

**ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY
STANDING COMMITTEE**

INQUIRY INTO 2011 KIMBERLEY ULTRAMARATHON EVENT

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 9 MAY 2012**

SESSION THREE

Members

Dr M.D. Nahan (Chairman)
Mr W.J. Johnston (Deputy Chairman)
Mr M.P. Murray
Ms A.R. Mitchell
Mr I.C. Blayney
Mrs M.H. Roberts (Co-opted Member)

Hearing commenced at 1.05 pm**HEWAT, MR ANDREW****Race Director, Great Ocean Walk 100, Bogong2Hotham, examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: This committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of Parliament. You have agreed to provide evidence to the committee in Western Australia by electronic means from a location outside of the state. Uniform defamation laws were enacted across Australia in 2005. This means that even though you are outside Western Australia, your evidence will still be protected by the defence of absolute privilege against actions in defamation. Before we commence there are a number of procedural questions I need you to answer. Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

Mr Hewat: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form?

Mr Hewat: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before a parliamentary committee?

Mr Hewat: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions relating to your appearance before the committee today?

Mr Hewat: No; quite comfortable.

The CHAIRMAN: For the record, for *Hansard*, could you please state your full name and the capacity in which you appear before the committee?

Mr Hewat: My name is Andrew Hewat. I am race director of two races in Victoria, the Great Ocean Walk 100 and Bogong2Hotham 64-kilometre mountain run. I am obviously presenting as a witness on the basis of my experience and knowledge of directing races, and I have also participated in quite a few ultra-marathons around Australia and internationally as well, so I carry that experience into this forum as well.

The CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much. The committee has received your submission. Thanks for your contribution; it was very instructive. Do you wish to propose any amendments to your submission?

Mr Hewat: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Before we get onto questions, do you wish to make a brief opening statement that directly addresses your submission and the terms of reference?

Mr Hewat: No; I think my submission speaks for itself. I am happy to take questions, and anything that leads on from that I can deal with.

The CHAIRMAN: I will allow my colleagues to introduce themselves.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Good afternoon, Andy. My name is Andrea Mitchell. I am the member for Kingsley.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Ian Blayney, the member for Geraldton.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Michelle Roberts, the member for Midland.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: And I am Bill Johnston, the member for Cannington.

The CHAIRMAN: Just to reiterate, I found your submission to be very, very interesting indeed and thanks very much for making it; I have read it. One of the big issues is that you have a very comprehensive risk-management strategy. Most of it, from what I have read, is probably tied to Victoria to a large extent, so I would like to ask a supplementary question on that afterwards. But really we have been told the relevant thing is not so much that you identified all the risks, but how you react to and make decisions on the implementation of the risk-management strategy. Could you explore that, particularly when it relates to issues of fire, recognising that the fire issues in Victoria are different than they are potentially up in the Kimberley?

Mr Hewat: The majority of my races are held within national parks, so the jurisdiction overseeing that is actually the Department of Sustainability and Environment, which answers to Parks Victoria. So I tend to liaise directly with Parks Victoria, and during my races I will have constant communication with a ranger, an on-duty ranger, of Parks Victoria. In the lead-up to the event, I will be communicating with the regional manager for the park that the race is being held in, and obviously I am monitoring the weather and any warnings that have been put out by the Country Fire Authority as well. In the event that there was a fire incident that arose on the day, I would be taking guidance from the authorities in terms of the dangers and how we would react to that. As a result of the bushfires in Victoria a few years ago, there were actually new guidelines for fire-ban days to have what they call “code red day”. And part of the permit process for getting a permit to hold any event in a national park is that if there is a code red day there is no access to the park. So, I would know in advance it would be a code red day and there would be no event. If there was a total fire ban, then I would still be able to have access, but as part of my race guidelines I would cancel the race purely on the basis of the risk factors being too high. If it was just a hot, windy day and a fire developed, then I would be dealing with that as it evolved. And, again, I would be taking guidance from the relevant authorities in terms of the dangers. I guess in that respect the important thing is lines of communication, and a fundamental part of my whole risk-management plan is to ensure that I have strong lines of communication, not only with the people on the ground in terms of the checkpoints, but also with the authorities, if need be, to get guidance.

