



# ***ECONOMICS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE***

**Members present:**

Mr LP Power MP—Chair  
Mr RA Stevens MP  
Mr MJ Crandon MP  
Mrs MF McMahon MP  
Mr A Tantari MP

**Staff present:**

Ms L Manderson—Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE EMBLEMS OF QUEENSLAND AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2023 AND AN INQUIRY INTO PREHISTORIC DINOSAUR AND PALEO TOURISM IN OUTBACK QUEENSLAND**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Wednesday, 4 October 2023**

**Winton**

## WEDNESDAY, 4 OCTOBER 2023

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**The committee met at 9.40 am.**

**CHAIR:** Good morning. I declare open this public hearing for the Economics and Governance Committee's inquiry into the Emblems of Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 and the parallel inquiry into prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland. As we are looking at the history of this district I want to acknowledge the Koa people, on whose lands we meet today, and pay our respects to eldest past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

My name is Linus Power. I am the member for Logan and chair of the committee. The other committee members here today are: Mr Ray Stevens, the member for Mermaid Beach and deputy chair; Mr Michael Crandon, the member for Coomera; Ms Melissa McMahon, the member for Macalister; and Mr Adrian Tantari, the member for Hervey Bay. Mr Dan Purdie, the member for Ninderry, is an apology as he is unable to join us on this trip.

The purpose of today's hearing is to enable the committee to explore with stakeholders the establishment of a new state fossil emblem and consider the broader trends, issues and opportunities for prehistoric dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland. This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. While the hearing is open to the public to watch, only the committee and registered witnesses may participate in proceedings. If you wish to participate in the public hearing but you have not yet registered, please see our committee secretary, Lucy, and we will endeavour to include you in the hearing, time permitting. The proceedings are being recorded. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and my direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. Before we commence I would ask everyone present to turn their mobile phones to silent mode. With those formalities out of the way I now welcome our first witnesses.

**ELLIOTT, Mr David OAM, Executive Chairman, Australian Age of Dinosaurs—Museum of Natural History**

**MILES, Ms Naomi, Head of Development, Australian Age of Dinosaurs—Museum of Natural History**

**CHAIR:** Would you like to make an opening statement before we begin our questions?

**Ms Miles:** In 2017 a large carnivorous hadrosaur was named California's official state dinosaur. Two years later while visiting the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History with the Paleo Study Mission for Outback Queensland, which was organised by Tourism and Events Queensland, I was inspired to bring that idea back to Queensland and see if we could start our own fossil emblem. In 2019, during engagements with schools in Outback Queensland, this started a pursuit with other Australian Age of Dinosaurs staff to find a potential state fossil emblem. We used the criteria that each fossil had to be well represented, only from Queensland and be scientifically described. From there the children of various schools came up with two sauropods and two prehistoric plants. We then started a petition and collected 775 signatures from Queenslanders to petition the members of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland to designate an official state fossil emblem of Queensland. While we did not initially put up *Muttaborrasaurus* as it has been found in Queensland and New South Wales, we are very pleased to have *Muttaborrasaurus*—as one of the most complete dinosaurs from Australia—represent Queensland as the state fossil emblem.

**Mr STEVENS:** Mr Elliot, thank you for your attendance and for the wonderful work you do out here. As the instigators of getting a state dinosaur emblem for Queensland, how do you feel about the process and the short time frame of the voting system that has led to the *Muttaborrasaurus* being put forward? How do you feel about a dinosaur that basically—I am going down the State of Origin path here—has New South Wales heritage as well?

**CHAIR:** Do you also want to ask is our specimen more complete than the New South Wales one, but go on.

**Mr Elliott:** We were a little bit torn when we first nominated Diamantinasaurus as our emblem. Australovenator, which was our meat-eating dinosaur, which is obviously quite popular, has also been found in Victoria and we thought they had to be unique to Queensland so we did not nominate Australovenator. I think Muttaborrasaurus is probably familiar with New South Wales, but, having said that, I think Muttaborrasaurus is probably the most famous dinosaur in Australia. It has been around since 1963. It is very well known and had a lot of publicity when it was first discovered and we as an organisation are very supportive of the fact that it is unique to Queensland. It represents our state on behalf of Australia probably better than any other dinosaur, even though I do know we have some very significant dinosaurs in our own collection. We put Diamantinasaurus up mainly because out of all the dinosaurs in Queensland we probably have more fossils from that dinosaur than any other dinosaur in Australia, not just Queensland. It was a strong contender, but I do think Muttaborrasaurus is the right choice.

**Mr STEVENS:** We cannot get details of the survey itself, unless we go to right to information and we do not want to go down that track. We do not know if there were a heap of schoolkids voting in the process, which was only open for a couple of months, and obviously baby Tyrannosaurus rex is going to be very attractive to schoolchildren in a voting system. I come from Richmond, and the Kronosaurus queenslandicus was actually found on a property my family owned called Army Downs. It is a lot older, it is 1926, and it is uniquely Queensland. I believe there is one in Hughenden, or parts of one in Hughenden somewhere as well, so that is two towns out of our wonderful triangle that we have, but obviously the little T-rex, the Muttaborrasaurus, or Mutt for short, is going to be more attractive. How do you feel about the Kronosaurus, for instance?

**CHAIR:** I notice he did not answer your question about whether our Muttaborrasaurus would beat the New South Wales Muttaborrasaurus in a rugby league match.

**Mr Elliott:** Kronosaurus obviously was a good contender. It is rare, it is quite rare, but it is in quite a few shires actually. There are Kronosaurus specimens in the Boulia area as well and actually we have some fairly significant Kronosaurus specimens in our museum, the Australian Age of Dinosaurs museum, as well. One little problem with the Kronosaurus at the moment is that there has been recent research, and I am not totally up to speed with it exactly, but it has been renamed by someone in America as Eiectus or some ridiculous name. I should not say ridiculous, but it is not a very attractive name, and it has been put forward that Kronosaurus is no longer a valid species, which is also still up for interpretation from what I can understand, but there probably are other reasons beside the obvious one that Kronosaurus in my view would still be a likely contender, but Muttaborrasaurus is far more well known around the country as a Queensland dinosaur.

**Mrs McMAHON:** Noting that some of the criteria was about where the fossils have been found, there are obviously issues around more of some dinosaurs than others and I understand that in the Queensland Museum the Muttaborrasaurus has taken pride of place there for quite some time so there are probably a lot of Queenslanders who are aware of it. I am wondering, in terms of the exploration for more fossils, is it a matter of these fossils are only found in very small concentrated parts and therefore we have not found too much of them? Basically, what I am trying to say is we are going to find more as we keep looking. Is there an idea of which fossil was probably most prolific, which dinosaur was most prolific in and around the area, as opposed to which one is most well known by kids or because of the size of the find? What I am trying to get at is whether there is a dinosaur that is more prolific in Queensland rather than just because it is the biggest one. Which of the dinosaurs that were nominated would we most likely find in Queensland?

**Mr Elliott:** Dinosaur discoveries in Queensland, in Australia for that matter, but particularly in Western Queensland, are still fairly well in their infancy. The Australian Age of Dinosaurs museum probably kicked this off a little over 20 years ago. It started off with the Queensland Museum holding dinosaur digs on my property and that was in 2002—2001-2—and the Australian Age of Dinosaurs museum did not start doing its own digs until 2003. We have been putting a concentrated effort into dinosaur excavation and discoveries since that time and you can see that the dinosaur record in Australia has greatly advanced in that time. Obviously there is still a long way to go. Even in our own collection now there are several new species just waiting to be described. It is still in its infancy. The marine deposits north of here take in Richmond, Hughenden, right around to Boulia really, and Muttaborra too for that matter, right round to Ilfracombe. It is like a wide arc right around the Winton formation we have marine deposits which have had some dinosaurs found in them. Because of the preservation qualities in marine deposits compared to fresh water, which the Winton formation is, there is a lot more fossil material in the marine deposits, it is a lot more common, there is a lot better quality fossils and a lot more has been found, a lot more has been described. The chance of numerous new discoveries in the marine deposits is less than in the freshwater deposits of the Winton formation

but it does not mean to say there are not significant discoveries out there waiting to be made, but because of the amount of material there is less chance of it in the marine deposits. Does that answer your question?

**Mrs McMAHON:** Basically watch this space, there is more to come in terms of finds.

**Mr Elliott:** That's right, there will be much more over the next years. Particularly in the Winton formation there will be a lot more discoveries forthcoming, but like you say there are very rare dinosaurs in the marine deposits, of which Muttaborrasaurus is one. Muttaborrasaurus is found out of context, not where it came from, so it has floated out to sea and been preserved with marine fossils, same with Kunbarrasaurus. They are two of the best preserved dinosaurs in Australia, particularly Kunbarrasaurus which is up around over 90 per cent complete.

