



EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Members present:

Ms KE Richards MP—Chair
Mr MA Boothman MP
Mr N Dametto MP
Mr JP Lister MP
Mr BL O'Rourke MP
Mr JA Sullivan MP

Staff present:

Mr R Hansen—Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE OPERATION OF THE TRADING (ALLOWABLE HOURS) ACT 1990

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

SATURDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 2021

Mossman

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The committee met at 3.03 pm.

CHAIR: I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the operation of the Trading (Allowable Hours) Act 1990. My name is Kim Richards; I am the member for Redlands and chair of the Education, Employment and Training Committee. I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the custodial land of the oldest living civilisation in the world and pay my respects to the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people and their elders past, present and emerging.

With me today on the committee are my trusty deputy chair, the member for Southern Downs, Mr James Lister; Mr Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore; Mr Nick Dametto, the member for Hinchinbrook; Mr Jimmy Sullivan, the member for Stafford; and Mr Barry O'Rourke, the member for Rockhampton. I also acknowledge that the member for Cook, Cynthia Lui, will be joining us here very shortly.

On 14 September 2021 the Legislative Assembly agreed to a motion that the Education, Employment and Training Committee inquire into and report on the operation of the Trading (Allowable Hours) Act 1990. The committee is required to report back to the parliament by 31 January 2022. The terms of reference for the inquiry are on the back of the agenda, so hopefully you have had a chance to review those. If not, they are accessible on our parliamentary website. The submissions to our inquiry as well as written briefs the department has received from the Department of Education, which administers the trading allowable hours, are available from the inquiry website, including the department's responses to issues that have been raised and the submissions that have been received by the committee.

We are very pleased to be in Mossman today. It is certainly much warmer than where I come from. It is absolutely delightful to be here today. The hospitality has just been lovely here from the bowls club and we just ducked up the road to the Beechwoods Cafe for a coffee. We want this hearing to be as informal as possible. We want to give everyone the chance to share their thoughts with us, but it is still a formal proceeding of the Queensland parliament and, as such, subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing rules and orders. I am obliged to remind everybody that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. We have a number of witnesses registered to speak today and we will also happily open the floor. There is a great turnout from the local business community here in Mossman. To begin can I please call to the table the Douglas Shire Council mayor, Mr Michael Kerr.

KERR, Mr Michael, Mayor, Douglas Shire Council

Mayor Kerr: Good afternoon. Thank you very much for allowing us to speak today. The opportunity to have a say for the region is extremely important for us. I would also begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and I pay respects to their elders past, present and, very importantly, emerging. The emerging youth of today are the change makers of tomorrow and the creators of futures for further generations. Change making is what we are here for today: creating change so that we can ensure today's generation has the best opportunities, with fair and balanced legislation that suits various regions throughout the state without a one-size-fits-all approach.

Sensibly, the 2016 review picked up on many issues this region faced. The 2017 amendments to the Trading (Allowable Hours) Act 1990 implemented recommendation 10 of the review: exempting this region from trading hours restrictions for a trial period of five years. Prior to these restrictions, on Sundays and public holidays et cetera retail and tourism businesses were constrained from providing the services that had become the norm for many of our visitors. The expectation of those visiting on holidays is that the businesses they attend would have been open. Images and perceptions of an empty town with no significant activity on what should have been a busy long weekend or a public holiday during high-visitation holiday periods not only were damaging to our destination's reputation but often instigated unsightly issues with the accommodation properties these guests were staying at. Another common issue prior to this change was that even interstate tourists, who are often not aware of various Queensland public holidays, were caught up with nothing open, losing days of holidays.

The benefits of the 2017 amendment for this region have been overwhelming. Up until COVID we had been competing on the world stage, with a large international market. The international market expects to shop and enjoy their holidays to the fullest. The economy of this shire depends highly on tourism, with over 700,000 people visiting the region annually to explore the World Heritage listed Wet Tropics of Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef. We are here to offer them the best we can, and when we are not open we simply just cannot do that.

We are now moving forward, hopefully, away from the past 18 months of COVID-19. This region has emerged as one of the most affected regions in Queensland, with the loss of almost 1,000 jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars lost to the local economy. The irony, of course, is that we have not been sick. We have not even had the virus present, and many up here still do not even know anyone who has come into contact with that virus. For us this has been an emotionally, mentally and financially heartbreaking journey—one that all of our traders in this region will need every hour of every day to possibly and hopefully see their way out of the loss of trade they have encountered.

If we have tourists here who want to spend their money in our shops, we must be allowed to be open in order to service them. Douglas Shire Council absolutely supports the request for a further five- to 10-year moratorium for this region to allow local businesses to trade on all public holidays. We also support the submission to extend that to all Douglas shire businesses to encourage and allow them to keep their doors open as much as possible. I am sure the other speakers today will also inform you of how this region has been significantly impacted by COVID related border closures and the pressures this and the other current and future restrictions are creating on our business owners. Anything that improves the trading environment for local businesses will absolutely help our economy recover.

We now more than ever, thanks to lockdowns, live in a world where people can get whatever they want online 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Restaurants deliver to doors and parcels are couriered within hours. The choice is beyond imagination. As we now start to move out of COVID, I dream of a world where face-to-face customer service will return. A happy smile and friendly demeanour will outweigh the computer monitor in front of you and a clicking keyboard—a real human connection again. We cannot do that unless we are open. We need to be open when the purchaser wants us to be and not when we are restricted by words on a piece of paper. This moratorium has given incredible results to Port Douglas and Mossman and its reputation as a high-end tourist location to service those tourists. It is paramount that, now more than ever, this continues for the sake of our economy. Thank you for your time.

CHAIR: You are absolutely right: I think we have been the victims of our own success when it comes to COVID. As you said, we have not seen it here, but what we know is that international tourism has diminished for this region substantially, as has the domestic tourism market in terms of our interstate friends coming up. With the potential of that opening back up again imminently, we know that things could look very different.

Mayor Kerr: We need to be on the front foot. We need to be able to compete on the world stage. If people are used to businesses being open every day of the week then we need to be doing that as well.

Mr LISTER: All of us, I am sure, wish this region all the best for a really strong recovery. It has been tough. If I could just ask you a question about pre COVID and the 2017 changes which enabled the larger chains to trade beyond the non-exempt shops—that is probably the best way to put it—what effect did you notice at the time in terms of impacts on other businesses and impacts on tourists' perceptions and others? Can you comment on that at all?