The CHAIRMAN: In Victoria, particularly up in the mountains, communication sometimes can be difficult. What happens if you on the day did not have safe communication between one checkpoint and another; what would you have done?

Mr Hewat: I would not have a race, simple as that. I can give you an example. For my race Bogong2Hotham, I have the help of an amateur radio group. They come in and they use it as a training event for them. They hike in the day before and they set up communication bases across the mountains. They actually go across three mountains, and so there are many places that there is no regular communication, and there are actually many places that regularly UHF radios will not reach, so they actually set up repeater stations on the top of some of the mountains so they can still communicate down in the valleys. And so for my race, Bogong2Hotham, I always explain to the competitors that without the help of the radio communication team we would not have an event; it just a little too dangerous.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you use satellite phones? Do you have experience with them as part of your communication?

Mr Hewat: I do. For my own races I organise, the Great Ocean Walk, I have no radio communications. The phone system is more accessible in terms of regular mobile phone networks, but there are pockets that are not accessible. I actually have purchased my own satellite phone for that purpose and I hire a satellite phone for the checkpoint where there is no regular mobile phone coverage. Just on that, as an aside, I actually initially bought one of the new Thuraya satellite phones and found that was totally inadequate for the coverage and services, and so I returned that

and got an Iridium phone. So there is some relevance, I believe, in terms of your situation with the types of phones being used.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you have any troubles with your satellite phones generally or do you always have backup to the satellite phones for communication?

Mr Hewat: The satellite phones are not infallible; there are places that they will fail, but that is more the case in the mountains. In terms of my mountain run, the Bogong2Hotham, in that case I do have a radio backup. For the Great Ocean Walk, which is held along the coast, very seldom do I find that I have got an issue with the satellite phone by not having communication.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Mr Hewat, can I ask what planning you do to extract a severely injured competitor?

[1.15 am]

Mr Hewat: It depends on the access, where they are and what the injuries are. I will focus on Bogong2Hotham because that is probably a lot more inhospitable in terms of terrain and in terms of access. Before the race I get permission from Ambulance Victoria. I actually let them know that I am having the event. I send them in my risk-management plan and I take any guidance from them that they deem necessary. Prior to the event I also go to the local ambulance station and I speak to the ambulance officers, who probably I would call over the weekend. Basically at a serious event, somewhere like Bogong2Hotham, then it would probably require a helicopter evacuation, in which case I would be relying on the ambulance service. It is not practical for me to have helicopters on standby for my events; they are too small and the economies of scale do not permit that. So I ask all of my competitors to have ambulance insurance or ambulance membership, and I rely on the emergency services. But I am very proactive in making sure they are aware of what is going on and the possibility that this event may be requiring their services.

The CHAIRMAN: When you communicate with the ambulance and other people in advance of your race, when do you start doing this?

Mr Hewat: When? It varies. The first people I speak to is obviously the parks department, because they are the primary source for my permit process. Once I have that in place, then I will deal with the police and the Road Traffic Authority, because I have a few road crossings. And as it gets closer to the event, then I will start talking to the ambulance service. And at some point in that process I will be dealing with the local councils to make sure I have got the permits in place for them and any others. Like on the coast for the Great Ocean Walk there is a foreshore committee I think as well. Generally, I start the big ones first in terms of parks, and as I get closer to the event, I deal with the emergency services. Bearing in mind October is my next race, I am already dealing with the authority in terms of planning for that. So it is a fairly long lead-in.

The CHAIRMAN: So it is six months?

Mr Hewat: Six months minimum; yes, six months.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: In that regard, what do you do about the communications plan, like this early in the process? I mean, are you already planning where your checkpoints are going to be and what equipment checkpoints will have?

Mr Hewat: As part of the application process, I have the risk-management plan which I attached to my original submission, and in that it will outline where the checkpoints will be. I will have been over that course. And by now for this year, the Great Ocean Walk, for example, is the fourth year of the race. So I know what the communication access will be at all those checkpoints. I also have a rough idea of what areas there will be access from on the course. That is actually outlined in some places within the risk plan, areas that will have access between checkpoints. But primarily we are interested in access first off at the checkpoints, and I will have that when I am doing the plan. So that is actually known before I even submit the plan. So that is one of the first things I deal with.