**Mr CRANDON:** I was just reflecting on what you were talking about before about this other big lizard thing.

**Mr STEVENS:** Kronosaurus.

**Mr CRANDON:** I can never remember the name of that, but I have no trouble remembering Muttaborrasaurus. I think that is one of the things that sticks in people's minds. It is like yabba dabba doo with the Flintstones. Everybody remembers yabba dabba doo and Muttaborrasaurus goes in line with that. My question, and I asked this question at parliament of the department, is: what do we have to do to get the dinosaur tourism market working with international visitors? First of all, could you let us know what the mix is for your visitor numbers, percentage wise: Australians, interstate et cetera? What numbers of overseas tourists are you getting through this region and what are the challenges for you in that regard?

**Ms Miles:** The majority of people that are coming through to the Australian Age of Dinosaurs in Winton are domestic. Prior to COVID we had envisaged building up on our international market, getting more international people coming out and making that a focal point of the museum, but post COVID we realised that the domestic market has to be a core, it has to be a mainstay, for the museum; it has to have this reliance on the domestic market otherwise it can fall very quickly. The museum is looking at other things to become reliant on more so than just on visitation. It has to be more diverse in the way that it is generating revenue and sustainability. In terms of visitation, at the moment we have about 98 per cent of people domestic and in a good year it is about two per cent international and that is during the summer season. You will see people from Europe and North America primarily; we do not usually get people from Asia. Obviously that dropped off completely in the COVID years. The majority of people coming are from intrastate and the next popular segment is from New South Wales, the ACT, followed by Victoria and then a small percentage is from WA, South Australia and Tasmania.

**Mr Elliott:** Probably on a slightly different tack, of course, is that we have done some research on the international tourism side of things. This was a few years ago. We went up to Cairns and met up with Bob Manning, the mayor of Cairns, and the major tourist attraction operators up there who more or less got Cairns started as an international tourist attraction, just to get our heads around what we need to do in regional Queensland to start to draw international tourists. What we did get from that is that, obviously apart from the facts that we know—they are time poor, they have plenty of money to spend in a short period of time—the distances involved in Western Queensland are a bit too much for someone to come here and spend time meandering through Western Queensland. They have only got time to come and go.

What is appealing to us about that market, however, is that they will mostly come in summer and a lot of visitations to Uluru and places like that are internationals coming in summer. We do not need a very large portion of international tourists to come to regional Australia or regional Queensland to make a lot of these towns and tourism businesses viable so that is probably why we are looking to grow that tourism market. You have to have a major destination. No-one is going to come from around the world to do a wander through unless they have a lot of time to spend. If they are time poor they are going to want to come in and get out fairly quickly and so you do have to have a major destination and that is what we have been modelling the Australian Age of Dinosaurs museum on for the last decade—to create that major destination.

**Mr CRANDON:** I recall back in the eighties going out to Uluru—Ayers Rock it was called back then. I recall what was out there: very little. Now you have hotels and that sort of thing but, of course, it is fly-in fly-out, as you said. They are there for a few days. Where are we going to bring the planes from and where are they going to land? Is it from Cairns, is it from Townsville or is it from Brisbane? Can you give us a bit of a rundown on that? What are your thoughts?

**Mr Elliott:** Obviously planes are further down the track, because we do not have the infrastructure in these towns to do that. For now we would only be looking at smaller numbers of people and probably more buses and things like that. One of the things we were interested in when we went to Cairns and what we were looking at was trying to divert tourists. We could get people going from Darwin, or it might be Cairns or whatever, down to Uluru and we believe we can link tourism from Uluru back through Queensland if we have a major destination in regional Queensland. It is just too far. Otherwise they are going to fly. For bus travel from Uluru we have to have a major attraction, which is what we are doing with the Australian Age of Dinosaurs museum. We have a direct link across to Airlie Beach or up to Cairns and we only have less than 30 kilometres, I think, of bitumen and there will be a direct link straight to Cairns. The whole idea, of course, is to try to bring people into the region and encourage them to do other things while they are in that region. I am well aware that we are not going to get international tourists through just for a lot of small things we have. It is not really how they seem to work. They come in in large quantities.

**Mr TANTARI:** I want to pick up on a comment made by you, Naomi, regarding future development for the museum, in particular income streams for that. As you mentioned earlier, you do not want to be just defined by one income stream being just visitors here. I was looking at some of these great notes put together by our secretariat in regards to the museum. Your museum is currently in stage 3 of development, is that correct? By these notes, you are still in that phase; is that correct?

**Ms Miles:** Yes, we are gearing up for stage 3, the final stage. We are currently passing the first two milestones of that and then moving up to the Museum of Natural History. That is currently what we are looking at funding for.

**Mr TANTARI:** With interest, I note that, as a part of that stage, you are talking about including within the facility laboratories, classrooms, theatres—those sorts of things? They are not available as yet; is that correct?

**Ms Miles:** We have a fossil preparation laboratory and that is open science policy. Everybody can go through and have a look at the prep lab and see fossils being prepared. As to what it will become in the future, the Museum of Natural History will have its own laboratory and a similar space where you can see fossils being prepared, so moving that whole infrastructure over to that space. It will have a fossil preparation laboratory. We currently have one, but in the future that space will become more of a maintenance facility, back of house.

**Mr TANTARI:** With regards to that, my assumption is that, particularly in that educational outcome area, you will be looking at scaling that up from a scientific and research perspective as well, and that would then be, I suppose, a focus point for further development of the museum into a learning centre and a research centre further down the track that could become, I suppose, an Australia-wide or worldwide acknowledged research centre?

**Ms Miles:** Yes, definitely. We have an extensive collection of fossils from all around Australia, and there is wide potential for more research than what is currently being done on them. The museum itself does not carry out the research; it facilitates the research with other people so that universities around Australia, and particularly young palaeontologists coming up through the ranks, are encouraged to find fossils within the collection and to research and describe them. One of the core mantras of the museum is to make the fossils themselves accessible to everybody. It is not just reserved for people in the upper echelons of science; it is for everybody. In terms of education, we have a lot of plans for the museum to bring education, particularly on Australian dinosaurs, palaeontology, science and geology—the whole gamut—to the rest of Australia and the world.

We have virtual excursions as well as onsite teaching programs, education through astronomy and night tourism—different ways to look at revenue streams because the museum has to be sustainable year round, not just through the months of April through to October. What we are working on currently is looking at expanding our shoulder and summer season and particularly, as David said, bringing the international market through those periods. It has real potential because a lot of Australians do not want to travel during summer, but the international market do not mind travelling during summer for the experience. There is potential in regional centres to make use of astronomy and night tourism, such as being the first international dark sky sanctuary. There is a real potential for regional Australia to get on board with astrotourism which nobody seems to be doing. We can get on the ground floor with that and start leading the way with the pristine skies that we have.

**Mrs McMAHON:** Following on from Adrian's question about the stage 3 development, I was wondering in terms of increased capacity and the numbers on a daily basis and a weekly basis, once stage 3 is complete, can you give us an idea of what kind of numbers of tourists you would expect to

have coming through the Age of Dinosaurs museum on a daily basis once stage 3 is done? I say that because, as a parent, I can never come here because it is always booked out during school holidays. I know it is a peak time. What kind of capacity are we looking at with stage 3, and what can local, state and federal governments be doing to make sure you are at capacity and able to, as you said, expand that season so it is not just a peak season but a shoulder season and off-season?

**Mr Elliott:** With regard to the design of the Museum of Natural History, concept plans were done on that nearly 10 years ago. They were revised again in 2019-20. Every time we go back to readdress something, we find we have to make it bigger. This just keeps happening. It is quite funny in that everything we have opened on so far, by the time we get the funding and build it and open the door, it is too small; we have outgrown it before we have opened it. That has happened on several occasions now, and we are very much aware of it. With the latest work done on the new museum, the schematic drawings have been done. We have done some schematic design and we have had to put that through quantity surveyors for approximate valuations. We designed what we have now for the museum to have a capacity of 1,000 people a day, but for those of you who have been to the museum, the museum is not just a building; the museum incorporates the whole of Dinosaur Canyon which is a fairly big area. There is the March of the Titanosaurs building there, the observatory and the Dinosaur Canyon outposts which have all been funded by the state government over the last six years, so it is a fairly new part and they are all part of the new Museum of Natural History.

When we talk about the new museum and stage 3, the new museum is stage 3.3, I think. We had stage 3, which became 3.1 and then 3.2 and the new museum is 3.3. We are looking at 100,000 people a year as the figure we are working with for our business models as the eventual goal for the museum. I am not sure—it might have been you, Adrian—but someone asked what infrastructure is needed to meet that. Obviously, Western Queensland is not ready for it yet. We do not have enough accommodation. We are very lucky in Winton that Longreach is just down the road. Already we are seeing a big overflow that would normally stay in this area stay in Longreach. We are very lucky in terms of capacity that there are towns close by that can take the overflow. We are aware that we can only grow so fast because we are limited by the growth of the town. There is a chicken-and-egg scenario here and one has to come before the other. I think we have to be first because if we cannot put that product up there, we are not going to encourage the investment into the towns.

