example—are very smart in the way they promote their products and their communities. There are some lessons to be learnt here, particularly for our own local government areas to think about how they can better promote their own existing areas. I will leave it at that, if that is okay.

CHAIR: Ms Mallam, do you have anything to add to that?

Ms Mallam: I do not have figures of the share data compared with the states on me, but I could take that on notice if you would like me to find that information out for you. We do work with our state and territory counterparts in various levels of marketing and also through the national tourism strategy to understand the travellers throughout Australia. Whether or not we are doing better or worse, I support Mr Turner’s assertion that it is a much bigger state to travel around as well. Out of the travellers who do come into Queensland, the ones from interstate spend a lot longer travelling throughout Queensland and, therefore, are of greater economic benefit to the state. There are a lot of Queenslanders who also enjoy travelling around their state and the experiences that it has to offer.

Ms DAVIS: The witness also suggested, though, that Western Australia was working hard to create a better experience for grey nomads, and they would have as much of a distance issue as we have in Queensland. I might even suggest it is more difficult because we have more established inland towns and regional centres. I do not know that that would have answered his question at all. Are the stakeholders proactively working with grey nomads, the people who are actually wanting to travel here, to gauge what it is that they want and what they need in order to provide the right tourist experience?

Ms Mallam: From our experience, the age and the mode of transport of the traveller is secondary to the experiences they want to have on their holiday. Therefore, that is where we would connect with our consumers, or visitors. If they are adventure seekers, they are more likely to go off the beaten track. It is not determined by age. Therefore, we look at what they want and need. The Simpson Desert may be one of those experiences that is more compelling to them or somewhere off the beaten track as people travel up the coast. It is the experiences that they are after that we look for rather than their mode of transport or their age. We are continually working with our consumers’ needs and wants to understand what we have to do to supply the right product for them.

CHAIR: Can I ask another question, Mr Nicholas?

Mr Turner: I was just going to add that Gary Rebgetz, who gave some evidence before the committee previously, is also a member of the advisory group that advises us on the minor infrastructure tourism grants. So they are very much part of the process.

CHAIR: Fantastic. Mr Nicholas, are land management plans for seeking a secondary purpose a difficult process? Are local governments given assistance in making them?

Mr Nicholas: Land management plans have been in place—certainly under the act—for the best part of fifteen years. We have a range from right across the whole state. It is not a difficult process. We have supporting fact sheets and procedures for all our trustees to consider in developing those land management plans. They are given a range of assistance through our regional offices in developing those land management plans. Particularly in relation to the one for Barcaldine, our Longreach office did work with the council in developing that land management plan, giving them guidance as they went through the process and encouraging them to engage the full community which would have included also the commercial caravan park owners.

CHAIR: The competitive neutrality question requires a bit of economic research into where are the markets for tourism and are they competing. Is there some information that councils can use or is there some assistance in analysing that on a case-by-case basis?

Mr Nicholas: The legislation itself does not require competitive neutrality. The legislation clearly puts it as a decision for the minister to consider as to whether or not the secondary use diminishes the use of the reserve and any undue impact on the surrounding businesses. In considering that, he looks at the type of arrangements the council is putting in place and how those arrangements may also be provided by the commercial operators. The arrangements put in place for Barcaldine were exactly the same commercial arrangements as for the commercial caravan parks and it was deemed that there would be no undue impact in providing this.

We do not promote it as an overflow arrangement; we promote it as a secondary use of the reserve when the existing caravan parks do not have capacity to manage the influx of tourists into the area. Capacity is not necessarily about the number of people coming in; it could be capacity regarding the vehicle or the people’s particular needs. They may be travelling with pets and the caravan park does not allow pets. So the showgrounds do provide for that capacity to handle those particular tourists coming through.

CHAIR: But is fair competition an adverse impact when considering a land management plan?

Mr Nicholas: The adverse impact we look at is whether or not they are actually competing on an unequal footing from a commercial point of view. Also, the secondary use is all about providing a supplementary facility to what is already existing in the town. It is not there to compete. We make that quite clear to our trustees. As trustees under the Land Act they do not have a role to compete with any commercial venture; they are there to manage the land for and on behalf of the state and for the benefit of the whole community.

Mrs MENKENS: This is probably enlarging on the earlier question of the member for Aspley. Several submissions highlight some deficiencies in statistics relating to grey nomads, and these deficiencies include a lack of clear definition of a grey nomad and methodological issues relating to the collection of data. Submission No. 71 by the Blackall-Tambo Regional Council suggests that the lack of statistical data can actually impact on the willingness of the banks to lend money to tourism businesses, tourism businesses can be reluctant to expand and there can be unintentional allocations of inadequate resources to regions. Does Queensland collect or access statistical information relating to grey nomads? To add to that, do you think that there is a broader area where this could actually be done or done better?