And with the Bogong2Hotham one, as I said, I do not even start until I have got the radio operator team on side to ensure that they are going to be there, because without that level of communication, I am not going to hold an event. So they are pretty much the first port of call.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Mr Hewat, with your briefings prior to the event, do you make it compulsory for all your volunteers to attend briefings and also competitors?

Mr Hewat: Not for all the volunteers. Some of the volunteers will have been at the races before. Some I know personally and have run races with, and so I am quite confident in their experience. Generally speaking, I will have a checkpoint captain who will be totally au fait with the procedures and protocols of the race, and I will also make sure that they are very experienced. In terms of Bogong2Hotham, a lot of the checkpoint volunteers will be the radio operators themselves. We have a briefing night before the race generally. They have already hiked in, so they have been briefed in the lead-up. They all are experienced and know what is going on. So there is not really that serious for them to be there. The runners need to be at a briefing, and I will go over all the basic risk management that the runners themselves need to know about at that briefing.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Can I just go back to your comments about the helicopter and Ambulance Victoria? I wanted to clarify a few things. Does Ambulance Victoria have helicopters as part of its vehicle fleet?

Mr Hewat: Yes.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: So they do.

Mr Hewat: Yes.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: In that area where you are running your race through the mountains there, are there other helicopters that are available, and do the ambulance helicopters have a winch capacity? Or what would happen if you needed to winch someone out?

Mr Hewat: There is definitely aerial rescue capacity in the mountains. There have been several cases of people being winched out of valleys. The Great Ocean Walk as well, even though it is coastal, there are some places that are inaccessible. I know from the past, they have actually airlifted someone with a broken ankle off a rock ledge because they could not get the backup from the coast back up to the road. So, yes, there is definitely air ambulance evacuation access in terms of everything and actually on-site planning and evacuating.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I suspected that was the case. I just wanted to clarify it because we do not have those capacities available in the Kimberley.

Mr Hewat: Also on the coast we have Westpac sponsoring helicopter evacuations and that helps out with the surf lifesaving assistance every summer, so there is definitely air backup.

Just anecdotally, this year when I went to one of the ambulance centres prior to the Bogong run—I was going through this year; we know all about that sort of thing, we know what you are doing—they are quite familiar with the race. It has been going for so long, so they are quite comfortable with what we do. Pretty much he said, “If you’ve got anything going wrong, I won’t be coming out, I’ll be ringing for the air coming in, for the helicopter to come and get you”; because it is an expectation that anywhere that we are going to be, he is not going to be able to get to anyway but he will require the air ambulance.

The CHAIR: I do not know if you read the transcripts given to this committee or followed it very closely, but this is a case where a group based in Hong Kong came and they managed to race in 2010, and they had a bit of trouble with hydration. But in the 2011 race they did not contact many of the providers—the police; FESA, which is our fire and emergency services agency; the SES, which is a subset for emergency services; the police; and others. Would you ever run a race or do you think a race should have been run without linking with those, including the shire?

Mr Hewat: No. I find that amazing. The level that I go to get approval for a race here, I can go through six or seven different authorities to get approval and deal with each one individually. To contemplate holding a race without having that backup and having those approvals, I would find just unbelievable, and quite frightening.

The CHAIR: You are an experienced ultra-marathoner both in organising and participating; have you been in a race that you thought that the organisers did not link adequately with the service providers?

Mr Hewat: Yes, I have been. I have had concerns when I have been in races where I have realised that that is the case. And I think that is something that people like myself bring to the table. You look at a lot of the trail running race directors in Australia. A lot of them have actually been runners themselves, or still are runners themselves, so they bring a depth of knowledge and experience to the events based on their exposure and what they have seen going on in the past. So it is almost like an apprenticeship we go through. I see a different culture. I am quite aware of the company that ran the race that you are dealing with, and I see this coming from more of a business perspective. Whereas people like myself, I have a day job and I go and do these things in my own time. It is a matter of sport and I bring to it the experience and knowledge of actually being a participant, and the people I am providing the race for, they are friends. It is like a community to me, and I would not want to ever expose them to the risk that I have seen people exposed to in the race that you are investigating. So the answer to your question is no.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Mr Hewat, can I follow that up? Is there a recognised body for sanctioning ultra-marathons?