**Mr STEVENS:** My question is to Ms Miles as the development officer. You mentioned 98 per cent of tourism, I think, was domestic. There are a couple of things in this question. Do you have a breakdown between grey nomads and families with children? Obviously children are very involved in dinosaurs as an interest factor. Do you have a breakdown of the numbers, say, between grey nomads and families? How will the Muttaborrasaurus as an emblem influence the paleo tourism for the triangle? Have you approached the education minister about school programs to further the interest in dinosaur tourism?

**Ms Miles:** You might have to remind me of some of those questions as we go through. At the moment, the majority of people coming through are grey nomads and that has really amped up again post COVID as people get back onto the roads. Some 49 per cent of people are recognised as 55 and over. We have a really strong and burgeoning family market. About 21 per cent of people coming through have children. That is hindered a little bit going to Dinosaur Stampede. It is a little more nerve wracking to go out there without reception and fully sealed roads with young children. We get a lot more older people and independent travellers going out that way. As we have progressed throughout the years, there has been a definite increase in the family market coming out to the museum. The museum itself is not geared towards very young children, with the content that it covers and the information that it has. Going through a working fossil preparation laboratory and the information of polarised specimens and the degree of walking, it can be overwhelming. It is probably a bit different to what most concepts of what a dinosaur museum might be. We generally say from about the age of seven to nine years old and up is better. The Australian Dinosaur Trail, I think, would be an easy fit. Most people get behind Muttaborrasaurus, as David said—floated out to sea and has a look at Kronosaurus Korner with the marine deposits as well as Muttaborrasaurus. We also have Hughie out there, a life-sized replica of Muttaborrasaurus. The last question was?

**Mr STEVENS:** Around the education minister and the programs for schools.

**Ms Miles:** We have not approached them directly. At the moment we are getting our education programs up and running—curriculum linking our onsite programs and going through our virtual excursion programs, getting the linked lessons out there. We have a fair cohort every year of more and more schoolchildren coming out to the museum. I think we are up to over 1,000 this year and we keep building on that number year after year. We have not gone so far as to put anything in the

curriculum, but we are curriculum linking all our lesson plans because there are ways around it besides purely dinosaurs. You can link up anything you want with poetry, literature, geology or maths. Really dinosaurs is the interest gateway to that knowledge, and you can pretty much curriculum link it around that.

**CHAIR:** Could you write to us to give us the detail around the number of discrete visits?

**Ms Miles:** I can do better and give you some of the annual reports, if you like, as well.

**CHAIR:** That would be wonderful.

**Mr CRANDON:** You were talking about your goal for capacity and what have you. What about employment opportunities in that space? First of all, do you have any difficulty attracting people to come and work? Is it the backpackers who come through who give you a hand? Can you give us a rundown of what sort of numbers of employees and all of those sorts of things?

**CHAIR:** We might just move a motion in accordance with our rules that we agree to table the document that has been lodged, the annual report. All those in favour. Carried. Ms Miles, you can proceed.

**Ms Miles:** I think we have been very fortunate with recruitment. Whilst we have a little bit of difficulty sometimes, particularly in the last year or so, being a dinosaur museum we do not usually have any problems with attracting people. It is usually young people, sometimes in their first job. Most of the time they have completed a university degree and have some kind of interest and paleo knowledge or archaeology, geology, geography or those kinds of fields. At the moment we are at about 45 people that we hire in peak season. That goes down about almost half in the off-season. A lot of those people are seasonal tour guides whom we hire and those are the young people that we hire regularly throughout the year. That might then go on to more specific jobs with the museum if we have capacity for that. That number is growing year on year as we get bigger, because we also supply tour guides for Dinosaur Stampede and tours go through our three facilities at the museum, including virtual excursions, our on-site education programs and night tours.

**CHAIR:** As there are no further questions, I want to thank you very much for your appearance and note that we are going to see you later on today. We did note that you tabled that document, so if you could give that to us that would be great.

**Mr STEVENS:** Thanks for also initiating this.

**CHAIR:** Yes. Thank you for initiating the entire process, as the deputy chair said, of a Queensland dinosaur emblem. Thank you.

**Mr Elliott:** Our pleasure. We are very honoured and privileged to be involved.

**BASKETT, Mr Gavin, Mayor, Winton Shire Council**

**CHAIR:** I welcome the Mayor of the Winton Shire Council, Councillor Gavin Baskett. Good morning. Do you want to make an opening statement before we ask our questions?

**Mr Baskett:** I will, and I hope it does not go on too long. Thank you for the opportunity to present at this public hearing into the proposed legislation to officially establish the Muttaborrasaurus as the state fossil emblem as well as the related inquiry into prehistoric dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland. Winton has a population of approximately 1,150 people and is 53,000 square kilometres. We have nine neighbouring shires, which shows the size of our shire, and six traditional owners in the shire. We are the birthplace of Qantas, the home of Waltzing Matilda, the Boulder Opal centre of the world and the dinosaur capital of Australia.

The Winton tourism association was first established in 1968, which was 10 years before any other organisation in the region. We have numerous exhibits and sites in town to visit and throughout the shire and Winton has now been established as a destination for tourists. We obviously would have loved to have seen *Diamantinasaurus matildae* be selected as the state fossil emblem but are supportive of the Muttaborrasaurus being selected. We acknowledge the significance of the Muttaborrasaurus and also are happy that it is one of our neighbours and part of the Australian Dinosaur Trail being exhibited in the Flinders shire. We also applaud the Australian Age of Dinosaurs for bringing it to the state's attention that we needed a state fossil emblem, even though our submission was not successful.

With regard to prehistoric dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland, Lark Quarry, now known as Dinosaur Stampede, was first discovered in the late 60s and opened as a tourism attraction in the 70s and has continued to grow. It is the most significant dinosaur stampede discovered in the world, with over 3,000 footprints. A new building was placed over the tracks, completely enclosing them from the elements. Council has invested significantly over the years with tens of millions of dollars going into the sealing of the road, the upkeep of the gravel sections and upgrades that have occurred to the facility over the last 50 years, including more recently sealing of the six-kilometre access road and the addition of a small cell mobile tower. Australian Age of Dinosaurs are the current operator of the stampede with a 10-year lease. It is also noted that before the Australian Age of Dinosaurs was established we had Big Al, a full size dinosaur down at Corfield and Fitzmaurice. It is a 105-kilometre journey down to Dinosaur Stampede, with 35 kilometres still remaining unsealed.

With regard to Australian Age of Dinosaurs, this facility is fantastic for our community and the local economy. It is the second largest employer in the shire. Staff from this place live in the community, with some owning houses, and Australian Age of Dinosaurs has also invested in dwellings in town for its staff. It is the premier dinosaur exhibit in Australia, with Winton also being known as the dinosaur capital of Australia. The museum was established and is driven by David and Judy Elliott. David is very passionate about AAoD and continues to drive and promote this fantastic facility. Establishing the Museum of Natural History is a priority for Australian Age of Dinosaurs and the region as a whole.

With regard to the Australian Dinosaur Trail, it was first established in 2007. This was an initiative by the Winton Shire Council, the Richmond Shire Council and the Flinders Shire Council to attract visitors and use dinosaurs as the common thread. There is an MOU established with all attractions listed in the region and this triangle is approximately 600 kilometres, with only 15 kilometres left to seal.

In terms of initiatives to grow paleo tourism by the Winton Shire Council, we have sealed the road to the AAoD and partly to the Dinosaur Stampede and have lobbied the federal government to seal the remaining section to Dinosaur Stampede which is currently tied up in the 90/120-day pipeline infrastructure review. Council has also put in, being a local government road, the 20 per cent to seal that road, which shows the importance of sealing this road to our region. We maintain the gravel road to Dinosaur Stampede which comes at a significant cost as well as upgrading the facility over the years and the small cell tower. We have also supplied significant support in many ways to AAoD throughout the years.

With regard to the value of paleo tourism to the outback economy, it is hard to put a value on the benefit of this to our region, but a recent study undertaken by the AAC group in the value of dinosaur tourism estimated the average spend at \$193 per day and 26 per cent of leisure and holiday visitors cite dinosaurs as the reason for coming to this area. With the numbers increasing to approximately 50,000 visitors, that is fantastic for our local community, with overnight stays, the employment of 45 people on a permanent, part-time and casual basis and the regional benefit being significant. It is also great for promoting our region because everybody in the world knows dinosaurs.



What are the challenges? With regard to accommodation, motels in our area are booked out most nights during the tourist season and the council undertook a feasibility study in 2021 to highlight this. From that study, which is this document here, we found that we lose 35,000 beds per year which is a massive hit to our economy. As David said, a lot of those go to Longreach, which still holds them in the region which is great and shows the benefits to other towns of the dinosaur industry. This demand will only grow with the sealing of the Outback Way, which is the road from here to Laverton in Western Australia. At the moment we have two blocks of land. We are trying to attract motels, but it is very difficult in this current environment.