Mayor Kerr: Disgruntlement, anger. When people come on holidays, time is precious. That five days they may have here is five days they want to spend, and if there is one day they are unable to do the things they need to do, that takes away the whole value of the whole trip. It becomes frustrating and they become angry. As I mentioned, some of the hotel accommodation properties were the ones that bore a lot of the brunt when people could not do the things they wanted to do. Opening it up again has given people fulfilment so that when they come here they get the whole package of their time here. That is really important.

Mr BOOTHMAN: What type of economic growth was experienced in the community when they changed over to extended trading hours? Do you have any data on that at all?

Mayor Kerr: I am looking towards our tourism—

Unidentified Speaker: We do not have specific data in relation to (inaudible).

Mr BOOTHMAN: What about tourist numbers? Did it cause that to increase?

Mayor Kerr: Prior to COVID our tourism numbers were increasing—full stop. I am sure they will continue to increase once we get out of the COVID side of things. As I said, we need to be able to compete with the international market. It needs to be a principle thing so that people can do all of the things they need to do rather than go home and say, 'We went there, but there were two days where we couldn't do anything and it was a waste of our holiday.' Word of mouth tells people 'that's a place to come' rather than not a place to come to.

Mr DAMETTO: My question relates to the type of businesses that have taken advantage of seven-day trading in the Douglas shire. Other than the major supermarket chains, can you please speak to the type of businesses that have taken advantage of that?

Mayor Kerr: That is a really good question. A lot of businesses had confusion about who could open and who could not open. There were always debates and threats of being fined, and then all of a sudden there was a release and it was, 'It's okay. You can open if you want to.' I think there were no days when people were not open, because they knew they could be. Certainly the town flourished, as in activity within the town itself. Everything was open and presented itself as open, whereas previously there were occasions when people just did not open because they did not know whether they were allowed to or not.

CHAIR: I think there may be some confusion around the terminology that is used within the legislation in terms of what is an exempt shop and what is a non-exempt shop. When we talk about exempt shops, it is everything from art galleries to pet shops, confectionary and ice-cream shops, the fish shop, the flower shop, the fruit shop, plants and nurseries, refreshment shops, souvenir shops, soap shops—there is a great big list there of exempt shops. Currently any Queensland business that falls into those categories has the ability to trade 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days of the year. I think maybe there is a piece around education in terms of the non-exempt shops—Kmart, Big W, Target, Woolworths, Coles, ALDI, Myer et cetera. I looked at Port Douglas and Mossman in terms of those big retailers: Coles, Woolworths and Kmart. I noticed that in Mossman for Woolworths it is Monday to Friday from six to nine and Saturday and Sunday from seven to nine. In Port Douglas with Coles we have from seven to nine, Monday to Sunday; that is consistent. I know there is a Coles Express, but that has a fuel station with it which would push it into the non-exempt anyway. Neither Coles nor Woolworths have taken that opportunity to go 24/7. Was that ever the case before COVID? Have those hours been pretty consistent?

Mayor Kerr: Prior to COVID it was more the case that on public holidays they were closed. Being the only department store in Port Douglas, we very much catered to self-catering accommodation properties. If they arrive that day and they come into town to get their groceries, they cannot. Having the shops open on Sundays and public holidays—

CHAIR: Sundays and public holidays are more key than possibly thinking about trading hours in the sense of whether you need Woolworths to be open at 1 am to service your markets?

Mayor Kerr: I do not think we would need anything at 1 am, no. The daytime trading was the issue, especially with the cruise boats coming in. If it was a public holiday—it was Target back then but it converted to a Kmart—they did a roaring trade on those days with people grabbing things. Rather than paying \$300 for a bikini on the boat, they raced into Kmart and grabbed a new one for \$20 or \$30. Again, that meant they kept staff on. I used to be one of the managers at Target, so I know its trading history. It was extremely busy on those days.

CHAIR: That is great. You have really clarified a lot for me.

Mr SULLIVAN: Can you give us an example of some of the niche exempt shops that operate odd hours, either here in Mossman or, probably more appropriately, in Port Douglas, in order to service the tourism sector you are talking about?

Mayor Kerr: Certainly. In the beauty sector in particular they work different hours, especially with the wedding groups. We can have four or five services in one day at the chapel, so they need to be spaced out through the day. There can be times when people come back from a tour and they want a massage at nine o'clock at night. There are opportunities there, especially with international tourists. If they arrive at 10 o'clock at night, they are still on their normal time slot so they are wide awake thinking, 'What can I do?' I am being hypothetical here—I do not think there are currently any massage shops that are open at 10 o'clock at night—but there is a possibility to do that.

CHAIR: Under the current legislation, irrespective of whether you had this exemption for the 24/7, hairdressers, beauticians, barbers and beauty services have the ability to trade 24/7.

Mr SULLIVAN: Noting the last 18 to 20 months we have had, can you reflect on what sorts of impacts that has had on your workforce? We heard some evidence in Cairns yesterday to that effect. Can you give us an insight into how you are going?

Mayor Kerr: In general, it is not good. That is the basic answer. When we did lockdowns, they lasted as long as they could with JobKeeper. We suddenly went to this massive boom—tourism was back and it was going to be great. Everyone went hard finding staff members. They put on staff, trained them, struggled to find accommodation for them and then, bang, everything was closed again, so they have lost them again. All these businesses are now going through the same process again of having to try and find staff, train them up and get them going. We have a majority of backpackers, especially on the tourism side of it, and we do not have those backpackers.

Mr SULLIVAN: In terms of workforce?

Mayor Kerr: Backpacker workforce. We did really well at one stage, through a campaign, to get the South American backpackers back up here last year. We knew they were locked in the country still so we did get quite a few of them back up here, but a lot of them have moved on again because there has been no work. We have so many jobs up here at the moment, it is not funny. From a council perspective, one of the big fears we have moving into this new period is where these staff will come from to run these businesses and where they are going to live, because we have a lost a lot of our accommodation as well from people buying properties up here and, of course, Airbnb, which is a nightmare in our residential areas. We still have restaurants that are picking days that they close so that staff can get a day off, so they are not open seven days a week. All that has to come back into line to get the restaurants running full, ready for this onslaught of the tourism to come back.

CHAIR: We certainly heard that feedback directly when we grabbed our coffee earlier.

Mr O'ROURKE: What an absolutely beautiful place you live in. It is just amazing. Last year my wife, my sons and their partners came up and travelled all around this region. It is so important to be able to get into the shops, on public holidays in particular. When you are up here, you want to make the absolute most of it. Some days you just laze around but on other days you will do a 14- or 15-hour day exploring and going everywhere. What you have up here is unique and absolutely wonderful. Congratulations to everyone who works in the areas.

