

Senate Committee Submission

INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S PREPAREDNESS TO HOST THE COMMONWEALTH, OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

This is a submission by the Committee for Ballarat, in relation to preparedness of Australia to host the Victoria 2026 Commonwealth Games. The submission relates specifically to Ballarat as one of the five regional Victorian hubs that will host Commonwealth Games events.

Committee for Ballarat is a member-based organisation representing over 140 organisations and individuals from across every sector of the region's economy and community. Its purpose is to inspire diverse thought leadership and unlock potential. Our vision is for a thriving and vibrant regional community known for its liveability, sustainability and inclusiveness. Our members seek to work with all layers of government to advocate for the key issues that impact our long-term social, economic and environmental future.

This submission by Committee for Ballarat addresses the preparedness of Australia to host the 2026 Commonwealth Games and relates specifically to Ballarat as one of the five regional Victorian hubs. Ballarat will host the Athletics and Boxing events while the nearby township of Creswick will host the Mountain Biking.

Committee for Ballarat fully supports the Games and wants to work in collaboration with the State Government and all associated Commonwealth Games bodies to ensure the Games are an enormous success for our region, Victoria and Australia.

The legacy the Games will leave has long been promoted as a substantial feature of the Victoria's bid to host the 2026 event. Committee for Ballarat submitted a Position Paper to the Office of the Commonwealth Games in August 2022 and proposed Legacy projects that would have significant impact on local infrastructure across our region, in areas such as sport, housing, tourism, sustainability and social opportunity.

Our submission is that Victoria has not provisioned sufficient funds to ensure the legacy outcomes of the Games meet the expectations of the community, specifically in relation to sporting and transport infrastructure.

The allocation of \$2.6b by the state government as the spend for the Games appears to 'short-change' meaningful long-term legacy outcomes. This will impact the potential for our regional city to benefit in the long term from the Commonwealth Games investment.

SPORTS INFRASTRUCTURE

The Athletics will take place at MARS Stadium and it has been announced that approximately \$150m will be spent to upgrade the stadium's seating capacity and install an international standard athletics facility for the event, that will be removed post the Games. A new permanent athletics facility will be built immediately adjacent to MARS Stadium as the warm-up track for the Games.

Since the funding announcement in October 2022, the combined impact of inflation, workforce and supply chain challenges will adversely effect the project and result in a scaling back of the permanent infrastructure development. This will diminish the legacy outcomes for the stadium and the warm-up facility.

The legacy outcomes that would be commensurate with the investment outlay required to host the Athletics at MARS Stadium would see the following permanent features as part of the precinct:

- MARS stadium with a minimum capacity of 25,000 for the Games, including temporary seating
- MARS Stadium with an increase of 5000 (minimum) in the permanent seating capacity
- An increase in the overall capacity of the stadium to cater of up to 20,000 for events beyond the Games
- World class accessible facilities for entertainment, spectators, athletes and officials.
- The Warm Up track for the Games must be permanent, built to international standard, with the capability to host community, national and international competitions.

Without these legacy outcomes, the investment required to host the Games will have little long-term benefit to the region.

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

The Ballarat to Maryborough railway line is immediately adjacent to MARS Stadium. Ballarat's central railway station is approximately 3 kms from MARS stadium. Situated approximately 2 kms north of MARS Stadium is a proposed an initial 6000 lot subdivision in Ballarat's new Northern Growth zone.

Athletics events held at MARS Stadium have the potential attract 40,000 – 50,000 visitors per day, depending on the final spectator capacity at the stadium. Access to a rail line provides an enormous opportunity for spectators to arrive at the stadium via rail, directly from Ballarat Central Station.

An event platform built to access MARS Stadium would not only increase transport options to the Games events but also result in a long-term benefit for future events.

Further, the lasting legacy of an event platform at MARS Stadium is that it can be upgraded (in time) to a fully accessible station to service Ballarat's growing community to the north. The Wendouree Station services Ballarat's western population growth, A station on the Maryborough line at or around MARS stadium will future-proof our northern growth areas

Without investment in rail infrastructure, visitors to Ballarat for the Games will be left to find their way from Ballarat Central Station or Wendouree station on foot, bike, car or bus. Rail will increase the transport options available, especially for those with limited mobility.

Investment in transport infrastructure will facilitate the involvement of more Australians in the Games. It also provides a unique opportunity to 'stage' the build of Ballarat's third railway station, ensuring a long-term benefit to the community and reduce future congestion in our new residential growth areas.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CITY ACTIVATION

Beyond the sports themselves, one of the features of the Games will be the Arts and Cultural events, and the opportunity for our community to come together at live sites. These experiences have been a significant part of many Commonwealth and Olympic Games going back to Sydney 2000. Live sites

provide a unique opportunity for the community to embrace the Games and celebrate the city, the sports program and the cultural events.

Currently, Ballarat does not have an appropriate events space that could cater for large scale public cultural and community events. A suitable site has been identified, though at this stage, we are not confident that sufficient funds are available within the Games budget to develop this site as would be required. We are confident that in partnership with local government and private industry, appropriate and proportional Commonwealth Games investment could deliver a significant events space for the city.

Investment in an arts and cultural events space in time for the Games would have a profound and lasting impact for our community and be well utilised for a range of visitor economy and other community-based initiatives.

IN SUMMARY

The Victoria 2026 Commonwealth Games gives regional Victoria, and Ballarat specifically, a once in a lifetime opportunity to accelerate, enhance and enable infrastructure developments - some which currently exists and can be upgraded, others which need to be built to cater for our growing population.

Committee for Ballarat is concerned that our preparedness to optimise the opportunities hosting the Games provides will be limited by the lack of adequate investment. Long-term benefits must underpin investment decisions, especially given the constrained fiscal position.

In order to maximise investment decisions, the local community needs to be engaged as genuine partners in the planning for Games infrastructure. To date, our experience with the Office of the Commonwealth Games has not been one of a genuine exchange of ideas that could lead to long-term positive regional outcomes.

To ensure investment in the Games does result in a legacy of sporting and other infrastructure that encourages more Australians to participate in elite and community sports and live active lifestyles, requires deeper engagement with our regional community.

Michael Poulton
Chief Executive Officer

29 May 2023