With regard to roads, sealed roads are a priority to grow tourism. Most large bus companies and certain tourists will not travel on gravel roads and it comes at a significant cost to council to maintain these gravel roads. If we could get the section to Dinosaur Stampede sealed—the 15 kilometres which is in our shire sealed—that will just grow those numbers. Some 17,000 people go to Dinosaur Stampede now and we could envisage that doubling, if not more, which also adds to overnight stays in town.

The future demand which will come with the construction of the Museum of Natural History is the airport upgrade. As David has said, charter flights are the way to go for time-poor people, but our airport is not up to the standard to handle large charter planes. Quite a lot of international tourists have high expectations on accommodation standards. There is pressure on our local council facilities such as sewerage, water and waste, but there is also the potential of growth in paleo tourism operators in town. We currently have one tourism operator, who will be presenting shortly, that has grown from one bus to five buses. We need local businesses to service this high visitation. With regard to school excursions, AB Paterson College have built a facility down here for their own use but are also going to put it out there for other schools to use. They have developed a curriculum around the history in Winton and we see the potential there as being phenomenal because that facility can house 200 students.

We would need daily flights into town. As you have done, you flew into Longreach and driven across and driven back. Imagine the benefits for this small community if we could have daily flights and the Traveltrain through to Winton. As mentioned earlier by David, I accompanied him on that trip to Cairns and found out after talking to Bob Manning that three million international tourists prior to COVID came into Cairns. If we could get one per cent of them, that is 30,000, let alone 10 per cent. Another impediment to that is not only the flights but the completion of the sealing of the Hann Highway from us here through Hughenden up to Cairns, which will also get your Juicy vans heading down this way full of backpackers.

In 2009 I went on the TQ paleo trip to Canada and the USA and visited places like Drumheller with the Royal Tyrell Museum, Dinosaur Provincial Park, Denver where they have footprints as well and dinosaur themed motels and Vernal in Utah for the Dinosaur National Monument which has exposed bones still in the ground. One thing that I did find out there, as David mentioned, is that we are on our way to being international standard, but when you visit those places you find out that we still have a little bit to go.

In closing, dinosaur tourism has become an important part of our community for not only the visitation it attracts but the long-term benefits such attractions have to our local economy. Organisations like AAoD and paleo tourism will be another step in the right direction to establish sustainability for our small community. The state government has been fantastic with the support so far provided to this industry, but if AAoD can get assistance to construct the Museum of Natural History this would be a game changer for Winton and Outback Queensland. I also encourage you, if it is not already planned, to go out and have a look at the Australian Age of Dinosaurs. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** With regard to the research document on the accommodation, would you be able to table that for the committee as part of our inquiry?

**Mr Baskett:** Definitely.

**CHAIR:** Who wants to move a motion that we accept the tabling of the document?

**Mr STEVENS:** Yes, aye.

**Mrs McMAHON:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those in favour? Against? I believe it is carried. Thank you, Mr Mayor, for what you have provided us with today. I believe the deputy chair, Mr Ray Stevens, has a question of the mayor. He is a former mayor.

**Mr STEVENS:** Exactly—a very former mayor.

**Mr Baskett:** And a former neighbour, too, being from Richmond.

**Mr STEVENS:** Mr Mayor, thank you very much for your attendance and for your brilliant outline of the tourism industry here in Winton. Local government gets four per cent of the taxation dollar and the federal government 80 per cent and the state government 16 per cent. I gather that some tourism operators are happy for the council spending millions, if you like, on dinosaur tourism and paleo tourism. What is the feeling from the other ratepayers you have in the Winton shire about the council's fairly large expenditure on the tourism industry?

**Mr Baskett:** As you would know from being a former mayor, there is always plenty of opinion on where we spend the budget, but as a whole I think the community is supportive of paleo tourism. There is always negativity, but if you try to please 100 per cent of the people you will please nobody. We are comfortable with the money we have funded which we are putting into the sealing of the road. Roads are for paleo tourism but they are also for the community to use as well for the people who live out in those areas, but every dollar goes around the community three times. If we can get more people staying in town for extra nights to create employment, then that employee shops in the grocery shops and goes to the tyre shop, so overall it helps everybody.

**Mr STEVENS:** I think you mentioned that 15 kilometres of road to the stampede needs to be sealed. Is that a federal government proposal? Is it a council road or a state road?

**Mr Baskett:** The 15 kilometres is on the Richmond road to finish the sealing of ADT. It is 35 kilometres of road down to the Dinosaur Stampede on the Jundah road. We received funding last year through ROSI, Roads of Strategic Importance, but being a local government road it is an 80/20 split, so we have to put up the 20 per cent which was approved by the previous government and went through the current government's budget but then got caught up in the pipeline review, so fingers crossed. It is a small amount in the big picture and it will come out the other end. It is important for that, but it is also holding up our construction crew of work as well. If we can get that money ticked off and it is over the next three years, that will be just a game changer for Dinosaur Stampede.

**Mr STEVENS:** Thank you, Mayor.

**Mr TANTARI:** Thank you, Mayor, for coming along this morning to talk to us. I have not had an opportunity to review your accommodation review, which will be good to see, but what are you thinking would be some form of incentive that could be made available to accommodation providers to start to build further accommodation here?

**Mr Baskett:** We already have an incentive in our budget of two years waiving of general rates. That is across-the-board but it applies to anybody upgrading to a certain dollar amount or constructing as well. If you want to build a 50-room or 60-room motel, that is going to be significant. We have got two sites. We have a site just coming into town where the Winton sign is. That is eight hectares that we have allocated for accommodation. There is also 3,000 square metres behind the Gregory hotel which is for more boutique accommodation that we envisage in town.

We supply services to the block—water, sewerage—but it is that double-edged sword as well. We currently have several motels and caravan parks in town, so we have to be careful with how much incentive we provide to create competition. We are trying our best to balance it and to get more accommodation in town because, as I said, the Outback Way and the crossroads with two major highways going north-south and east-west is going to put pressure on our accommodation, as well as the growth of paleo tourism.

**Mr CRANDON:** You may have mentioned this in your opening statement and I did not pick up on it properly. What sort of percentage of your local economy is tourism? What percentage of that tourism is the dinosaur and paleo tourism aspect of it?

**Mr Baskett:** Regarding percentages, I will take those questions on notice. I was trying to find it this morning in a couple of documents but I was not able to get a true figure. It is our second largest economy behind the ag industry. It is growing and it is very important. We have four hotels in town. We would not have four hotels, I do not think, if it was not for tourism because they make hay while the sun shines for six months of the year and then battle through the other months. We have several motels. We have four caravan parks and we just did a development application a couple of months ago for a fifth caravan park. We have 150 powered sites down at the showgrounds for the overflow and they are all quite often full.

June, July and August is our peak tourist season, and we can have 1,200-plus people in town every night. That is the pressure I was talking about on our facilities and that is only going to grow. David was talking about 1,000 people a day through the Australian Age of Dinosaurs. That is up 30 per cent currently on his busy times now. It is all going to create pressure. That is where we need

the support from both levels of government to upgrade our facilities because our current rate base is about 10 per cent of our budget. If you are going to grow your facilities, your budget has got to grow but there are no further mechanisms to create revenue within our shire.

**Mr CRANDON:** Chair, can that be taken on notice?

**CHAIR:** Mayor, if you can write to us with those figures that would be very useful. We can talk to you afterwards about what we are after.

**Mrs McMAHON:** I have done a bit of work with Cairns tourism operators before so I understand the issue with international tourism. They are very fly in, do their thing and then fly out. Obviously, one of the barriers for getting that market here from Uluru or Cairns is the airport. In terms of the capacity of the current Winton Airport, what size growth needs to happen with that facility in order to meet the needs of the larger charter flights which could be bringing more people to Winton? I know airports are graded by different levels. Have you done any work on what size airport facility and runway is needed to be able to meet the needs of those larger flights to bring in the international tourists?

**Mr Baskett:** We did an airport feasibility study, similar to the accommodation one, several years ago. There was the current level and then two more above that, and it escapes me what those levels are. The next level was about \$13 million to upgrade. The final level was to handle the large Qantas domestic planes, but we were not envisaging going to that at the moment. There are Fokker 70s that Alliance fly. We had quite a lot of day flights come in during COVID. They were just passengers with very little luggage, so once you add luggage they get very difficult. We have had state and federal planes that cannot land here just because of their size. We need to go up to that next level, and that is where that investment is needed by either level of government. We have done that study. I do not have it on me at the moment, but it can be tabled if you would accept it.

**Mrs McMAHON:** That would be great. With that \$13 million to upgrade the airport, what size flights in terms of passenger numbers would that enable? How many passengers would be able to come in with an airport that has been upgraded to that next level?

**Mr Baskett:** That level is about the 70 to 80 seaters, with full luggage. It is the weight underneath it that adds to the component of the current airport in terms of being able to handle the size of the plane. With the Fokker fully loaded on a day trip, there is no luggage on it, but then you add the luggage component. It is the same with the Dash 8 400s, the Qantas plane. When they are fully loaded, it puts a lot of pressure on the airports, especially in the summertime with the heat. In the winter it is a lot more accessible.