Mr DAMETTO: It seems from your presentation and answers to questions that the general consensus is that you would like to see things here stay the same?

Mayor Kerr: Absolutely, and an increase in the area. At the moment it is Port Douglas and Mossman. We need to give Daintree businesses the same opportunity.

CHAIR: Does the Daintree have the Coles, Woolworths and Kmart that fall into non-exempt?

Mayor Kerr: No.

CHAIR: Effectively on the Daintree they really can now. The provision in this legislation that has given the exemption for Mossman and Port Douglas is purely about the big-box retailers.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Would you recommend similar types of exemptions for increased trading hours in other tourism areas similar to Port Douglas? Would that be of benefit to them, in light of what has happened in your town?

Mayor Kerr: That is a loaded question, because that means creating competition for ourselves!

CHAIR: He is very Gold Coast focused!

Mayor Kerr: From seeing the results it has given us, in reputation and all the rest of it, absolutely. If they are a tourism based town, they are after the same thing—wanting to ensure they can look after their customers when they need to.

Mr O'ROURKE: The chamber of commerce said that about 70 per cent or 80 per cent of the income in this area is derived from tourism. If we were to look at something similar to this across the state, should we have a bit of a benchmark so that it does not become open slather?

CHAIR: Do you mean a definition of a tourism destination?

Mr O'ROURKE: Yes.

Mayor Kerr: Again, I am favouring the tourism sector in the sense that, yes, absolutely that would be great. Businesses need to be able to compete fairly with their competition in all aspects. If there is a need, it should be dictated by the customer. If there is an area that has a customer base that needs to be using a supermarket on a Sunday or a public holiday, it should be fair and right for them to be able to access that business, regardless of whether or not it is in a tourism area. Naturally, it would fall more to tourism based areas, because that is the high influx that this really does affect. In a lot of small country towns that do not have high tourist numbers anyway, they know that Coles is closed on a Sunday so they do their shopping on a Saturday and it does not affect them as such. If there is a need for it then I do not see an objection to it, especially as online is available 24 hours a day.

CHAIR: Thank you so much. That has been really helpful and has clarified a few things in my mind. We are very grateful for your presentation and really appreciate it. I also acknowledge my good friend Cynthia Lui, the member for Cook, for joining us here today. I am sure she will have something to contribute at the end.

TRANTER, Mr Martin, President, Douglas Shire Chamber of Commerce

Mr Tranter: Thank you, members, for coming up here and having this inquiry. The chamber of commerce made a written submission to the inquiry which I am sure you have in front of you. I do not see the need for us to repeat that verbatim. I just want to recap on some essentials from that submission which I think are worthwhile noting.

The question you just asked Michael about reliance upon a tourism gig economy is really a quite important question. It is where we are unique in the state, even compared to areas such as the Whitsundays or the Gold Coast. Our particular economy is reliant, to the tune of some 70 per cent to 80 per cent, on the tourism economy. It is not correct to say that that means we have 70 per cent tourism businesses or 70 per cent souvenir businesses. It is not that.

I am a lawyer, but most of my clients are business operators in this area and most have employees. All of us therefore depend, through an extension, upon that tourism gig economy. In the past, we always used to talk about multiples: 'What is the industry multiple for that particular industry?' I come from a farming background, so forgive me if I fall into a few analogies.

Mr SULLIVAN: Barry has cows.

CHAIR: He is 'Mr Beef', my friend!

Mr Tranter: You understand what I mean, then. You will understand that basically we are so reliant upon that one driver within the economy that we need to make the most of it when that occurs.

I am probably one of the longest standing members of the chamber of commerce and I was actually involved in the submission that we made back in 2012, when we first started to be penalised by officers from the Office of Fair Trading coming up from Cairns and having a crack at businesses in Port Douglas, saying, 'What are you doing opening on Good Friday? Why are you opening on these days? Dire things will fall upon your heads unless you immediately shut.' We were really quite taken aback when that happened because there was not really an understanding as to how that even affected us up here in the north, where we are so reliant upon that tourism economy.

In the Port Douglas region and the Douglas region in particular, we are also fundamentally reliant upon the school holidays, Easter holidays and Christmas holidays. Those particular holidays really determine maximum turnover for our businesses. If we cannot get maximum turnover during those periods, we cannot sustain ourselves through a long wet season, when there are no visitors. Telling a business that they cannot open on Good Friday or Christmas is a bit like saying to a farmer, 'Go and plant a crop. We'll give you optimal conditions to grow that crop so you can get the best possible return, but when you need to get that crop off, you can't. We're going to ban you from doing that for the day.' Things like Good Friday and Christmas are actually pretty important for that economy up here.

Even though there are a number of exempted shops in that category, there is a lack of understanding about how they fall into one category when in fact they fall into several different categories. One of the things up here is the souvenir and craft shops. That is fine, but then we also have a number of retail shops and fashion shops which might sell one or two souvenirs but are predominantly fashion, so what is the driver behind that particular exemption? It really makes a mockery of it all. You may as well just do what they did in 2017 and say, 'You're all exempt for that particular period,' rather than try to single out an individual business depending on that individual business's product.

In that regard, when we put in the submission we were more concerned about the ability to trade on those public holidays and more concerned about the ability for businesses to self-regulate as to when they thought they would need to obtain that revenue. A business that has only two or three staff may not open on those days because it may not be viable for them to do so. That should be a decision that they are allowed to make, not a decision that is mandated by government.

Similarly with Coles and Woolworths, it is one thing for us to sit here and say, 'Do we have the independents versus the likes of the big players?', but you cannot separate it in a tourist area like that. In Port Douglas, for example, we have tourists who come up here for two, three or four days at a time. That is how the accommodation houses, of which there are a few in the room, make their money in terms of tourists. That tourist who stays two or three days a year wants to be able to slip over to Coles and wants to be able to grab something to eat and grab some milk to put in their fridge. You cannot necessarily ban those shops without diminishing the tourist experience.

Similarly, because of the employee situation up here, we want to make sure that the employees get as much revenue as they can on those days. If Coles want to put them on and pay penalty rates to put them on for that day then let them. Let that employee who wants to work make some money on that particular day. Those who do not end up working somewhere else anyway.

What we have learned and what I would stress to the committee is that we are a bit of a region apart. Whether or not you can apply something like the Douglas region to other regions I will leave up to you. It has definitely worked for us over the years and we have definitely had no complaints over the years. The vibe and the perception of a tourist town is everything, as we said in our submission. We would like, at the very least, another five years for the moratorium if there is not a wider deregulation of the hours across the state.