Mr Hewat: We do have our own organisation, the Australian Ultra Runners Association. I believe they were giving a submission this morning to you guys. I am not sure who actually represented them.

The CHAIR: They are coming after you.

Mr Hewat: Sorry, I forgot the schedule. I am a member of the Australian Ultra Runners Association. In my races I actually rely on them as the governing body to sanction my races, and they source the insurance, my liability insurance, through AURA. So they do not have a specific control over how the races are run. They have guidelines, but in terms of the permit process, we go through the bureaucratic processes with the authorities who are going to be in control of the areas that we are running basically; if that is the answer you are looking for.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Could I just ask one follow-up? Is it generally accepted amongst ultra-runners that that organisation is the sanctioning body, that people recognise it as that?

Mr Hewat: It is to some degree. The sport is growing very fast, and there are a lot of people who are new to the sport who are coming from road running, from shorter races, from 10 kilometre, half marathon and marathon, and who are not aware of AURA's presence. We try to educate them. At my race briefings, I explain to them what AURA is and how important they are in terms of being our professional body, so to speak. But, yes, the awareness is not as great as it should be. That is purely the nature of the sport; it is growing so fast.

The CHAIR: Your insurance, what type of insurance do you or your organisation provide, and what type of insurance do you require the participants to bring on board?

Mr Hewat: The insurance that we get is public liability insurance. As I said, I source it through AURA and it is usually one of the Australian insurance companies. I think, we were running Suncorp up until this year. We have just recently changed the provider. We need a minimum of \$20 million liability insurance for the event. That is not going to protect—that is not insurance for the runners; that is insurance for the event. So I explain to the runners that they need to have their own—any other coverage, any of their own insurance coverage that they need to cover themselves if they have an injury or, as I said before, if they need to have ambulance, they need to have that

covered separately because the event insurance is not going to cover them for that process. So I encourage them to have some level of responsibility for their own insurance, because the event insurance is not going to cover them for personal injury or accident.

The CHAIR: What does the event insurance cover? Do you know? Can you give me some examples?

Mr Hewat: If there was damage as a result of the event, if there was damage to property or to a third party, it functions pretty much like a third party insurance. So it is designed if there was an accident at one of the checkpoints and there was damage to infrastructure, then they were covered.

The CHAIR: Does it cover lawsuits taken against the organiser or the holder of insurance for, let us say, accidents and damage done to participants?

[1.30 pm]

Mr Hewat: Against the race directors and the organisers?

The CHAIRMAN: For the body that takes out the insurance, does the insurance cover them from law suits taken against that party by participants who are injured, like happened in the ultra-marathon event in Kununurra in the Kimberley?

Mr Hewat: It does now. Up until recently, when we changed our provider, it was not doing so, but it does now provide us with cover.

The CHAIRMAN: When you take out the insurance, do you have capability or are there abilities to restrict the coverage of insurance against certain types of actions?

Mr Hewat: I am not terribly sure actually about that. I could not answer that. I would like to think that the representatives from AURA would probably be able to answer that better than I can. They actually source our insurance for us and so we rely on them to some degree to make sure that those details are in place. I would probably default to the representatives from AURA.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I was interested in your submission where you talk about the NSAIDs, the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, and you make a reference to what happened to Nick Kruse in China. You have commented there on the dangers and what is current practice and how you believe a warning should have been given about these drugs, and then you note that RacingThePlanet actually mandated the carrying of these drugs. I am just wondering whether you have got any more that you could add about that and what you recommend in your medical pack for runners to carry.

Mr Hewat: I recommend that they do not take any pain killers at all. Best practice now in ultra-marathons and, in fact, in any endurance event, is to educate the runners and the organisers and the checkpoint volunteers to not administer, and for the runners to not take, any non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs because of the impact it has on the function of the kidneys at a time when they are already stressed. Without going into too much detail, the drugs suppress the kidneys. While we are running these events, the kidneys are under quite a degree of stress as it is, so they are already struggling to function, and then you place a restriction on their function by taking these drugs and so it leads into a dangerous cycle of further shutdown. The other problem is that, quite commonly, people take these pain killers because they have got pain. More often than not, that is because they are getting muscle breakdown. The by-product of muscle breakdown is debris and protein that is broken down. That is filtered out by the blood, it is carried to the kidneys and the kidneys are getting full of this debris. You take the pain killer so your legs feel good so you can run more, so you get more breakdown, so you get more debris and more waste products, so the kidneys are getting overloaded with this by-product because you have facilitated that by overcoming the pain barrier with the drugs. At the same time, the drugs are suppressing the function of the kidneys and so the kidneys then basically shut down and you can end up with kidney failure. People actually die from that. There are serious side effects. I know several people have been on dialysis until they can