Like David said, it is the chicken and the egg. AAoD is the chicken and we have to keep up with them, because if they grow and we are not right up their backside it is going to hamper their growth. For their potential growth, we are trying to get the planning in stage to go along with them but it is the funding opportunities. The motels are the same. We have people interested and you mention the dinosaurs and the Outback Way, but it is taking that leap of faith to make that investment on potentially what could happen which is a struggle. We are working hard to try to get to that one.

**Mr TANTARI:** I have briefly gone through your accommodation study. It states that you are probably looking at going to that next level, potentially even to a five-star luxury level for some international tourists who expect that. Very briefly, what sort of feedback have you been getting from your visitors? What do they say about your current accommodation? What do the major booking providers say that visitors are saying regarding the accommodation here?

**Mr Baskett:** We do get negative feedback through our complaints department. Vicki may be able to answer that question a bit better being a tourism operator and transporting quite a lot of people around the region from Longreach and back. We currently have a five-star operator at Rangelands Outback Camp about 15 kilometres out of town which provides six tents of five-star quality. One thing we found through the feasibility study is that motels self-rate themselves. You probably noticed that someone said they had three or 3½ stars, but through the feasibility it is actually two or maybe 2½ stars.

Achieving that standard is what we need. Like every place, we have operators who are of a fantastic standard and some who are not so much. I think getting more motels in town will lift the standard of everybody. If you have more options, you have to lift the standard; if you have got no options, everybody just fills up. I think 3½ to four stars would be a good target to aim for. That should keep most of the people happy most of the time.

Public Hearing—Inquiry into the Emblems of Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Bill  
2023 and an inquiry into prehistoric dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland

**CHAIR:** There being no more questions, we thank you for your appearance today. We note that you have undertaken to write to us about some of those statistics. You might also attach the airport report that you mentioned.

**DILLON, Mr Sean, Mayor, Barcaldine Regional Council**

**CHAIR:** Welcome. Would you like to make an opening statement before we go to questions?

**Mr Dillon:** I will be very brief. Firstly, I would like to commend the parliamentary committee for its attendance in the dinosaur capital of Australia today. It is great to be here to join with you. Thank you very much to Mayor Baskett for his welcome. It is fantastic to see that, when things like this affect regional Queensland, the parliament of Queensland brings itself to the regions, and that is duly noted even by people who are not in the room.

I also want to echo the thoughts of Mayor Baskett that the larger councils in the room today have a more direct attributable economic impact and also real visitor impact from paleo tourism than a council such as mine in Barcaldine. Muttaborra is my smallest community and it is certainly one of the most spirited communities in the Barcaldine Regional Council. Their passion and pleasure in seeing the Muttaborrasaurus identified as the fossil emblem of Queensland, as you will see tomorrow, knows no bounds. The presence of Muttaborra itself in the dinosaur triangle is a very well-established product that probably does not need any tampering with. The identification of the Muttaborrasaurus as the emblem will certainly add a bit of weight to the community of Muttaborra in attracting further paleo tourism as time unfolds.

We are very supportive of any of the dinosaurs that were put forward. Given the location of its discovery initially and the attraction piece that is built as our very small paleo tourism offering in Muttaborra—which is a community of only 150 if you include the rural population—to be included in this way and identified through this is a very proud moment for that community. They look forward to welcoming your committee tomorrow. I will leave it at that.

**Mr STEVENS:** Mayor, thank you so much for coming a long way to meet with us here. It has been a difficult time for us, given the short six-week time frame the parliament gave this committee, which included two weeks of the Queensland school holidays, to finalise our deliberations on this emblem issue. Fortunately, both sides of the parliament think it is a wonderful idea to have a dinosaur emblem for Queensland. The fact that it will be your Muttaborrasaurus that ends up being the emblem for Queensland is a great achievement. How important is that for the future of paleo tourism? What contribution is required to take the Muttaborrasaurus, as your own part of the emblem, forward for tourism for your area?

**Mr Dillon:** Obviously, it is an emblem so a lot of what is required in this case is symbolic. What my council can do is incorporate in part of our product and our corporate branding the recognition that a prehistoric animal or a fossil that was discovered within our council area is identified as one of the state emblems. I think that is a very important step. We are all aware that corporate rebranding costs money, but it is a soft piece of infrastructure change.

We recognise that paleo tourism is more than just one fossil, more than just one location, more than just one individual animal. That particular dinosaur is representing all of the other dinosaurs and evidence of dinosaurs in the tourist attractions here in Winton. It will simply become iconic. That certainly starts with education, whether it be with excursions or with understanding what the Muttaborrasaurus is and the rich heritage behind that and incorporating the target markets at people who may be visiting the region for other reasons. They may be here to investigate natural heritage of a different type, whether it be the many cultural tourism opportunities or even exploring the history that has been created since pastoralisation occurred in the Central West. There are many tourism opportunities. Even in the community of Muttaborra, there is probably one of the best hospital museums in the world that is just like something has frozen in time. When you visit these communities, it can be for a specific purpose, while understanding that there is so much more to the region than just a one-trick pony.

**CHAIR:** We took our kids to Barcie and we probably would have added this if we had had greater knowledge of the day tripping that was available.

**Mr STEVENS:** That would be Labor heritage tourism and we are not supporting that at all.

**CHAIR:** I want to give a plug to Barcie again for having some great things that are not to do with dinosaurs such as workers' heritage. It is a fantastic place.

**Mr STEVENS:** It is the birthplace of the Labor Party. Mr Mayor, I will follow up with a similar question about the ratepayers who are not involved directly with tourism in the Barcaldine shire. How supportive are they of council's commitment of the ratepayer dollar to tourism?

**Mr Dillon:** If I could speak specifically to the Muttaborra region initially, due to its relevance to the Muttaborrasaurus, they are very positive and very supportive. The commitment has been a two-piece investment between the state, through the Works for Queensland funding, to establish the Winton

Muttaborrasaurus Interpretation Centre, and also local council dollars to complete the fit-out of that. They understand that it is not all grant money and that certainly some of their own money has gone to that.

The fact is that it has given Muttaborra just that little piece of something else to attract people, which helps keep the general store going, which is also the local service station and the local hardware shop. It is literally a one-stop shop. It has also helped sustain the one pub in town. This is a town that is struggling to exist through 10 years of drought and the decimation of the sheep and wool industries, which saw its population reduce by 90 per cent over a 40-year period. These types of tourism opportunities that see upwards of 100 people a night, which doubles the town population, are something that even the pastoral ratepayers, who contribute roughly 85 per cent of our general rates, support.

More generally within tourism, there are other tourism opportunities including our world-famous sculpture trail, which council is spending considerable amounts of money on in terms of road conditions and sealing. As I think the mayor of Winton said previously, already ratepayers are undertaking agricultural activities on those roads. They are not special purpose-built roads for tourism so there is a symbiotic relationship there. Broadly, it is quite positive so long as the council investment or even the attraction of state and federal funds is done in such a way that they can see mutual benefit for their business.

**Mr TANTARI:** I have a question about outback tourism generally in your area. What are the challenges for tourism related businesses in your shire, in particular with regards to natural disaster impacts on your tourism dollar and your market? On a year-to-year basis is there an impact on local tourism from natural events such as floods and things like that?

**Mr Dillon:** Drought is not officially a natural disaster but, in my opinion, it is the worst of the lot. Drought has a very measurable impact on all areas of our economy—tourism or agriculture. It would be remiss of me to comment in too significant a degree on the flooding. The impact of the 2019 monsoonal event was much more substantial here immediately in Winton and to the north in the Flinders\Richmond\McKinlay shires, Cloncurry. Our challenge is that our natural climate, even without a disaster, is not very attractive to people who do not live here. For three or four months of the year, commencing very shortly—although I am freezing in the town hall; the air con is working quite well—it is quite difficult.

The seasonal nature for a lot of hospitality service providers means that they struggle to keep itinerant labour, especially when there is low demand and, therefore, their flow of dollars is not significant. On top of that, I think the greatest challenge facing them, notwithstanding any weather impact, natural disaster or anything naturally occurring, is the maintenance of a consistent skilled workforce in the hospitality space. I am certainly no expert in tourism as a specific marketable product, but the hospitality element to it, whether it is the accommodation, whether it is meals, whether it is our pubs—we saw no greater evidence of that than when we were recovering from COVID and the borders were still shut. We just had no workforce. We almost still have no workforce now. That is our biggest challenge.

There is a secondary challenge, which is the identification that all tourism compliments each other. Outback Queensland is not fighting itself for market share; we are fighting to value add. I think that decisions such as the parliament is hopefully taking with respect to the state fossil emblem will only add to that. Each of our communities, whether it is the existing dinosaur triangle or the very smallest of central-western communities in Muttaborra, each has a unique and distinctly impressive attraction piece.