Mr LISTER: Thank you for coming before us. It is great to hear from people who are at the coalface of business here. I have two questions. The first is for my benefit, really. As a business which is a degree removed from the front line of tourism and depends on the broader economy here, how quickly did the economic difficulties start to present themselves to you when COVID struck and the tourism market was devastated?

Mr Tranter: Almost immediately. When COVID kicked in in March, I had a conversation with my staff that I never thought I would have. I said, 'I expect to be here on Monday but I'm not sure how many of you will be.' That killed us, because our staff are our families who have worked for us in the trenches for 10 or 15 years. We were quite gutted in terms of how we were going to be able to adapt. Fortunately, in that first period, JobSeeker saved so many businesses up here it was not funny, but it also significantly knocked business confidence, which then of course affects my business because my business relies upon business confidence for activity out there.

Having said that, come September last year, somebody turned on a tap of money in Victoria and the property market just went insane. I feel a bit guilty in this regard because I have been working 12-hour days for the last six to seven months in that particular field, but it is very isolated pockets. From a tourism perspective, it is still very bleak out there. From a dive boat perspective in particular, most of the dive boats had actually upped the ante and bought new boats and were positioning themselves to have such a significant year but they were suddenly set back some 10 years in terms of their revenue. When that happens to businesses up here, of course it flows through to my business because, again, I rely upon the level of confidence of the employees and employers, and around and around the economy goes. We were knocked around significantly. We hope come 17 December things improve. There are some vexing questions at the moment, which I am sure you all know about, but we are hopeful.

Mr LISTER: I heard you referring to the accommodation proprietors here. I represent the Southern Downs and Stanthorpe businesses. It is a thousand miles from here and very cold compared to Mossman. What you said struck a chord with me—talking about how the people who come here want an experience, they want to be able to survive and that expectation is reflected by the business needs of the accommodation providers. What is the answer to the small businesses that are working lots of hours—mum-and-dad businesses who feel they cannot manage that extra day and it keeps the main street quiet? It is a dilemma in my electorate. Can you shed some light on that and the tensions that drive that?

Mr Tranter: I certainly can. Here is where I disclose that I act for a number of accommodation houses. Accommodation house businesses are actually 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week gigs. It is like dairy farming—that is what I tell them all when they start to get into it and they all laugh at me, but I am sure they do not laugh at me by the end.

In terms of the impact upon a small business, it is hard. We find it difficult to attract talent to the regions. That is just the nature of it. We try very hard as an industry to retain locals as much as we possibly can. There was a great danger before July this year where there were business burnouts by the number of accommodation houses, restaurants and employers who were running 24/7 and could not face another month or so. We were all pinching ourselves and saying, 'Please don't complain about this. We'd rather be busy than not busy,' but there is no real solution except to try to attract more people to the regions.

From what I do, this year we have seen quite a significant divestiture of assets from Sydney and Melbourne through to North Queensland. Whether that translates, though, to an increase in young people to the region is a different thing as well. It is a loaded question for every single little region around the state, and the Douglas region is no different. The only thing you can possibly do is allow a business to self-regulate, allow a business to turn around and say, 'My competitor is working from nine to six. Maybe I could work from six to nine after that and attract a bit of business. Maybe I can arrange to have an employee with a second job to work the hours they want to work.' If you regulate it so much that you cannot let a business try to make its own decisions in that regard, you will remove the capacity of the business to be creative so you are trying to put one stamp on all the businesses across the state.

CHAIR: If I were honest with an observation of what I have just seen, every shop and retailer in this area has the opportunity to have their doors open now and they are obviously self-regulating—

Mr Tranter: Except for retail, except for fashion, because fashion is not one of those exempt shops, I think you will find, in the exempted industries.

CHAIR: Fashion is not a non-exempt, unless it is a Kmart, a David Jones or a Myer or the big ones. I have made note of that to take away in terms of looking at maybe providing within the recommendations a more comprehensive description of those that are exempt and non-exempt so there is very clear—

Mr Tranter: Even in that bigger situation—if I might interrupt, I am sorry. Even in that Coles and Woolworths situation, I am sorry but we need them to be able to open as well, otherwise we diminish that tourist experience. There are not enough little NightOwls and not enough little 7-Elevens and not enough of a driver to have those independent businesses set up without those larger businesses as well in our region.

CHAIR: Earlier I asked this of the mayor. Providing Sundays and the public holidays remain as a trading option, do you perceive a need now or potentially into the future to have the ability to trade at 1 am?

Mr Tranter: Up here, no—not at those sorts of hours. I do not see unlimited hours being the answer, but I do see unlimited days and I see unlimited hours, within reason—up until nine o'clock at night I think is fine.

Mr BOOTHMAN: I will make more of a statement than a question. It is very interesting coming up here to see how everything is going. For instance, I am from the Gold Coast, where we have critical mass in Brisbane and Logan who regularly come down to see us. To us, it is almost 'out of sight, out of mind', what is happening to you up here. That is something we as Queenslanders need to get together about and try to sort something out and share some of the love.

Mr Tranter: Please. Tara will probably tell you a bit more about how badly we need more regional support for some of the tourism industry and so on. It is fair to say that we drive south and see a lot of infrastructure compared to not much infrastructure in Far North Queensland. That is fine; that is the way it has to be from a population base, but it does not mean it does not rankle and it does not mean we therefore do not need government to support us to the maximum we can to operate when we can.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you for addressing our panel, because I believe it is important to get an understanding of exactly how this has worked for your region. I have more of a comment. Some of the comments you have made in reality do not overlay in other areas, and that is why it is absolutely imperative that we bring committees to these places. Off the back of that, when the Coles, the Woolworths and the larger supermarket chains were able to open 24/7, 365 days a year, did you see any small businesses suffer because of that ability to trade the extra days?

Mr Tranter: There was probably only one local business that suffered and that was the NightOwl business in Port Douglas. That business was not geared up to deliver the actual expectation of what a customer wants, so there was a twofold impact. There was the impact of Coles staying longer but also that business itself not being sufficiently geared to do it—and it will never be so while you have a Coles in town. It is why you will not find the independents necessarily being able to compete on the same level. If they cannot compete on the same level, you still have to allow Coles to operate. I am not a fan of massive corporations—I am not a fan of the likes of Coles and Woolworths—but I am a fan of making sure we deliver a tourist experience.

Mr SULLIVAN: You have used language that you want businesses to be able to self-regulate. Our inquiry is looking at whether requirements for both businesses and employees need to be voluntary. Can you talk to anything around when you have a very defined small area, whether it really is a choice of businesses to open up when the person across the road or next to them chooses to? Do you understand what I am saying?