get their kidney function back. There are two main concerns. One is rhabdomyolysis, where the kidneys get clogged up, and the other one is hyponatremia, which is where they basically get fluid intoxication. The kidneys are overloaded with fluid and when they are suppressed by the drugs, they get shut down and you end up with oedema and fluid on the brain and you can die. That is the nth degree. That is fairly serious.

For the last few years, the common practice of races has been to warn against, firstly, drinking too much and, secondly, taking pain killers, specifically non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. When the race was cancelled with the disaster, I tried to find out more about RacingThePlanet and I was going through their mandatory gear list, because that gives you a fair indication of how switched on a race organiser is and how seriously they take safety matters. I was blown away by the fact that they did not have any warnings about it. Not only did they not have warnings, they actually had it as part of their compulsory gear in their mandatory gear list to carry non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, which is totally contraindicated. That I found quite alarming.

Interestingly, going through all the submissions that have been loaded on the website as your inquiry has been going on, I have been alarmed to read that several of the volunteers or people who have been present during the race briefings said there were constant warnings to drink lots of water but no mention of the fact that you have to balance that with having an adequate salt intake to keep your electrolyte balance to stop that fluid intoxication which leads to hyponatremia. I am concerned that they still have not learned the lessons from their past experience. They have removed that mandatory requirement for the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs from their gear list. Mind you, the gear list has disappeared from the website, so you cannot actually see what they are anymore. But I am concerned that they still are not following best practice in terms of those guidelines.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: If I can just follow up on that, in the 2010 event they held in the Kimberley, they had a lot of issues to do with dehydration. So it would appear that their response to that is just to tell runners to drink more water, which, as you have explained, does not appear to be appropriate advice. The other thing is that this was held at a different time of the year; it was held in September rather than April. One of the persons who gave evidence to the committee, a local in Kununurra, talked about the kind of oppressive atmosphere. I do not know what familiarity you have got with tropical areas and whatever, where you get high humidity and so forth. He commented that he would not run a race. Given what you have just put to me today, I am wondering whether or not you can actually mitigate those risks of dehydration and so forth in the Kimberley at that time of year, whether you are putting people at risk because they need to be hydrated, whether you are saying that the salts or whatever that need to go with it would be sufficient, or whether September is just not a good time in that season in the tropics to run a marathon.

Mr Hewat: In the humidity, that makes it more difficult to determine what your hydration levels are because you do not get the normal cooling effect because of the fact you are sweating and it is not evaporating and so you are not cooling. It will exacerbate overheating and it will make it harder to strike a balance for that cooling process. There are races around the world that are held in tropical climates. I think if you are going to do that—obviously, they are going to do that because they are happening—you need to give serious consideration to, and try to educate the runners on, the proper processes in terms of monitoring your fluid balances. One of the techniques used in some races is to have scales and mandatory weigh-ins. That is helpful because you can tell if you are retaining fluid or if you are losing fluid. It is not a total cure. It helps in terms of the management of it. I could not tell you—I am not familiar with your area, but I have run races in some pretty hot climates—whether there is a more appropriate time of year to hold that event. Whenever it is held, I think what is more important is the fact that there is a proper understanding of these processes and education that goes with it, and monitoring is part of the whole risk management process. From what I can see, that has not been the case with this race, which is quite surprising. Given that they have had past problems, they do not seem to be learning the lessons from what has gone on before.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Is it normal in those kinds of races for competitors to have to sign a waiver before they are allowed to enter, which basically in this case limited the liability of the company to the entrance fee that they had paid?