**CHAIR:** There being no further questions, we will have a quick break. If there are any questions or things you want to put to us, you can have a quick chat to us. We will invite other speakers to come up afterwards. If anyone else wants to speak, Lucy is here. Thank you, Councillor Sean Dillon, for the evidence you have given here today.

**Proceedings suspended from 10.51 am to 11.21 am.**

**JONES, Ms Vicki, Owner-Operator, Red Dirt Tours**

**CHAIR:** I would now like to welcome Ms Vicki Jones, the owner-operator of Red Dirt Tours. We noticed your sign as we came in. We were going to give you a call, but we knew you were appearing so we did not need to. Good morning. Would you like to make an opening statement and then we will have some questions for you.

**Ms Jones:** Firstly, I think the Muttaborrasaurus is a good choice for the fossil emblem. Anecdotally, we get a lot of people who know about Muttaborrasaurus on tours and things like that, so I think that is not a bad thing. In relation to paleo tourism, obviously I am a tour operator so I run buses. Part of that is dinosaur tourism, so it is a mix of nature-based and dinosaur tourism. I started Red Dirt Tours in 2015 and it has grown over time. As the Age of Dinosaurs has picked up speed, obviously things are growing as well. Even before COVID the business was growing, but then the COVID years were very good for us out here. We are back to a more normal structure in visitation this year which we can probably see maintaining for next year.

Contrary to what the people from Age of Dinosaurs said earlier, from the point of view of my business I have noticed there is an increase in international tourism. Previously it was probably about two per cent, but it is nearing eight or nine per cent nowadays. A lot of that is self-drive as opposed to flying in. Obviously there are a lack of connections and difficulty with changing planes. When people have to change planes it just adds another element that is a barrier. From my point of view, I have had an increase in international tourism which still has a long way to go, but there is also a lot of marketing around that through the Outback Queensland Tourism Association and myself working with other businesses to promote international travel as well. New Zealand, America and Germany are the main places.

My business has four prongs, but it is primarily day tours from Winton to natural attractions and dinosaur attractions. Most of my business comes from day tours from Winton to the Dinosaur Stampede National Monument as opposed to the Age of Dinosaurs museum, but obviously that is a big drawcard. I also do longer tours. There is a six-day tour that encompasses the Australian Dinosaur Trail. It is based in Winton but there are a couple of nights in the Hughenden/Richmond area as well, so it encompasses all of that. There are also charters into town. Since 2020 there has been an increase in the number of planes flying into Winton, so particularly for those people who want transport around the Winton region. Some stay overnight and some stay for a day. As Mayor Basket mentioned earlier, Alliance Adventures came out in 2020-21 with day trips from Brisbane, which was 70 to 80 people at a time, which was wonderful. That has not continued. That market is not there and Alliance Adventures has decided not to do that, but it certainly goes to show there is capacity for that but probably on a smaller scale. A lot of the charter flights that come in are anywhere between two people and 10 people. Some of them are just individual people travelling around themselves but others have organised tours out of Brisbane, so it is pre-organised, which is wonderful.

The fourth element to my business is having a package that encompasses accommodation plus my tours that go to various attractions around the region. Therein lies a few challenges with access to towns in term of planes, trains and other public transport such as the Greyhound bus and things like that. It is not so much capacity but days of the week and that sort of thing. There are a few challenges in all of that. I also know there are a lot of other tour operators such as myself who run vehicle-based tours. There are at least a couple over at Longreach that encompass dinosaur tourism as well and there are a number of bus tour operators based in various parts of the country that come out this way. Winton is now on their map. That is purely because of dinosaur tourism. Yes, we have the Waltzing Matilda Centre, which is not dinosaur based, but there are certainly other attractions. A lot of businesses are benefiting from dinosaur tourism in town and along the way. Places like Barcaldine, for instance, do not necessarily have dinosaur tourism in the town but they benefit from that flowthrough, and that creates the industry throughout the whole of the Outback region.

**Mr STEVENS:** Thank you very much for appearing today; it is really appreciated. If we adopt the Muttaborrasaurus as our state emblem how will that feature in your promotion and marketing of Red Dirt Tours? What is the greatest impediment to the expansion of your business? Would it be roads, for example?

**Ms Jones:** Firstly, in terms of adopting the emblem, when we talk about the Muttaborrasaurus we think about Muttaborra as well, but the Muttaborrasaurus is also in Hughenden. That is obviously part of that Dinosaur Trail I take people through as well. The Dinosaur Trail itself is promoted, so that can go with all of that. There are opportunities for promotion as the state emblem, and it can occur with websites and all of that sort of marketing. From my point of view, there are certain roads that need a little bit of attention, although the Winton Shire Council is very proactive with roads, particularly

tourism-based roads. In terms of impediments, from my point of view the Dinosaur Stampede road is a big one and also the Dinosaur Trail. I guess the other part of that would be going into the Longreach region and encompassing Muttaborra itself as part of that. If you try to travel from Hughenden to Muttaborra it is not such a great road, so that means having to come back down through here to get to Longreach for people to fly out of the region or catch a train or whatever, so it is that road infrastructure. You have the same thing with accommodation and all those sorts of things, but a lot of the people who come out are self-drive people. The people we have at the moment are quite happy to stay in 3½ star, but if you want to attract different people then you are going to need something a little bit more flash for them.

**Mr STEVENS:** I have not driven Muttaborra Road for a while, but it was very corrugated the last time I did. During the interval I was told that it is quite acceptable for us to drive tomorrow morning, to see Muttaborra. Is that particular road an issue that is hindering the tourism triangle? In the Waltzing Matilda Centre I saw a beautiful brochure on the triangle. It had the Muttaborrasaurus running wild on the front of the brochure, which I thought was pre-empting parliament's decision but they certainly got it right. Is the sealing of that road an important part of furthering tourism? This is away from the bill that we are currently investigating but it is also part of our investigation into paleo tourism. Is sealing the road to Muttaborra critically important for tourism?

**Ms Jones:** Probably not from Hughenden to Muttaborra as a key line or route for people to travel. If we are talking about the Dinosaur Trail, you are looking at Winton to Hughenden to Richmond and then back to Winton. That road, particularly the Richmond Winton Road, requires the finalisation of sealing before anything else. If you wanted to add on Muttaborra, they have quite a nice little display and museum for the Muttaborrasaurus out there now, but the only real sealed access is from Longreach so it does not connect to any of the other dinosaur places in an easy manner.

**Mrs McMAHON:** Could you give us a bit of background on the growth of your business? You started in 2015. How many tourists a day do you get? How many buses are you operating? What is the daily number of people on seats? You indicated that your baseline is back to normal. How many people a day are you looking after during the normal peak season?

**Ms Jones:** In 2015 it was myself, a bus, a computer and a mobile phone. That was it. I had 16 seats. Now I have five buses and five staff. A lot of that was because of the influx of visitors during 2020 to 2022. Nowadays, on different tours, because I have multiple tours running on any given day, you are probably looking at 40 or 50 people on a bus during the day. It varies day to day as well. Obviously it is settling out now. I think it will probably stick around about that for the next year as well. It is a bit of an unknown.

**Mrs McMAHON:** These people are staying in Winton so you pick them up from accommodation in Winton?

**Ms Jones:** Yes, that is correct.

**Mrs McMAHON:** I know you touched on it before but anecdotally what kind of feedback are you getting from your visitors about accommodation and other services in and around Winton? What could we look at addressing to increase satisfaction or to increase the number of people coming through?

**Ms Jones:** In terms of accommodation, most people are quite happy. A lot of people are caravanners. We have some very good caravan parks either started or that have been refurbished, I suppose you would say, in the past couple of years, which is great. All four caravan parks are of a very good standard and there are good cabins and things like that in there as well.

From a motel point of view, there are two motels that are probably the better two that tend to get a lot of bus groups. When you start putting a bus group that has 40 to 50 people into a motel you take up a whole motel with 26 rooms, which takes out one motel for two nights a week, usually. There might be multiple bus groups on any one night and then multiple nights during the week, particularly through May to August, which is very peak season for bus groups. Anecdotally on the quality of the accommodation, most people are okay. Anywhere that is clean and comfortable is okay for most people, but that is Australians.

**CHAIR:** We were just talking about the number of bus tours. In the hot season when fewer people come here, what do you do with your employees? Are they employed year round or are they seasonal workers? How does that work?

**Ms Jones:** I have casual staff. They work a set season, basically. I normally try to run 12 months of the year. The peak season is April to the end of October and then you go into off peak after that. I still have scheduled tours running through November and also in March. For anything outside of that I might have something scheduled, but I also have to have a break because it is just me in that



summer period. One of my staff has already left for the season. I have two leaving in another couple of weeks. One is a local person so I can call on her fairly regularly if I need to. There is not really any other way to do it.

**CHAIR:** I understand. We were just talking with Mayor Dillon about school numbers. Obviously you want to try to create employment and make the shoulders broad enough so that families can be supported through a broader employment period. It is about expanding those shoulder periods to continue those things.