Ms JARRATT: Scope

Mrs MENKENS: Scope.

Ms Mallam: The first issue is the definition of what is a grey nomad. We have taken the definition for these purposes to be people over 55 who travel for at least four days and have at least three stopovers. Once we have settled on that, then we can start defining what the size of the marketplace is. It is a little bit like backpackers: no-one can really define what a backpacker is, either. For that purpose, we know that, if I use my definition of a grey nomad, there are about 700,000 long haul drive trips in Queensland a year. Half of those are from interstate and the other half are from intrastate. The 700,000 is for all travellers travelling for four nights or more and have three stopovers and half of those are aged over 55. There is a lot of travellers out there who are not grey, who are travelling around Australia or Queensland enjoying the experiences that we have to offer. So should we exclude them from this conversation is the question. The other thing is that those people aged over 55 will stay longer—a lot longer—than the younger travellers, who can also be families. This information is all from the National Visitor Survey. So that is where we can understand the share by state as well. It is a very reliable source of data. They have conducted 120,000 interviews a year with Australians about their travel behaviour and from there you can determine who has been on a trip, where they have been and how much they have spent. Because of the reliability of that data at the national level, that would be the key source of information.

Ms JARRATT: I think I will go to health if that is all right. I will skip from tourism to health. There has been a little bit of divided opinion, I guess, in our submissions around the importance of health services when grey nomads decide where to go on their travels. It may, indeed, not be a high priority but particularly for a part of that cohort it is. Mr Turner mentioned the percentage of stays in our hospitals of people who were of that particular age. Could you just elaborate on the statistics around the impact and impost on our health services, particularly in rural and remote Queensland that may come from this sector?

Dr Cleary: The percentage was about 4.4 per cent. It is still difficult to determine whether they are people visiting or whether they are related to the grey nomad group. Again, collecting the data is something that we do not do within the healthcare system at the moment to identify that subpopulation specifically.

As you would be aware, Queensland Health is a very diverse organisation with a very large number of facilities spread across the state. There are 166 public acute hospitals in Queensland. We have four psychiatric hospitals in the state and 27 multipurpose centres, which is a service model that has been developing in Queensland over recent years. There are 26 hospitals with emergency departments, three hospitals with 24-hour accident and emergency care and 112 hospitals that provide accident and emergency services but do not have a fully fledged emergency department on site. There is quite a diverse range of services that people can access across the state.

In terms of the types of services that the subpopulation would access, I guess they are looking at accessing acute services obviously when someone becomes unwell. They may also be looking at accessing primary healthcare services, which principally are not provided through the public hospital system and are really provided through the primary care services in the community, mainly led by general practitioners.

One of the things that we would probably encourage—and I was talking to a colleague of mine today whose mother is a very active grey nomad and has been on the road for seven years except for the annual visit home at Christmas time. At that time my colleague, being a medical practitioner, obviously encourages her mother to do a number of things and I think they are quite valid because they align with what Queensland Health is suggesting, so that is the reason for the anecdote. The first is to have an

annual health check. That is very important as you cross the age barrier and go past 45 years of age. So if you are over 65, it is particularly important. In terms of some of the other things, when you are taking medications it is very important that you ensure that you have your medication list up to date and with you and that you have information with you relating to the type of medical condition that you have, and often that is provided by a local general practitioner. Equally important is ensuring that you have adequate medications when you are travelling. Sometimes there are medications that are not available in particular locations if you are on highly specialised medications. Access through community pharmacies is sometimes limited. I am happy to talk more about the medication access if you would like.

The other thing for us—and I assume the committee is aware of this—is that the growth in the population will be quite substantial over coming years. The intergenerational report is probably a document that you have had access to and have had time to consider. In terms of Queensland Health, the key things I have taken from that report is that over the next 40 years, going from 2010 to 2050, we will see the number of people between 65 and 85 increasing from 11 per cent to 17 per cent of the population and those over 85 increasing from 1.8 per cent to 5.1 per cent of the population. That is quite a substantial increase in that subgroup who often have chronic medical conditions.

The other interesting statistic that I have taken away from that report is that the number of people working compared to the number of people over the age of 65 is going to decrease quite dramatically. At the moment there are five people working for every person over the age of 65. By 2050, the number will be down to about 2.7 people. That has a number of impacts. Firstly, it means that obviously there will be fewer people working who could potentially be there to support the population over 65 but also there will be fewer people working and potentially generating income. That is going to have an impact.

That was one of the reasons the federal government recently, in consort with all of the state governments with the exception of Western Australia, looked at the COAG agreement around the national health and hospital reform agenda. One of the subcomponents of that was ensuring that we have a viable health industry to support the population as that population growth occurs. Just in closing, this is probably a positive thing for the committee in that there are going to be more people travelling across the state. So the numbers are certain to grow and will continue to grow probably after 2050.