Mr Hewat: No, I have not heard of that ever anywhere. No, I have never heard of anything like that. They generally sign a waiver that acknowledges the risk and asks that they do not hold the race organisers responsible for any injuries that they incur. It is a fairly standard waiver in everything from your five-kay fun run that is held by the local primary school up to ultra-marathons. It is a fairly standard thing to do. But, no, not that sort of waiver. I have never heard of that before.

The CHAIRMAN: Have you ever heard anything about RacingThePlanet through your ultra-marathon grapevine, and did you hear anything specifically about their Gobi Desert race and the outcomes or otherwise from it or the 2010 relay in the Kimberley?

Mr Hewat: In terms of the previous races, I have heard bits and pieces, generally third-hand. I have had no direct communication with anybody who has ever been involved in other races in respect of the issues that they have had. I was aware of the death in the Gobi Desert. I was aware that in 2010 they had issues with dehydration in their runners and their ability to cope with that situation, but it was at a pretty low level. There is nothing very specific that I could really add to your knowledge on that.

In terms of what has gone on with the 2011 race, I obviously followed that very closely both in the media and during the inquiry and have communicated with a couple of people who were there. I have concerns about the race on several levels—the fact that it started and then there were several trigger points throughout the day that I thought would have raised alarm bells and that should have led to the race being stopped or abandoned or, at the very least, the course changed to provide a more safe environment. Reading through some of the submissions, it is almost like there is an elephant in the room and during the day no-one was really actually taking any notice of the fact that they were talking about going out and re-marking the course after it had been burnt, not the fact that the runners had actually been burnt. It scares me that the safety priorities just were not there, and despite the environment with which they were dealing, it does not seem to have rung the appropriate alarm bells, which is why I am pleased to be able to give some input from a race goer's perspective as to how I feel these things should be done.

The CHAIRMAN: Let us say you were a desk officer searching about ultra-marathons and you were thinking about sponsoring a RacingThePlanet race, was it common knowledge on the internet about ultra-marathons that RacingThePlanet had problems in the Gobi Desert or in the Kimberley the year before?

Mr Hewat: No; it is actually quite hard to find information on those events. When I was researching for my submission, I had to dig fairly deep to try to find any evidence of what was going on and I had to go back through just some race forums basically to get anecdotal evidence of what had gone on. There is actually very little information out there. As I said before about removing the information regarding the mandatory gear list, there is actually no information at all on RacingThePlanet's website about their previous events. It is almost like they do not exist. If you go to any other race or running company, the history of the race is all there, the results are all there, the race reports are all there, the photo gallery is all there, whereas with RacingThePlanet it seems like "Wipe the slate clean and we will try again" almost.

[1.45 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: Between checkpoints, let us say two checkpoints, you are going through a difficult area, how do you communicate? How do you get communications of how the race is going between checkpoints in your races?

Mr Hewat: That is always a weak point, but we will have sweepers following the race and the sweepers will have a form of communication. They will have at the very least they will have phone

communication or a satellite phone communication or they will have an emergency position location beacon that they can actually communicate—it is a device called a SPOT device that will send communications similar to a position indicating radio beacon. They are at the tail end. So if there is an incident that occurs before them, then we are relying on the runners to communicate. As part of the briefing and part of the race rules it is mandatory for any runner who encounters another runner that has got a problem to provide support and try and pass on communications. Now, if they are in a situation that they cannot help—there is no phone reception where they are at—then they will either wait, depending on the severity of the incident, for someone else to come along. Then one person provides attention while the other person goes to a point where there is communication. But it is definitely an area that all races have a vulnerability in and some of it boils back down to the reliance of the runners, self-reliance, which is why the more difficult the race, generally speaking, and the more dangerous the race, the more requirement levels in terms of experience that we require the runners to have. To enter either of my two races, you have to have done a substantially difficult event or demonstrate an ability to have self-reliance—either have come from a bushwalking background—rogaining—or have done an ultra-marathon that is of sufficient difficulty to demonstrate to me they have enough experience and enough ability to look after themselves.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I am very interested in what you have just said because you have probably seen the evidence that Turia Pitt was only approached a couple of days before the race and she had never done anything of this nature. I am wondering if you can give us any comment on that and also whether or not you recruit people in local areas and offer them free entry to the race in any of your events.