**Mr TANTARI:** Ms Jones, other than the issue that you have raised of access with roads, infrastructure and so forth, what other support—this is a question generally to you; it has been put to us—would you like to see for the continued development and growth of dinosaur and paleo tourism in the area?

**Ms Jones:** I imagine that, as far as paleo tourism in the area for us here in Winton, the Age of Dinosaurs museum is an obvious place that requires support. I guess paleo tourism in our region piggybacks onto that. Without the Age of Dinosaurs museum we do not have much paleo tourism. We have the Dinosaur Stampede and that is really it. You could probably count on a quarter of the people who come into Winton going down to the stampede.

If you want to build paleo tourism in town, you support the museums and attractions around all of that, whether or not that is just the Age of Dinosaurs museum or it is other locations that are nearby, because we are all connected. It is the outback. You do not come to Winton just to do the Age of Dinosaurs museum. You come to do lots of other things as well. You do not come to the outback just to come to Winton. You travel through all of the other towns. You go and visit all of the other places as well. If you have kids who are particularly interested in palaeontology and fossils and things like that then you visit all of those locations. It is not just about one town or one museum; it is actually about them all.

**Mr CRANDON:** Dovetailing on that, you were saying that you have an increase in international tourism. Are you aware of what is driving that? What is bringing them here in the first place? I take on board what you have said about all of the other parts, which makes a whole lot of sense. That is something that we as a committee are looking at more broadly beyond the fossil. What is attracting them? Is there one particular thing? What could we do to attract more of them?

**Ms Jones:** The Outback Queensland Tourism Association has been doing quite a lot of work in the past couple of years to try to promote Outback Queensland, as a whole, to international markets, specifically those ones that I mentioned before that tend to bring visitors to this area. It is one of those things that a lot of those sorts of people are interested in. They do not care about the heat. Particularly the Germans, they do not mind a little bit of heat. They do tend to travel in our summertime, but it is not just about coming to the outback. They are here for maybe three weeks. They might hire a motorhome or a car and, yes, some of them do fly around, but they are travelling. If we can promote these areas to those people then they will make it part of their route. If you can go from Brisbane, maybe up to Rockhampton, come out this way and then go back into the coast at Townsville then you are capturing some of that market that would normally travel straight up and down the coast and we miss out completely.

**Mr CRANDON:** So there is not one specific thing that is attracting them here?

**Ms Jones:** Obviously, paleo tourism, the fossil tourism, is a big thing for a lot of people. Certainly they are visiting places like the Age of Dinosaurs museum, but it is everything combined. You cannot have one thing without all the others. If the rest of Outback Queensland is shut, then the Age of Dinosaurs is not going to get many people out here.

**Mr CRANDON:** That feeds into the reason, as a committee, we are looking more broadly at Outback Queensland and the tourism opportunities.

**CHAIR:** There are no further questions. We really appreciate you appearing before us.

**McNAMARA, Ms Jane, Mayor, Flinders Shire Council**

**CHAIR:** I now welcome Mayor McNamara from the Flinders Shire Council. Would you like to make an opening statement before we ask you questions?

**Ms McNamara:** I thank the Economics and Governance Committee for being here. I am sorry that I will not be in Muttaborra tomorrow. One of the reasons is probably because of the Hughenden Muttaborra Road so I will put in a plug for that. The Emblems of Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, of course, is very important. I am a very strong supporter of the Muttaborrasaurus. Doug Langdon found the first fossils in Muttaborra, hence the name Muttaborrasaurus langdoni.

We at the time had the most complete Muttaborrasaurus fossils at Dunluce just west of Hughenden so that is how we ended up with a replica of Mutt or Hughie. We have two—one out on the street. He has his own park now because when the Grand Hotel burnt down he got a little singed so we decided that he needed a revamp. He gets his own park. Then we have Hughie who is the skeleton in our brand new Flinders Discovery Centre, so thank you to the state government for the funding that went into that. That has been amazing. It is open now, but it is the soft opening. I invite any of you to the opening of that in early December.

I have been making lots of notes as other people have been speaking so this may be a little disjointed. Obviously No. 1 for me, and I did vote, so I put my hand up there, was Muttaborrasaurus. Just a little bit about the geography of the area and why the Dinosaur Trail, we have to our east, which encompasses Muttaborra and also Barcaldine, the Jump-Up area. In the Flinders Shire we have four bioregions. We have the Desert Uplands, we have the Einasleigh Uplands, we have the basalt and we have the best part which is Mitchell Grass Downs. We did not clear the trees, it is just naturally like that. I suppose I need to say I have a conflict of interest because Ray and I used to go to a lot of parties in our younger days, just so that you know that.

**Mr CRANDON:** We have got a few questions about that.

**CHAIR:** We might have to extend the session as we might ask questions on this.

**Ms McNamara:** We have the Jump-Up on that side and then you have the Selwyn Range forming the basalt tablelands to the north. In that northern region there are four extinct volcanoes. Those volcanoes had a very big impact on this area of the Australian Dinosaur Trail and is why it is so prolific in fossils. We have Richmond which is more the Eromanga Sea, with the sort of fish-type marine animals, and then Flinders is where the land and the sea meet the sky so we have all sorts of fossils there, and then you come down here, and David has given you a good description of what is happening here so I will not go into that.

What we are lacking, to answer a little bit of what MP McMahon asked, is we do not have the palaeontologists in the area. We have fossils in abundance. There is Kronosaurus that was found in the Stamford region in 1915. We know that it is still sitting out there in the paddock. Part of it is in a shed on one of the properties which is great because it is protected a little, but we do not have the palaeontologists, we do not have the capacity to have the digs. I commend David for what he has done here and also in Richmond. You need a champion and you have David here and you have had Robbie levers in Richmond. We have been lacking a champion, I guess, but recently one of our councillors had a guy just digging on the side of the road and he said, 'Come and have a look on my place.' He unearthed 400-odd specimens out of one gully. There is lots new within that. One of our biggest impediments is the ability to be able to go out and actually find the fossils.

The other thing was that in the early days Queensland Museum used to come out and whatever they found they took away. It has to be generational change now on those properties that changed ownership because those people who were burnt by having their favourite pieces taken and put in a vault somewhere in the Queensland Museum, they have never got over that. What happened in Richmond when they had the reparation here was they have reparation. It is really important for some of those specimens to be returned to their place of origin. I would like to see some of that happen.

Tourism packages have already been covered, but I think it is really important. People fly into Cairns and they want to see the reef and the outback. If we can finish that—I think by the end of this year it will be—11 kilometres on the Hann Highway, Kennedy Developmental Road, whatever you want to call it, it will be finished in the Flinders shire by the end of next month, it will help. I think there will be about 11 kilometres of that road. On that road you also have three national parks, including, of course, Porcupine Gorge which is a beautiful canyon that is within our patch. Flinders shire has five national parks. For those people who are into national parks, there are three on that highway. You can start at Blackbraes in the lakes and then Porcupine Gorge before you even come down this

way. Geologically it is also an important area because where I live all the water goes to the Gulf of Carpentaria. Where you are sitting now it all goes to Lake Eyre. That watershed is between here and Hughenden. That is another part of the story of the dinosaurs and why there are different sorts of dinosaurs in the different areas because there were seven inland seas—the Eromanga Sea being the largest of them.

As you can tell, I am a little bit of an old dinosaur. We can provide you with an MOU on the Australian Dinosaur Trail. I would like to commend all the previous mayors, and there is one sitting in the room here today, Bruce Collins, for the work that Bruce did with the Flinders shire in terms of both the ADT and also getting the road bitumened between here and Hughenden. There is also the Queensland dinosaur collective. I was at the first meeting of that. We have now passed it over to our staff to be a part of. I think that is a good initiative of TEQ, so thank you for that. In the shire you have Muttaborra, you have Eromanga and you have Riversleigh—and I was lucky enough the other day to go into the Riversleigh OQTA—as well roads, roads and roads. I was vice chair of IQRAP so it was all about corridors and connectors. It is not just about tourism, it is about the freight routes: Richmond to Winton, Hughenden to here, Hughenden to Muttaborra. We have five state roads. I can count five state roads coming into Hughenden so it is a crossroads. Accommodation is a problem at the moment and it is going to get worse. Thank you for your wonderful initiative in the jobs and energy package, but in Hughenden and Richmond you will not be able to get a room. You cannot get a room now because of contractors. We put another couple of 300- and 400-person camps in those two towns. There is going to be no accommodation for tourism, so that is really a problem.

I think paleo tourism is a huge part of the tourism package. They would not come to Hughenden, Richmond and Winton without it. Kids love dinosaurs. It is important for schools and education. We fortunately have a gypsum plant in the town and they have given us their overlay so people can go and fossick around in piles of dirt. They love it.