Mr Tranter: I do. Essentially what you are saying is: how does it happen in practice?

Mr SULLIVAN: Correct.

Mr Tranter: I think you are not looking at the picture in the way that you need to look at it—forgive me for saying so, with respect. It is a bit like a supermarket or a shopping centre where you have one shop open in the shopping centre. No business does well by itself. A business does really well by having a number of other businesses in and around it also operating. Those businesses might have different trading hours, but the perception of being operating all the time is actually quite Mossman

important to that happening. You are not going to see a situation where a business opens up on a Sunday just because another business does not actually open, but you are going to see all of those businesses want to try to maximise the revenue for that Sunday. It is not quite something that could apply up here just because of how small a microcosm the region is. How that would apply elsewhere, I could not say.

Mr SULLIVAN: The other element of being voluntary, from our point of view, is as an employee. We have spoken a little bit with the mayor around workforce and a reliance on the backpacker economy, but of course there are locals who work here full-time and who dedicate themselves who have families and who have other commitments. Can you speak at all—I do not know if you do any industrial law or as a member of the chamber—as to whether people are coerced into working what are in our legislation referred to as unsociable hours?

Mr Tranter: It is not something that I can speak to, just because I do not see that in my practice and my staff would leave me before that would happen. It is probably a question Tara may be able to answer more from a tourism and larger tour operator perspective, but I think you also have to recognise that over the last 10 years you have seen an evolution of an employee. You have employees up here who work Tuesday to Sunday. They are the shifts they work and the choice to not work specific days is up to that employee. There are a number of employees who turn around and welcome the fact that they work public holidays because of the public holiday rates, so it is not usually a case of an employee's arm being twisted and browbeaten or a threat of losing their job. In fact, unfortunately up here we are in such dire need of employees that none of us are prepared to have that level of conversation with our staff anyway. Again, it may be unique to Port Douglas, but Tara is in a better position to speak on that than I am.

CHAIR: As there are no further questions, thank you very much for a really great contribution that you have given us. It is very helpful, so thank you very much.

BENNETT, Ms Tara, Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Port Douglas Daintree

CHAIR: I welcome Tara Bennett, the Chief Executive Officer of Tourism Port Douglas.

Ms Bennett: I would like to welcome you all here today. I do hope you are staying tonight. We need every single room night we can get right now—just saying. Without repeating everything that has been said, I absolutely reiterate every point that was covered by Mayor Michael as well as Martin on behalf of the chamber of commerce. I have a submission for you, but it does echo the same message that has been shared previously. I want to then add on to some of the points that have been made—again, not going back over what we have already said.

When the mayor opened, he spoke about the 600,000 visitors we had prior to COVID. Of that was 280,000 who were day visitors, so that means we have one opportunity for them to come in and spend some money in the region. Also bearing in mind that Port Douglas is world famous for our Sunday markets, we have the greatest influx of day visitors on Sundays. As a testament from those coming up from Cairns, the highway is an absolute mess. Not only are they attending the markets; they are shopping up and down Macrossan Street and probably stopping into Coles. If not, they are taking a family trip up to the Mossman Gorge and hopefully stopping in at Woolworths now that it is open. These two outlets, Coles and Woolworths—much like Martin, I am a big advocate for smaller business and independent operators—play a critical role in delivering the necessary services for visitors.

In recent years, particularly this year, the drive market has gone gangbusters throughout Queensland. We are one of the last stopping-off points for people heading up to the cape. They need those services open on a Sunday or on a public holiday because they are doing their \$300 or \$400 shop and it is probably one of the last big places they can stop until they get to Coen for meat and vegetables.

They are probably two pieces just to add to what has already been said. We have touched on the self-catering nature of Port Douglas. We have a lot of strata title properties and, as such, people are coming in thinking that, yes, they will go out to the restaurants and cafes but they are expecting probably 1½ meals of each day to be able to cater for themselves. Again, that is why those services are so critical.

Many arrive on Saturdays in the domestic market as they have just finished their week. They are coming in and they may arrive late, so they are looking to do their bulk shop on the Sunday. Again, it really is not necessarily about increasing visitation with what we are touching on today; it is absolutely about meeting business expectations but also maximising our opportunity to grab every visitor dollar in the region. We are not built as a high-volume model; we are a high-yield destination, so we need to be able to maximise the opportunity for people to spend at every turn when they are here because that is the style of visitor that we have been attracting for decades now.

I think that has covered a number of the issues. I do want to just touch on the fact that I worked in hospitality 20 years ago, and working through Christmas and Easter, when so many places were closed—and this is when they were not able to open—was just a disaster. People were so upset. They are looking to gift shop. They might be flying out the next day and they have had their eye on something all week and all of a sudden they cannot make that purchase. It really did hinder our ability to meet visitors' expectations. They are the things that I wanted to add to what has already been said, but I also welcome some questions.

I also want to touch on the fact that we talk about Sunday trading and if people are being forced and coerced into that. I think another really important point is the opportunity that provides to the local youth to have a job to make their own income and to start, particularly with Coles and Woolworths, to learn through their programs. They get incredible training. This is a really great opportunity for the youth of our region who do not have access to as many opportunities as you would have in larger populations.

CHAIR: Touching on the unemployment, do you have the stats for Mossman specifically?

Ms Bennett: No.

CHAIR: That is all right. In your experience, because we have heard how it is the smaller person that we do not want to detract from if we have the bigger ones, it is clear up here that having Woolworths open seven days a week and 365 days a year, particularly on Sundays, does not detract from the experience of your markets and those smaller market businesses but it adds to that value.

Ms Bennett: I believe so. Mossman markets are on Saturday mornings. There is fabulous produce. I come every week to do that and then we will go to Woolworths for the bulk shop, so as a community the markets are supported first and foremost and then you flesh out everything that you Mossman

could not get in the supermarket. That is my experience and most people I know would do the same. I think Saturday afternoon in Mossman is evidence that Woolworths being open is not taking away from any other businesses, aside from potentially the service stations where they might have been able to generate a little bit more through their food service.

We come up here every Sunday morning and the cafes are open and people are frequenting those going for breakfast or a coffee, so it is different and it is that self-management. You can see that evident not only in Mossman but also in Port Douglas where businesses are choosing to close so that they can look after their workforce, or you have some creative retailers who are taking a siesta now because we have so many people coming in on tours at four, five or six if they are coming back from some of the bigger day trips. If they come back and the bulk of the shops are closed, that is impacting their experience, so you have a handful that stay open through that dinner trade where people are walking up and down our main street and are inclined to do some shopping on their way. That self-management I think is a really important point.