Ms DAVIS: You spoke earlier about providing the experiences that grey nomads are seeking. I suspect here in Queensland that part of that might be having an Indigenous cultural experience. I am wondering what might be being done at the moment or what you may be pursuing in terms of facilitating that cultural experience and whether there is a social and economic benefit to Indigenous communities by encouraging grey nomads to visit.

Ms Mallam: I will speak on behalf of Tourism Queensland first. A number of Indigenous experiences have been identified through the tourism opportunity plans. At the moment the majority of those opportunities are in Cape York and in the Torres Strait. We are actively working with regional communities to develop those experiences, but they do take quite a long time to develop. We are actively doing that with various local regional tourism organisations through the tourism opportunity plans. Do you have anything to add?

Mr Turner: No, other than to recognise that DEEDI has a significant responsibility for addressing Indigenous employment issues. We certainly see tourism, along with agriculture, as the key priorities for trying to engage Indigenous people in employment opportunities. We are actively working in that space, but I cannot give you any direct, specific information at this stage.

Ms DAVIS: Further to that—and this might be to one of the other departmental officers—in terms of providing part-time employment opportunities for the grey nomads in Indigenous communities, is any work being done as part of those discussions, those conversations?

Mr Turner: No, other than I think it is part of the program that we have developed. We have talked about the volunteering sector and the hotline. I think there are opportunities there for Indigenous communities to put their name down and say, 'These are the sorts of people we would like to come to our community to work with us,' or alternatively people can put their name down and say, 'Yes, we'd like to volunteer in Indigenous communities,' and then see if we can get some matches.

Mr Maguire: In regard to volunteering opportunities, certainly that is something that we are particularly interested in—encouraging volunteering in Indigenous communities. There is a non-government organisation that specialises in that work in terms of placing people in Indigenous communities on a voluntary basis. It is a national organisation funded through the Australian government. We have close links and we encourage that sort of volunteering.

CHAIR: Are you able to provide us with the name of that organisation?

Mr Maguire: It is not on the tip of my tongue, but I can certainly provide it.

CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Ollason, there has been a lot of talk about dump points. I understand the basic principle, but can you tell me what they look like, what they do and who pays for the operation of them once they are installed?

Mr Ollason: There are a significant number of dump points already out there that have been provided by councils or even by the private sector. In recent times, from 2008 to this year, we have had a program where the department has been in partnership with the CMCA and with local government to
Brisbane

establish a network across Queensland. I am sorry that I have not got a photo, but I can provide one. In simple terms, they look just like a water tank with a connection on the top. They are buried in the ground with proper sewerage connection type fittings that allow the people in the vans to hook up and pump into them. That is my understanding. Not that they are always connected this way, but in a lot of cases the councils connect them to their town sewerage system so that the effluent goes straight into the system and does not have to be transferred again.

CHAIR: So councils are meeting the cost of the water and sewerage for the operation of the dump points?

Mr Ollason: Yes. Sorry, I did not answer that. We are not in the water supply business obviously and we were trying to avoid being in a situation of continuing to have to maintain them when that is not our core expertise. So the way we set it up was that we would provide the tank itself and we would provide funding to the council to install it and connect it all up. At that point it would become part of the council's infrastructure and they would then operate it and maintain it. Where they are located is run by the CMCA. They do the planning and the liaison with the councils, and they come to us and let us know where they are looking to put them across the network. Again, if it is okay with you, Chair, I have a map here of where we have put them out so far. I can table that for the committee.

CHAIR: I know there are some dump points on this map.

Mr Ollason: Those are the ones that are on the ground. That map is about 12 months old. That has all the ones across Queensland that we are aware of and we got that information from the CMCA. But I also have a map of the ones that have been rolled out through this program over the last couple of years. I think we also noted in the opening statement that there are plans for another 34 to roll out over the next three years, and some of those have already been planned by the CMCA. So they are shown on the map at the moment. But not all of those 34 sites have yet been identified.

CHAIR: We love maps. Leave is granted.

Mrs MENKENS: I might stay on the same track that I was on before, if that is okay. In the Queensland government submission on page 10 it suggested that more research is needed on grey nomads and that the most effective way of obtaining this information would be to encourage local area data collection. Firstly, my question is: how do you think this would work in practice? Also, from the other aspect, I want to make the comment that information centres do a wonderful job. I think it has also been outlined in various other submissions that the grey nomads do frequent the information centres wherever they go. So I imagine that that would also be a data collection point for you. I am interested in your comments there and on whether there is more that can be done.