There are a couple of other things. You need to have a welcoming community. You also need to have a livable community. I call it pretty much the race of the lakes. Richmond got a lake so of course Hughenden had to have a lake and Barcaldine has a lake. Water is important for that livability factor and to attract people to stay. I was sitting beside our lake yesterday and two cars pulled up and they said, 'Can we swim in the lake?' I said, 'Yeah'. 'Can the dog go for a swim?' I said 'Yeah, righto. Just pick up after it, please.' We have to attract families and have those fossicking areas, but you have to make sure that your centre is kid friendly. We just opened up and gave the kids an area with sand in it. The first weekend there was sand everywhere but it is getting better. It takes a little bit of education.

Short tours are for time-poor people. I think that is important. Expressions of interest for motel sites has been covered. I think four- to five-star is important. We have three motels at the moment and because of a great farm that we have had built in the area, which was a state coordinated project, so thank you again, we had to put 72 units into the back of our caravan park just to accommodate those workers. It is wanting to quadruple in size and we also have CopperString, the wind farms—airports have already been covered. Yes, we need more length to our airport. We can actually accommodate a Boeing to land, but it would not be able to take off so that is not much use to you.

We need shoulder events to encourage people to come earlier and leave later. Winton is the capital of festivals. I take my hat off to Gavin and his crew. I have no idea how they do it. This year we had the Festival of Outback Skies. Thank you again for supporting this. That will be the first weekend in May next year. That will be our second one. It is around the sky, the lake—everything that can be encompassed to attract families to our region. I better leave it at that and thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Mayor. You were talking about the ancient specimens found in sheds in Hughenden. We have found our own specimen in the back shed at Richmond and we have him right here: Ray Stevens, deputy chair, member for Mermaid Beach.

**Mr STEVENS:** Thank you, Chair, for your kind introduction. Your Worship, thank you very much for coming along today. It is greatly appreciated because it is important that we get feedback direct to both sides of the parliament. We are very supportive of the dinosaur emblem going forward in this piece of legislation. To pick up more information about paleo tourism and what is necessary is very important for us for the future as well. I am aware Richmond was a bit of a dying town tourism wise until they opened up Kronosaurus Korner which was a very large amphibian that was found on a property my family owned, Army Downs—I put that plug in there. Everyone seems to be happy with the Muttaborrasaurus going forward as the emblem. You mentioned that you need a champion.

**Ms McNamara:** Like you!

**Mr STEVENS:** I am not moving back. I am in the long paddock down at the Gold Coast and I am not moving back to Hughenden. You need a champion and I agree with that. Robbie levers and Johnny Wharton and the crew got behind the Kronosaurus Korner in my old picture show building next to the Blue Bird Cafe. Is there any possibility that you can have a dual role for someone on your council to pursue a higher identification of Hughenden as a dinosaur stop, mainly because a lot of my Gold Coast grey nomad friends drive to Richmond and stop in Richmond and say, 'Oh, yes, we know Kronosaurus Korner', but very few mention Hughenden as a stop for them in terms of dinosaurs. They probably turn right and come down to Winton, I am not sure. Is there a possibility you could put a champion in a dual role in Hughenden to lift its profile in the paleo tourism world?

**Ms McNamara:** Yes, I do believe that we do need a champion and a local is best, I believe, because they know the community. I think where our advantage is that a lot of our tourism comes from Townsville. We are the first stop. You have a ticket arrangement with the three dinosaur centres and I think it is really important that that is promoted as well. I really want to put a plug in for Muttaborra. We are putting TIMS money into Hughenden Muttaborra Road to do the worst of it. There is about 120 kilometres and it is a state road. It is a corridor and a connector so it is important for that road to be considered in future funding rounds because it not only connects Hughenden to Muttaborra and then across to Longreach and here but also follows down the Landsborough Channel and it gives you a great insight. You have Eromanga Way and the basalt—not the Basalt Byways, that is up north of Hughenden, but there are two other drives that you can do where you either go up the Jump-Up or you come to the top of it and you just see this huge expanse of what was the inland sea. So it gives you a great sense of what this area was. We have had ice ages, we have had rainforests, we have had deserts. It is just the most amazing area and that is why you have got these millions of fossils. At home, because we are higher up, we have starfish which are very rare. You are looking at little things that are this big as opposed to Matilda who is absolutely huge. I think what draws people here is the dinosaurs but then we can tell our other stories as well.

**Mr STEVENS:** Has your council put in an application to the state government for an upgrade of that state road? Have you considered putting your project to the tourism minister, who would then put it across to the main roads minister and maybe even for federal funding and a council contribution. It is not unusual for a council—which we have done on the Gold Coast—to make a contribution which helps the state government get across the line.

**Ms McNamara:** We have done an economic study on it. It did not come up as well as we hoped simply because we have Aramac-Torrens Creek Road, which is one we have just done recently, and we have the Kennedy Developmental Road. They have been our priorities. Now that one is finished and one is nearly finished we are turning our sights to the Hughenden Muttaborra Road. Yes, you will be hearing from us on the Hughenden Muttaborra Road.

**CHAIR:** I understand that international tourists come to Sydney, but it feels like you could see Sydney anywhere in the world. What is the one thing that really attracts the international tourists you speak to who make their way out to Hughenden? How do they describe it when they talk about attractions and making the effort to get there?

**Ms McNamara:** It is the distance; they cannot believe it. They just come out and the amount they can see! Where are all the kangaroos? Where are all the cows and sheep? They should have been on the road this morning because there were lots of them. I think it is just the fact that they can see an emu, they can see kangaroos. It is also the night skies. The night skies are amazing. What tourism has done for all these towns is they have tidied us up. They have us on that trajectory to be a tidy town, to make it livable, to make it really nice.

I need to make a comment here. Talking about champions, there is a lady in this town, Nookie, who started a nursery. The ability of that lady to transform all of our towns! She used to travel everywhere with her plants and so forth. She only sells plants that will live in this area. You have to have climate-specific species, and Nookie just knew what grew here. I used to say to her, 'I need some more poddy fodder,' because whenever you have pet sheep in the yard the roses are the first thing to go. It just made Winton. To me, coming here as a child and coming here now, it is like an oasis compared to what it used to be. I think it is all about livability. Tourists will not stop in your town if it is not welcoming and it is not clean. Yes, we need accommodation. We have an expression of interest out. It is only because of the projects that are coming that we now have two proponents who are interested in building a motel. It is chicken-and-egg. You cannot have everything at once, so you have to just build it slowly and they will hopefully come.

**CHAIR:** I certainly find the people out here really welcoming. I know you got rid of the rude ones and sent them to the Gold Coast. Do you have a question, member for Mermaid Beach?

**Mr STEVENS:** Going back to the champions, I have been made aware that Richmond, Eromanga and Winton have palaeontologists employed through the Queensland Museum. Have you made any approaches to that source of funding et cetera, which would be an enormous help to Hughenden's dinosaur tourism?

**Ms McNamara:** Not directly. Yes, we are definitely going down that track now to try and attract somebody who can be in our patch, because we know of at least three completely different areas in our shire. The issue is that there are a few million years between where I live. We are on the Flinders River. There are very different areas.

I would just like to give Richmond a plug. On the road going to Croydon they have used the borrow pits. Council has used the topsoil, and in any one of those borrow pits now they can just go and scratch around 20 to 30 ruler lengths and they are coming up with the most amazing fish like Wanda. Basically, if you dig there you will find something. Fortunately, you do not have to go through the couple of metres that has been taken off to build the roads.

It is important for us to connect with our landholders and give them the peace of mind that whatever is found on their property is going to stay in place. That is the most important thing. We have bought the piece of land next to our Flinders Discovery Centre, and my mind has been going overboard this morning because we are looking at a country university centre for there, but I can see also a preparation area down the back for our fossils that are going to come out of the Flinders shire.

**CHAIR:** There being no further questions, we want to thank you very much for coming down. We really appreciate you doing that. As part of the broader inquiry not connected to the bill we will probably be looking at some further exploration. I just wanted to provide an opportunity for anyone else who wanted to share their views on issues. We very much wanted to come out, both the deputy chair and myself, and expressed the ability to be there for anyone who wanted to have their say. If there is anyone else who wants to say anything, just step forward.

I want to recognise former mayor Bruce Collins, who we met earlier and kicked off a lot of this process. A lot of people in the community have made big contributions. I want to thank all of those who have appeared before us, especially those who have travelled in the short time we have given you. Thank you all for your evidence. We will be around for a little bit, so if anyone wants to buttonhole us we are very open to that. We do know there were some questions taken on notice. We also know it is a big thing to appear in *Hansard*, but we have submissions that are quite short and simple and we very much welcome them. Even without us being here there is still an opportunity to express your view. We note there were questions taken on notice, I think specifically from the mayor. We would really love it if we could get them by 5 pm Tuesday, 10 October, so we can feed them into the process.

Thank you to Deane, our Hansard reporter. Due to his hard work a transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. Also thank you to Lucy, who will be working hard to forward those transcripts. I thank all of the committee members. We have certainly enjoyed the hospitality of Winton and we look forward to going on to see the museum later today. I declare this public hearing closed.

**The committee adjourned at 12.10 pm.**