CHAIR: In that Port Douglas context, yesterday we heard that Port Douglas is looking at that earlier morning as being that real opportunity, too, in terms of servicing that visitor experience—that is, being able to trade earlier in the morning is important in Port Douglas. Similarly for Port Douglas, it is not important for you to be open at 1 am or midnight?

Ms Bennett: No. Port Douglas is so different as a visitor model to the Gold Coast. Whether it is the high-rises or the lower volume model, we are not looking to have clubs still going at 5 am. It used to be fun when they did, but we are definitely not looking for that 24-hour trade. In terms of what we already have in place with the two service stations, people can duck out and get something. If they need nappies or formula at 2 am, that is still available, both in town and out of town, so by no means are we looking for 24-hour supermarket trading—or I am not.

Mr LISTER: Nothing from me, but thank you very much for your appearance.

Mr DAMETTO: Tara, through your tourism body, do you do surveys with the tourists who come to the region? If so, in any of those surveys have you talked about the customer experience of seven-day trading and being able to trade throughout the public holidays?

Ms Bennett: There was surveying of visitors prior to this changeover and it was coming through that it was letting down the visitor experience. In terms of the surveying since then, we still get a little bit of negative commentary about availability. However, we are here today to make sure that everyone has ample opportunity to trade as they need to. It is absolutely having an impact on visitor experience. It is not a key reason people are coming to the destination; however, it is the delivery of every aspect of their experience that is going to be their takeaway.

Mr DAMETTO: It is all those inches adding up to a mile, right?

Ms Bennett: Always, and hence the attendance today. We are all so aware of how we have to deliver on every aspect of their experience.

Mr DAMETTO: I am not even sure if I am allowed to do this, but are we allowed to ask for a show of hands from the group on who is supportive of leaving things how things are?

Ms Bennett: What a great idea!

CHAIR: I am happy to take a straw poll.

Mr DAMETTO: Who is supportive of leaving the moratorium the way it is here in the Douglas shire? That is very interesting.

Mr LISTER: That is approximately 100 per cent.

Mr DAMETTO: Yes. That is absolutely how I thought it was from the commentary I have heard today, so thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms Bennett: We are all in the visitor game, so it does make sense for everyone.

Mr DAMETTO: Most appreciated.

CHAIR: We might just clarify that with a second showing of hands, though, because I have asked each submitter. The current trial exemptions mean that every single retailer in Mossman and Port Douglas can trade 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. I totally get that we have talked about seven days a week and 365 days a year, but in terms of trading hours—the hours beyond what I see on the website for Woolworths and Coles—is anybody in here expecting Coles and Woolies to be open for your benefit at 2 am? No? Can we have a show of hands?

Mr DAMETTO: I have started a trend.

CHAIR: Nobody wants Woolies open at 1 am, which it could rightly do at the moment under the current provisions. That is absolutely clear, isn't it, that that is service demand where it does not exist?

Mr BOOTHMAN: You open when you want to.

Mr SULLIVAN: You probably heard me ask previous witnesses—I would like to give you the opportunity to speak to it as well—about the workforce and if you have any insight or data around the demographics of the tourism workforce in terms of locals versus imported or seasonal, if I can call it that.

Ms Bennett: It is a very good question. It is a hard one to speak to in the here and now, so I may talk in general trading terms. Our permanent population is sufficient to staff probably 80 per cent of businesses year round. We are a highly seasonal destination, so we have the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. We used to have such perfect synchronicity in that backpackers would tend to come up from down south in April/May, just as our visitation, particularly from the domestic market, took off, so we had increased demand at the same time as the supply arrived. That worked perfectly to the end of our season at the start of November, when they all headed down south. There were opportunities there. Taking that away has been a nightmare.

To answer that question, we have a strong balance of locals who are servicing year round the tourism and hospitality businesses working full-time and it is very competitive, so employees are looked after by employers or they move very quickly. We have all heard of the great resignation. We used to have that every May. I would call it 'poaching season', but you would see that natural movement of people who were looking for the different circumstances to suit their needs. We are very reliant on an external workforce as demand picks up or as numbers pick up, and we are going to see that come into the next month. Everyone is hiring. They can see the numbers that are ahead and we just do not have the people to service those visitor needs, so we are very concerned.

Mr O'ROURKE: With your future planning, as you are saying, are we looking at an absolutely great time up here this year? Are things full et cetera?

Ms Bennett: It is going to be an incredibly bumpy road to Easter and I could actually turn it back on yourselves and say you tell us. It all comes down to lockdowns, borders, vaccine rates. We have no power. Every decision has been taken away from us. All things remaining equal to what it looks like, absolutely domestic numbers are picking up incredibly. International are ready to book. We just need Queensland to say when that is going to happen. If we had a date we could start selling now, but right now they are booking in Sydney and in Melbourne or Victoria and Queensland is a no-go zone. The current situation is hurting us enormously for six, 12 months time because they will book Australia and they will not be coming up here. Sorry.

Mr O'ROURKE: Are you still seeing good travel within Queensland into the region?

Ms Bennett: No, we are too remote to benefit from the intrastate dispersal. Pre COVID our market was made up of 35 per cent international travellers, 65 per cent domestic. Of that, Victoria is by far our biggest market—probably about 50 per cent of the domestic—then New South Wales, then Queensland. We have had really good support locally. There are only 140,000 people south of us directly. We are just simply too far, unless people are going to be flying in. We have had great support from South-East Queensland and certainly that got us through I think it was October last year. It is never going to be sufficient for us. With tourism making up 80 per cent of our economy, we are just so incredibly vulnerable right now, as we have been for the past 20 months. The future is bright if we are able to achieve what people would like to do.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. We are grateful for your contribution.

WALKER, Mrs Janette, Jungle Road Clothing

CHAIR: Welcome. It is lovely to have you here with us.

Mrs Walker: Thank you. My business has been established in this town since 1993 and I have been involved since 2002. It has been through lots of different things—airline disputes, COVID and all sorts of things—and one of the things I have found is that over these last four-and-a-bit years, when it has been open for us to trade whenever, that has made life a lot easier. I do not quite know whether I have the bull by the horns, but I understood as a clothing retail store I was not exempt and I could not trade on those public holidays. Having said that, I had an art gallery next door that could, a souvenir shop also selling clothes across the road that could and many other businesses in town that could. I was one of the unfortunate ones who had a visit from someone with a clipboard from the department of justice on a Good Friday—I was there working in my business—saying that I could be fined \$20,000 for being open.

CHAIR: Was that in 2012?