Ms Mallam: The best data on this is at the local level, without a doubt. That requires the coordination of local governments, their visitor information centres and local tourism organisations to actually collect the data that suits their needs and that does require quite a lot of organisation. Tourism Research Australia do offer a program to assist with that and we work with Tourism Research Australia. It is the funding that is the issue. It is also getting the interviewers on site and the right timing. So it is a cost issue to some degree. We have done a couple of surveys in centres that give us a good idea of the type of traveller we are talking about here. We are just about to do one in the outback in September and October to look at the visitor profiles there. That will include, given it is outback Queensland, quite a lot of people who are drive travellers and grey nomads.

There is also research done in other states and we can learn from that as well. But Tourism Research Australia's website has that research, that comparative data, as well. There is not a huge amount of work, but there is some research currently available.

Ms JARRATT: We have learned that for some of the grey nomad sector they do, indeed, stay in the one place for a considerable period of time. In fact, we read in one of the submissions that they have at times set up vegetable gardens because they actually stay so long in the one place, which is quite amazing. One of the issues that has been raised is around training or further education through the TAFE system. I think what many of the grey nomads would be looking for are those short courses, be it in pottery or photography or something along those lines, that we once delivered out of TAFE systems but apparently are no longer available. I wonder if you care to comment on any future plans or any alternative ways of delivering those sorts of lifestyle courses that would be of interest and would keep people in a place for a period of time.

Mr Maloney: There are still a myriad of adult education type programs around through TAFE and other providers that could well suit a long-staying grey nomad, for instance. Yes, they are typically through TAFE. We have 13 TAFE institutes around Queensland but we also have probably the most vibrant private sector training market in Australia, with about 1,400 providers operating in Queensland and often in distance and remote environments. The availability of courses that might best suit grey nomads I think are quite extensive. Even in harsh economic times, there has been a real emphasis within my department on where are the skill shortages, what is the high-end trade training required and the like. There is still a vast array of adult programs that suit a whole range of community based arrangements and needs.

It is probably a double-edged sword, too—that would be my other observation—if training is linked with employment perhaps. I know this probably was not specifically your question but, for those who do stay for longer periods, often it is around part-time and casual engagement and that sort of thing. The other

service which I think is critical to this sector is about understanding one's own skill sets, one's own capacity. Some of the research that is available does demonstrate the extent to which grey nomads have partial skills, even lapsed skills—that is an expression I have been reading. To update their skills, to top up and complement their skills is very much on the agenda. So the services that the department does provide through its outlets, known as Skilling Solutions Queensland, allow individuals to establish or determine just where their skill sets are up to and where the gap is—what is missing. It might be about adult education, but I am thinking that it might also be about a skill set that is required to do X or Y, especially if you are staying in a centre for any prolonged period.

It is only because of the inquiry that I went looking for those figures. I know that since the inception of the Skilling Solutions service, with 16 outlets around Queensland, there have been over 8,000 services provided of that type for that grey nomad cohort, if you like. That is a growing part of the business and I think it is an important demand-supply equation that we are talking about.

Ms JARRATT: I am really pleased to hear that. Do you advertise the availability of these types of courses in a place that the grey nomad can plan ahead and in a place that is easily accessible?

Mr Maloney: Yes, we do communicate and publicise. Whether or not it is entirely appropriate or whether it could be more appropriate to this cohort and be linked with other more industry or sector relevant mechanisms, I will take advice. They are conveniently located, to the extent that these services are typically found in shopping centres and community based environments rather than in metropolitan centres or regional centres in office blocks and so on, but I take your point. I think there is probably more to be said about how we can make the service even more relevant to the cohort we are dealing with.

Mr Maguire: In regard to lifestyle courses, the University of the Third Age is a significant player in Queensland. Under the Seniors Strategy that was recently released by the government, the department has funded the University of the Third Age to look at establishing further sites specifically in regional Queensland. Most of their current sites are in the main population centres and this funding is to assist them to try to establish further sites in regional Queensland.

CHAIR: Dr Cleary, I know you were talking about hospitals before but I am concerned about the impact on primary health care for grey nomads. Older people travelling from town to town to town to town might find they need to have a different GP in every location. I am concerned that some people, particularly those with some sort of chronic illness, could have 10 GPs look over their file and review it. Is there an information sharing system possible within Queensland Health and across primary healthcare providers that would ensure grey nomads do not have to retell their story at every town and perhaps get conflicting advice from different GPs as they travel?

Dr Cleary: I think your concerns are quite valid because when people travel and see different health providers, they often get independent advice which may vary from provider to provider. My suggestion would be that when people do travel they take with them that information that is relevant. For example, if you have a normal general practitioner, it is quite valuable to get them to provide a summary of your medical condition so that you can take that with you so that when you visit a general practitioner in a particular setting you can provide that information to them. The history is something you would carry with you and that would be all encompassing. Most of the general practitioners now have electronic systems and it is generally quite easy to generate that information for people who are travelling; there is not a lot of, if you like, effort involved in generating a summary of a patient's condition. Again, it is very important to have that medication list with you when you travel.

One of the things that has been discussed is the opportunity for e-health across Australia. That is an area where the states and the Commonwealth have been working for quite some time to develop an opportunity for shared care across the public and private sector. There are a number of projects that are reasonably well advanced. In fact, there is one in Brisbane, which does not necessarily relate to rural and remote areas. In the Brisbane north area, there is a project where general practitioners and hospitals are sharing information about patients with chronic and very complex conditions often, and the patients have consented to that process. It is probably, in my opinion, one of the flagships in Australia where that type of model is being tested. I can foresee that that type of model could be applied more generally across Australia as time goes on. There is also an opportunity for Queensland Health—with the electronic health record system that is currently being introduced principally in the major hospitals to start with—to facilitate some of that information flow.

I think at this point it would be wise for people who are travelling to obtain a written summary of their health conditions so they can move freely and have that with them when they attend general practitioners or community health centres. In the not-too-distant future, I can envisage that changing as the electronic health records become available as a result of the ones that are being used now, such as the one I mentioned in the Brisbane north area. The information resides on a computer system in one of the health services, and that is obviously appropriate if you have got a community. More importantly, I think we will see the electronic records being held by patients and clients so they will be able to take that with them when they visit their general practitioner wherever they visit.

Mrs MENKENS: This is probably a bit of a left-field question so I am not sure who is interested in answering it. I live in tropical North Queensland and from January to March we are subjected to storms, cyclones, et cetera. With our wonderful modern media, that gets lots and lots of coverage and our southern tourists think, 'We're not going there.' That certainly does have a huge impact, and Cyclone Larry is an

excellent example of that—well, not excellent, but it is an example of the breakdown in tourism that happened when that occurred. A corollary of that is like what happened last year when there were the huge floods in the gulf and places like Normanton and Karumba were unreachable for a long time. From speaking to a tourist operator up there last year, I learnt that what happened was that when the roads did clear they could not get the message out, so the message did not get out and they really did suffer. As I said, it is a left-field question but it is a big issue. A major issue in the tropics is the overenthusiasm of some of the communications that go across.

Mr Turner: I suppose I would like to preface my comment by saying far be it for us to try to manage the media.

CHAIR: Not from us either.

Mr Turner: Nonetheless, what you say is very true and we were certainly conscious of it this year when the south-west floods took place. One of the real priorities for us was to start working with the community out there for recovery, recognising that while the floods were devastating at the time they did present a real opportunity. I have not got the figures at my fingertips, but we did undertake quite a number of campaigns which actively promoted travelling in the south-west as soon as the roads were open. One of the difficulties you have, and my colleagues from Main Roads might attest to this, is that everybody likes to get out there and actually charge through the roads even though they might still be closed.

This is one of the challenges of living in Queensland. Certainly, we are factoring it in far more in our responses. For Cyclone Ului, one of the first priorities we looked at was the impact not only on agriculture but on the tourism industry particularly and how we could promote recovery.

Mr Muller: Can I briefly add to that. In discussions with some tourism organisations, an idea came up that is worth tabling—that is, some of the regional tourism organisations or resorts might like to think about putting some live webcams around the areas and using social networking to prove that the sun is out and the place is no longer flooded or cyclone devastated. There is merit in that idea, as there is in using the networks through the RTOs, TQ and QTIC—and you heard from Daniel Gschwind this morning—and so you make sure you are using every one of those opportunities to get the message through. A picture tells a thousand words, and the idea is to have some live webcams to actually prove that the sun is shining again and that the winds have dropped, particularly post cyclones and post floods. Using social networking through Twitter, Facebook and all the rest of it is the way of the future.

Ms JARRATT: It might be difficult in Bedourie.

Mr Ollason: Could I add to that too. I apologise again, but being a visual person I have some further handouts, if that is all right.

CHAIR: We assumed that Main Roads would send us an engineer so we expect nothing less.

Mr Ollason: I was an engineer in a former life; I have been reformed. Could I pass these handouts to you?

CHAIR: Yes, leave is granted.

Mr Ollason: We have a traffic and traveller information website called 131940. I think most of you would have seen it in Brisbane on the motorways in an urban context but that website covers all of Queensland. It is not the solution to the problem that has been raised totally, but it is part of the solution in my mind. We actually do have webcams on this website, but at the moment most of them are in the south-east corner. On the example, you can see a photo that is all in real time on the website, and that is over at the airport. Equally, we have webcams in places like Cairns and Mackay, so at least if people use this website they can see that the sun is shining in those places. All you need to do is scroll on to the map for, say, Cairns and you will start getting web images from Cairns.