Mrs Walker: That was before 2017, yes. I was involved in the chamber of commerce to put in that submission. One of the things is that it is a choice to be open. It is not compulsory. I think a lot of people think if we have this trading we must open. I believe that is something that is important to say. There are times when, yes, it works for me and other times it does not. That is sort of where I am at in terms of my business. I think it is important for everyone and for the town in general—and that is more important—that they have that facility to be open when they need to and it is up to each and every individual business to say what works for them.

CHAIR: It is interesting that in our Brisbane submissions we heard from the Shopping Centre Council of Australia, which represents the likes of Cairns Central. It represented some of those bigger players. They were seeking deregulation in essence, which means just open, but they were not necessarily going to provide to the retailers within their lease agreements within those bigger shopping centres that same level of ability to self-regulate, whether they opened or not. That is an interesting thought. I definitely will be going back after this to find out some more on that specific point about fashion: at what point a dress shop becomes a gift shop or a souvenir shop before it is a dress shop.

Mrs Walker: I think it comes down to however it is registered in your business registration. We are registered as clothing retail and accessories, and other businesses I know here that maybe sell shoes are registered as tourism businesses so they are automatically exempt. In terms of a souvenir shop, once it says the word 'souvenirs' it does not matter what else they are selling; they are in that exemption. I think it does come down to how you set up your business in the first place, not knowing those sorts of pitfalls.

CHAIR: I am definitely going to go away and find out about fashion shops. I cannot let that be.

Mrs Walker: I can't either.

Mr LISTER: Thank you very much for coming in. It is great to meet with small businesses face to face. A number of us went down to a cafe and had a cuppa and a yarn there and we learned a lot out of that. Thank you for taking the time. If you have been in business long enough to have remembered the pain of the pilots dispute then you have really been around a long time and you have survived lots of ups and downs. Congratulations on doing that. I hope you and your colleagues in business really do pick up quickly.

Mrs Walker: So do we all.

CHAIR: Member for Hinchinbrook?

Mr DAMETTO: Mrs Walker, I just wanted to say you are just lovely.

Mrs Walker: I am blushing!

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you for coming along this afternoon with your retail colleagues to let your voice be heard by our committee. I think it is very important. As I said to Mr Tranter earlier, I was not of the same opinion as this group of retailers before I came here, but I have learned a fair bit. I understand that different areas require different rules. I am a big fan of the idea that one rule does not fit everyone. Queensland is too big for one set of rules. Thank you very much.

Mr BOOTHMAN: With the pandemic, obviously business has been very difficult for you. What have you done to change your model to try to find additional markets? Have you gone down that pathway at all? Is your local clientele enough to get you through?

Mrs Walker: We have a good local clientele but, no, it is definitely not enough to get us through. I was fortunate enough to get an adaptation grant last year and used a lot of that money to learn how to operate my website. I was up at five o'clock in the morning to speak to the person who was training me in how to use it and my website business has improved greatly.

CHAIR: Let us get your website address in *Hansard*.

Mrs Walker: It is www.jungleroad.com.au. Let your wives know.

CHAIR: I know what I will be doing later on.

Mrs Walker: Actually, I had to close this afternoon to come up here.

CHAIR: Thank you so much.

Mrs Walker: So, from 10 o'clock tomorrow morning, please. We have done that and that has probably been the most that we can do. There is only me and one other worker at the moment, because it is just not busy enough to have more than two people, but we are very lucky that we have had a good base of clientele. People, once they could get here, have been very generous to us and have supported us. That has been fantastic.

CHAIR: I know what I will be doing in the bus on the way back!

Mr SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mrs Walker, for your evidence today. I know that you have been here the whole time. There is a question I have put to previous witnesses that I want to put to you as an independent operator. You seem pretty comfortable in your own skin in terms of opening hours and pressure from your competitors. Can you speak to the question I put previously as to whether, in terms of being voluntary or not, the natural pressure is that if the souvenir place across the road is opening you feel that you also have to have your doors open?

Mrs Walker: The specific answer is no, I do not. It is not perfection by any stretch, but I do know that at certain times people are not going to come and buy things at my shop. I do not open until 10 o'clock in the morning because generally people are breakfasting and then they are touring around. After that is when the ladies will get free of their husbands and they can come and visit.

CHAIR: You know us women all too well!

Mrs Walker: Seriously, no, it does not make me feel I have to open if somebody is open across the road from me. We are very fortunate in a small town like this that there is not a lot of crossover in terms of labels that you sell, so I know if somebody wants to come and buy a label that I stock they only have one place to come. That makes a big difference. I am probably fortunate that way. I know where you are coming from and it is important that there are not people who fall by the wayside. I do not feel pressured at all one way or the other. I open for some public holidays. Mind you, do you realise that in the first six months of next year and the year after there are nine of them?

CHAIR: That is good for business?

Mrs Walker: If I can open, yes. Seriously, yes, it is good because there are people coming and visiting at those times and that is what this is all about. Hopefully we can be open during those times.

CHAIR: Thank you so much for appearing before us and sharing your experience. You did an excellent job and we are very grateful to hear your voice.

Mr BOOTHMAN: You have a very nice website too.

Mr LISTER: Are you doing lots of internet sales?

Mrs Walker: They are getting there. They are improving.

CHAIR: Thank you.

WELLHAM, Mrs Cheryl, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome.

Mrs Wellham: Welcome to all of you as well. Thank you. I just want to lend my support to the retail industry here. My family is in transport. There is a bit of passion here, I suppose. The family has been in the area for 50 years. We have seen it grow from just a tiny little village up to what it is today with Christopher Skase bringing the tourism industry here. The family is quite passionate about keeping the industry going. I am just lending my support.

We are in transport. We moved 150,000 people a year pre COVID, mainly from overseas. Seventy per cent of our business was inbound, so you can imagine the hit we took in the middle of March last year. I remember sitting in the lounge room looking at my husband and saying, 'Now what?' I had 50 employees. I now have probably about 28. Twenty-two of them went onto JobKeeper. Then Easter came. We had Easter and that was wonderful. We thought we were actually going to rumble along the bottom until the end of the year. This year we are still rumbling along the bottom, but at Easter we had a heyday. We made hay. It was fantastic.

I just want to lend my support, because it has a trickle-down effect. If the retail industry is being affected by trading hours then I know that our customers will be too. Our clients who come in from overseas have been to Bangkok and places like that. We have all been to the east and we have seen other shops open for long periods. We are certainly not wanting to support that sort of regime; we just want a fair go for our traders.