Further than that, particularly in the last 12 months, we have been able to develop the site up, because I think it was the year before that when we had the Emerald floods. If you think back over the last couple of years, we have had significant flooding in rural Queensland. In response to that, the website has been developed and we have partnered with the RACQ in terms of this. It gives people the ability to look across the state network to see what is going on at any point in time. If you look under the photograph, there are four categories that we report on: incidents, such as crashes on the network; where our roadworks are happening; special events; and the fourth one on the right is closures and load limits. If people tab on that, they can look across all of Queensland and see what roads have been closed by flooding, particularly the major roads. Not all of the council roads are there, although we are partnering with councils to get them on here so some councils will have their information on the website. We also have the load limits that we impose to protect the assets during the wet weather.

My understanding through the CMCA is that a lot of the grey nomads have computers on board now and they have the capability to look at what is going on in real time as well. We do make them aware of this site through the CMCA. It is part of the information that will help people understand what is happening on the network around Queensland.

CHAIR: Can I take up the issue of your former life. I understand that you used to be based in the northern district for Main Roads.

Mr Ollason: I have worked in Townsville, Cloncurry and Cairns so all of North Queensland.
Brisbane

CHAIR: One of the most spectacular parts of our state is Cape York but it is also a part that I assume is probably quite difficult to traverse with a motorhome or a caravan. How far up Cape York can you go with a caravan? Is there a potential to open that part of the world up to grey nomad tourism?

Mr Ollason: While I was up there, the bitumen seal to Cooktown was established so that opened up some additional areas north of Cairns. Hire companies will not let their vehicles go off the bitumen so that does limit it a lot. I have been down here five years now and there has been progress since I left. If you picture Cape York, Lakeland is at the bottom of it.

CHAIR: We have got a map in front of us.

Mr Ollason: You have got maps there; you have got numerous maps. In fact, the Guide to Queensland Roads is probably the best one there but it is a bit large. From Lakeland up to Weipa, which is the spine of Cape York, is about 500 kilometres. From memory, we might have had about 100 kilometres of that sealed at the time I was there. It is very seasonal of course. The wet season comes in and lots of river crossings cut the road, so we go in after that and do maintenance grades to open it up again. During the tourist season, it is usually in reasonable condition but as we get to the end of the season it starts to deteriorate a bit. I have been up there and seen people with purpose built four-wheel drive caravans, but in my experience it would be very risky to take a normal caravan up there because the corrugations shake the van and all the joints and things start to come apart.

The other thing is that the peninsula road goes up the middle of the cape, but some of the nicer places to go and see are another couple of hundred kilometres off that road into the Aboriginal communities such as Lockhart River and places like that. Those roads are lower order roads than the state controlled road, so it gets even tougher once you get away from there. It is another 350 kilometres to get from there up to Bamaga and Seisia up on the tip.

It is a long way to go for normal, conventional vehicles to be able to access the cape. They need to be purpose built for off-road use, and I think it will be like that for a fair while to come. As I say, Cooktown has certainly opened up. The road into Hope Vale has opened up. I think that area there, which gives you a little taste of the Cape York wilderness, is accessible now but a lot of the cape is still hard to get to.

Ms DAVIS: I am not sure who will be able to answer this. Someone might be able to take it on notice, but one of the earlier witnesses was speaking about self-containment schemes for vehicles. A lot of the debate earlier was what sort of vehicle requires minimal access to amenities, where other people require showers or a broader range of amenities. In Queensland, as I understand it, there is no registration or standard for self-containment vehicles. I was wondering whether there has been any discussion that through either registration or some other method vehicles which are self-contained can have some sort of sticker or identification that they are in fact self-contained.

CHAIR: I understand that New Zealand has a national standard on self-containment. No?

Mr Turner: For what purpose do you think? Is this to say that they can be exempt from our curfew on roadsides?

Ms DAVIS: No. Part of the discussion earlier was regarding who needs what in terms of opening showgrounds or having roadside stops rather than using caravan park facilities. For council officers, if they were able to identify whether or not a vehicle was self-contained—

Mr Turner: Okay. So you could be offering up a lower quality park without toilet facilities and those sorts of things which if you were self-contained—

Ms DAVIS: Yes, absolutely.

Ms JARRATT: You would never get one of those stickers on a Wicked van, for example.

Ms DAVIS: No, absolutely. Has there ever been any discussion within departments of some formal manner of officers identifying at a glance whether it is a self-contained vehicle?

Mr Turner: I think the short answer is probably no, but we will take it on notice and try to get back to the committee on that.

Mrs MENKENS: The Queensland Tourism Industry Council submission states that the Department of Environment and Resource Management sewerage licence fees impact in a negative way on caravan parks. Would you be interested in elaborating on this issue? I am certainly well aware of it in quite a few areas in my area.

Mr Di Salvo: I have a colleague here who specialises in that field.

Ms Nichols: I am Elisa Nichols from the Department of Environment and Resource Management.

CHAIR: Have you had a chance to read the witness guidelines?

Ms Nichols: Yes, I have. The fees under the Environmental Protection Regulation increased on 1 January 2009. It was the first increase in more than 12 years. The fees had not increased since they actually commenced. The increase was not just a straight increase; it was a complete reformulation of how fees were charged under the regulation, and it was based on a comprehensive environmental risk assessment of all the activities.

In relation to caravan parks and some other small businesses like motels, in some unsewered areas those businesses run small sewage treatment plants and they were captured by these fee increases. The former environmental protection agency did a full eight weeks of public consultation on the fees as well as quite a lot of targeted consultation through industry associations. At that time no information was forthcoming about the impacts of those particular sewage treatment fees. However, since the fees commenced and invoices started rolling out, the department has received a lot of correspondence about that.

The department responded in relation to the small sewage treatment fees by putting in a payment plan for operators in the first year and giving them six months to pay the new increased fees, but since that time the minister has instigated a review of those fees. What we have found was that the original risk assessment assumed that most of those sewage treatment plants were discharging into watercourses, as the larger ones tend to do. It turns out that that is not actually the case. They mostly discharge into absorption trenches and infiltration beds, which means they have a lot lower environmental risk. The result is that the minister has approved an investigation into two new categories which will reduce fees. We are in the process of that investigation, and hopefully we will have an outcome in the coming weeks.

CHAIR: There was a question earlier about fees for camping in national parks. I understand that Mr Cook is here and that he has some information on that. Mr Cook, have you seen the committee's witness guidelines?

Mr Cook: Yes, I have.

CHAIR: Do you want to re-read the question?

Mrs MENKENS: Several submissions discuss the issue of national parks in the context of grey nomad tourism including camping costs. I think I also made the comment that there was a perception of controversy amongst the community about fees in national parks. Of course, we have a very broad range of wonderful national parks in Queensland. The question is: what are the fees to use national parks for camping? Are there time limits on the length of stay? Are there any other comments you would like to make on the use of national parks for camping?

Mr Cook: There is a schedule in the Nature Conservation Act that describes the fees that apply to protected areas. I will read them out for the committee if that is informative. For each night if you are five years old or younger, it is \$2.80. For persons who are five years or older, it is \$5.15. For a family, each night is \$20.60. That is the fee schedule in the Nature Conservation Act. That is amended according to CPI every now and again.

CHAIR: Is there a time limit on how long you can camp in a national park?

Mr Cook: It is usually no greater than 30 days, depending on the particular camp site because of the turnover that occurs. But, generally speaking, there is a limit and you cannot stay there ad infinitum.

Mrs MENKENS: How do people register or let you know that they intend to camp?

Mr Cook: Booking online is the best way. For example, for about a million camper nights we have recovered about \$5 million in revenue from booking online. You can book by phone. There are still a few self-registration booths around, but we are gradually phasing them out in lieu of booking online. We have also established 15 agents across Queensland to take booking fees on behalf of the Parks and Wildlife Service.

CHAIR: Do national parks provide facilities that are suitable for people in campervans or motorhomes? I know it varies, but are the facilities appropriate for campervans and motorhomes?

Mr Cook: They are generally not provided in the same sort of quantum as the private sector. We have very few powered sites—for example, a handful. We are cognisant of the fact that most of the parks cater for four-wheel drives, camper trailers and self-drive visitors. The other end of the spectrum is the person who visits a national park on foot literally and camps in remote areas with a two-person tent, for example. The range that we provide is really 'harden up' sites, which are a bit akin to local government provided services, but we are very cognisant of not providing those sorts of services adjacent to rural towns in particular. So we do not compete in that same niche of the market. The fully serviced sites are generally provided in smaller rural communities. Our sites are usually pretty basic. There might be a toilet block, but they are cleared sites and so forth. Very few of them will have power to them, for example.

Mrs MENKENS: No doubt with the booking there would be a limitation on numbers and cut-off points with the number of people that you allow in certain areas.

Mr Cook: That is correct. One of the benefits of booking online is that you can choose the site, book it and then be guaranteed you have the site when you rock up there, but obviously the line is drawn once it reaches its capacity.

CHAIR: Mr Di Salvo, the QTIC in its submission talks of concerns about the rollout of site valuation processes for caravan parks.

Mr Di Salvo: Yes.

CHAIR: The QTIC said that it had a great deal of concern initially because of the amount of site works undertaken, but subsequently it has been involved with the department in a process that has, to some degree, satisfied its concerns. Can you talk about your view of how a transition to site valuation would affect caravan parks, particularly in rural and regional communities?

Mr Di Salvo: On 9 March 2010 the Premier announced reforms to the valuation in Queensland to provide greater certainty and also to align Queensland with most Australian states. The move to site value will provide that alignment. Site value will apply from the 2011 valuation—that is next year’s valuation—for all non-rural land. Rural zoned land in rural community areas will not be going to site value. They will continue to remain on unimproved value.