As Janette said before, we have had the pilot strike, we have had Icelandic volcanoes, we have had the Asian meltdown and we have had the GFC. There were 40-odd shops closed in Port Douglas at the time. They were locked up over the GFC. Now we have been hit with this. The last thing we need is for this to happen. I have actually been in a vehicle—I drive every now and then—and had a journalist from the United States sitting in the back of my vehicle saying—this is before when we used to have the lockdowns for the public holidays—'Is Port Douglas open for business?' That is a pretty damning statement.

I just want to put our support there. It does have that trickle-down effect. We want our borders to be open. International will not be open probably until about April next year. I am starting to get inbound operators calling me wanting our rates for 2023-24 so we have had to get them out. We are really looking forward to having a great boom in the next few months, as Tara said, but it is going to be a struggle. We all have our advertisements in the local news port. We are trying to attract employees. It is really difficult. I am really quite nervous about how we as a business are going to operate over the next few months after 17 December, because I am really worried that my staff are going to be burnt out. I am adding a little bit of passion there as a business owner, but the town has really struggled and the last thing we need is another kick in the guts by these trading hours being curtailed.

Mr LISTER: I do not have a question, but I thank you very much again for coming before us. Maybe afterwards, I would like to hear about your transport business, to see what you do. Were you driving a truck?

Mrs Wellham: No. I am a nurse—that is my past trade—but I drive coasters and smaller vehicles, yes.

CHAIR: Good on you. Up that windy road, my goodness me!

Mrs Wellham: You were asking about how we are trying to diversify. We have not been sitting on our backsides doing nothing over the last 18 months—trying to survive, getting grants, always applying for grants and loans and so on and so forth. The banks have been fantastic, as has the tax office. We have a new product that we are rolling out very shortly. It is called Silver Service. It will be for high-end customers coming in from overseas. I have top drivers who will be doing it; they will be going up to the Daintree. I have been having late nights trying to work out how to do this. I said to my husband that it is like having a 10,000-piece puzzle on the table and no picture to go by, and I am just putting it together. It is all coming together. You have to do that to survive. You just have to think outside of the square, as they say.

CHAIR: Can we give your website a plug? What is your website?

Mrs Wellham: The website is a bit old-fashioned at the moment. It is undergoing a big revamp. We are putting a new booking engine in that is huge.

CHAIR: Excellent.

Mrs Wellham: We have people in the United States, my husband and people in India who are doing it. The booking engine is huge. We have good relationships with the airport. They put through their flights every week. We have to upload their flights into the system every week so that when we put our bookings in, bang, the flights are there. If the flights have changed—‘Sorry, QF922 is not coming in at that time’—

CHAIR: That is a massive back end.

Mrs Wellham: It is huge.

CHAIR: What is the business name?

Mrs Wellham: Exemplar Coaches and Limousines.

CHAIR: Exemplar Coaches and Limousines. I have that noted.

Mrs Wellham: Thank you very much. The website is being renewed at the moment.

CHAIR: In terms of that support, similar to the show of hands before, you do not see the need for the 1 am standing for Port Douglas in terms of having a Coles or a Woolies open?

Mrs Wellham: No.

CHAIR: Terrific. I can see the mayor wants to speak.

Mayor Kerr: May I just add on that? Over the Christmas period, will the 12 o'clock closings be affected? Coles do a good business with the locals. Over that busy period, when we get busy, our staff are also very busy and they take advantage of that 12 o'clock closing over the Christmas period. The year before last, before COVID hit, the Coles here did a 24-hour opening.

CHAIR: Could you please sit here so we can get your voice into that microphone and restart, please.

Mayor Kerr: I wanted to put brackets around that ‘we do not need to open until 1 o'clock’ part, because there have been times with the 12 o'clock closing over the Christmas period where it does get very busy in town. The staff, the people who live here who are working all those hours, need the opportunity for those times up until midnight. There could be also emergency circumstances. We are in a cyclone area. If we know there is a cyclone coming into this area, having Coles, Woolworths and those shops open later also is advantageous.

CHAIR: So that you know, the disaster piece is built into legislation, so that is sorted. However, we are looking at the Christmas aspect. There are some other parts that deal with how retailers are allowed to trade over Christmas. We will definitely take those comments on board.

Mayor Kerr: Perfect. I just wanted to make sure that was covered. Thank you.

Mr SULLIVAN: Mayor, there are examples where those exemptions have been utilised—including COVID, where we had the seniors being able to go to shops early, for instance. Also in Bundaberg after their floods it was utilised and the department worked very quickly. To your point—we do not need to tell you guys about natural disasters up here—that is how it is intended.

Mayor Kerr: Excellent, thank you.

LUI, Ms Cynthia, Member for Cook, Parliament of Queensland

CHAIR: I now call the member for Cook.

Ms Lui: I start by thanking the committee for coming up here. It is always wonderful to have the committee in the regions because you obtain a very different perspective. We have heard the many submissions here today which I think are very valuable into this inquiry. Also I want to thank the community for coming out to be part of this inquiry. I am a firm believer that in the regions, and especially in an electorate such as mine, we need to have a voice because I think we are unique in the challenges that we face. We have heard a number of comments around the opportunities that come about. The ones that come to my head are that it creates employment and training opportunities. It supports the industry that we rely on, the tourism industry. It is about feeding into the trading market which is there. It is about also the seasonal markets that we expect to see.

The complex nature of this region suggests that we need to be flexible around some of the matters that we are trying to push through this inquiry and really listen to what the regions are saying. I stand with my community today. I have heard some really good feedback and I hope that we can take it away and give my community a voice as well. Thank you.

CHAIR: Terrific. You are absolutely right. We had a public hearing in Cairns last night. I say how delightful it is to see, outside the major players of chambers of commerce and tourism associations, so many locals who are clearly passionate about your area and making sure that it thrives into the future.

Mr LISTER: Cairns is about 20 times the size of Mossman and there are 20 times more people hear than there were in Cairns.

CHAIR: It is a real delight to hear from some retailers on the ground.

Ms Lui: Also, we are so close to Cairns but we are so very different from Cairns. Like I said, that uniqueness that Mossman and Port Douglas present is very important. Not only that, I think everyone here would probably agree with me that we are all the pieces to the puzzle that makes this community work. I think that is the message that needs to be taken on board today. It is really community orientated. Everyone relies on each other to make this town work, but it also comes back to policies and legislation.

CHAIR: Definitely. That concludes our public hearing today. Thank you all very much for coming in and sharing your insights and experiences here in Mossman under what has been a trial period which expires in August next year. We certainly will make sure we incorporate all of your feedback as part of this process. Thank you very much for being here with us today.

The committee adjourned at 4.22 pm.