In terms of the layman’s definition of unimproved value, it is basically valuing the site if it was filled as if there was no fill on it, so bringing it back to where it was in its natural state. In terms of a move to site value, site value assumes that what you see, if it is a filled site, is what you are valuing. Rather than remove the value of that additional fill and maybe revetment wall, it will be part of the value of that property for statutory purposes. There will not be any impact in terms of rural zoned lands or lands in rural environments, because they will continue to be valued on unimproved value. In terms of urban or non-rural areas, the valuation of properties that have been filled that are used for caravan parks will more than likely go up, but it will be consistent across that whole local government area.

CHAIR: I suppose rates and land tax depend on going up more than your neighbouring property and the other property base of that council. Will their valuations increase at a greater rate than the average of property values under site valuation?

Mr Di Salvo: If you have a caravan park that has been filled and it is the only one in the local government area that has been filled and the others have not been filled, that caravan park will go up over and above everyone else’s. However, it will not go up in terms of value above those other caravan parks. It will be brought into line with them. Currently when we value that caravan park it will have a concessional valuation. We would remove the value of that fill and the revetment wall.

The way I look at it is that if I were going to develop a caravan park and I had two choices—an improved property that is filled and one that needs filling—you would pay more for the one that is already filled and you would probably get a bargain for the one that needs to have some earthworks done on it. You would buy it on the basis that, after you have done all that work, you will get better value for money than the one that is already filled.

In terms of moving to site value, we would value that property the same as the other filled site. Whilst their valuation will go up and there is a possibility that the rates will go up, local governments have got strategies to manage rating impacts on these properties also. There are things like averaging and a concessional approach to increases in valuations. There are a lot of valuation tools and categories available that local authorities can use.

CHAIR: I have one more question to the tourism specialists. Grey nomad expenditure on tourism seems to be quite different to other types of tourism. Most tourists might spend a lot more money going to attractions, tourists events and those sorts of activities whereas most of the grey nomad spend, from what we have been told, is on consumables—on petrol, groceries and clothing and footwear. People are travelling for the cultural experience rather than necessarily for a tourist experience. How do we engage with those retailers who do not necessarily see themselves as in the tourism market but who are probably the major beneficiaries of grey nomad tourism?

Ms Mallam: The information we have so far backs up that it is mainly petrol, food and living expenses that are spent on by the grey nomads. But there is some evidence that they contribute to experiences along the way—that is, tourism product. It is bit like the backpackers in that sense. Their cost of living per day is quite low but they are willing to do the experience if they see its value.

In terms of how we engage the rest of the community—those people who are indirectly involved in tourism—we have just completed a survey of social attitudes towards tourism. It is about engaging with the community and making everyone aware that tourism is an important part of their environment, not just for the grey nomads. The other side of that is understanding the economic value of tourism to the local community. We have done some work on the regional economic contribution and getting the word out through the community, through the councils, through the local press to increase that awareness of tourism and its value in their region.

Mr Turner: I can only reinforce those sorts of comments. One of the little experiences I had about six months ago when I flew out with ministers to Windora was—and you could actually get real coffee at Windora—that all of a sudden not only was it real coffee but we were sitting in chrome chairs. It is a trendy little buzz there at Windora. This is the community. This is local government. What we are seeing with the increase in grey nomad tourism is that local governments and communities themselves are responding to the challenge. If you travel around many parts of Queensland now you are seeing significant change in the way communities are exhibiting their own communities, for want of a better word, to take advantage of the opportunities of grey nomad tourism.

CHAIR: So you were the latte set of Windora were you, Mr Turner?

Mr Turner: Exactly.

CHAIR: I thank all the government witnesses for coming this afternoon. It has been a great opportunity for the committee to explore many of the issues covered in your submission. Thank you for your time. We very much appreciate it.

That concludes today’s hearing. I thank the members of the committee—Rosemary, Tracy, Jan, Betty, Shane and Jason—for their efforts in terms of this inquiry. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank our Hansard staff who have supported us all day and the other parliamentary staff.

I thank the witnesses for their interest in our committee and its work. Many of the witnesses who have come today have come a long way. Some of them are grey nomads and have come from all parts of Australia to be here and give their evidence. We very much appreciate that.

The transcript of today’s hearing will on our website as soon as we can finalise it. This will probably take about three weeks. If you would like a copy of the report please leave your name on the subscription form on your right and we will ensure that you get a copy of that. Finally, and most importantly of all, the committee would like to thank the research staff who support us: Lyndel, Liz, Margaret and Anne. We need those people and their support to make our committee function. We very much appreciate their help.

Committee adjourned at 3.34 pm