Mr Hewat: Firstly, in terms of offering local people entry to the race, while I would love to have local people get involved in the race, they still go through the same entry processes as everybody else. They have to meet the entry criteria by proving to me that they have sufficient experience to be able to cope with this race. That holds true even with people who are volunteers who will help me out at a race. I will give them guaranteed entry the following year, but they still have to meet entry requirements. The races that I hold tend to sell out in a fairly short space of time because of the demand these days. So, I will put spaces specifically for them to reward them for helping out, but they still have to meet the entry criteria in terms of sufficient experience.

In terms of Turia's late entry into the race, I do not know what her experience was beforehand so I do not want to comment specifically on that, but I would be reluctant to let anybody into my race if I was not confident that they had sufficient experience. This was a race out in the bush, so I would have applied similar standards to what I apply in my race, so I would not have been approaching anybody unless they had the relevant experience.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Can I just follow up just on one medical thing: do you have burn aids available in case people are burnt in your event, because that is one of the issues that has been raised with us?

Mr Hewat: Not to the level that would deal with the injuries that were sustained. I do not know any race that would. As I said in my submission, I have an advanced wilderness first-aid certificate, which involved seven-day full-time course training. So, it was designed for use in wilderness areas, my first aid training. I do not have anything that would be sufficient to deal with the kind of injuries that were sustained.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: How many competitors would you get in one of your races on average and do you advise them about wearing or not using iPods or MP3 players and things like that during a race?

Mr Hewat: I have a cap for Bogong2Hotham of 100 runners and a cap of 70 runners in the Great Ocean Walk. So similar to the field—RacingThePlanet was probably about half that. Wearing the iPods in the race, I do not have a specific policy on my website or my race guidelines, because it

has not been an issue to this point. It is becoming more common for races to incorporate a policy in terms of wearing them and the most common stance at the moment is to either outright ban them or to, which is happening in most road events and trail events, they take a softer option and saying, “We would prefer you to not wear them and, if you do, please make sure you remove them at any road crossings or when you come into any checkpoints, so that you can be communicated with.”

The CHAIRMAN: Again, accidents or issues between checkpoints—does the sweeper go with the runners or do they try to be in front of the runners? What is the role of the sweeper?

Mr Hewat: Now, just before we go to that I want to make a point about something I read in one of the submissions too. I think it was Lon Croot stated how he was sweeping from checkpoint 1 to 2 and he was picked up so he could be driven to checkpoint 2 to go out and re-mark the course and they left the other sweeper on her own and did not mention what level of communication she had with her, but I was quite alarmed at the fact that they would do that because that leaves them in a very vulnerable position if they do come across an incident because they have no backup or support.

I always have two sweepers and they are always experienced ultra-marathoners. They will carry with them basic first-aid kit, basic food, extra clothing, extra food and hydration and communication. They will run, or walk most often is the case, just behind the last runner so that they are not actually pressuring that runner. So, they stay in contact and know if there is a problem. If that last runner is actually falling behind the cut-off in terms of they are not going to meet the next cut-off, the sweepers will walk with them and help them to the checkpoint where they will be removed from the course. Ideally, sweepers are kept in close communication behind the runners. They never get in front of the last runner. All the runners will have a ribbon on their pack and if they have to leave the track to go to the toilet, they will leave their pack in the middle of track so the sweeper knows that they are there so they do not go past them, because it is an important part of the process to make sure that we are always coming through behind them and accounting for their presence.

The CHAIRMAN: Just on the communication, in your races are all checkpoints manned with communications at the start of the race? Communications options for the competitors in areas of poor reception—do you have flares or EPIRBs and other locational devices?

Mr Hewat: No flares. EPIRBs are optional and I do not mandate them. I know of one race in Australia that actually provides EPIRBs as part of their gear. They source them and provide each runner with one. It is not something that I have needed at this point. The Bogong2Hotham race, as I said, I am very well covered with radio communications and the checkpoints between the radio communications are quite relatively close together by ultra-marathon standards, so I am quite comfortable with that. What was the other part of your question, sorry?

The CHAIRMAN: The communication at each checkpoint—do you have those at the start of the race?

Mr Hewat: Given the length of time that the races run for, not all the checkpoints will be set up when the race starts. For the Bogong2Hotham race there is always a command communication centre for the radio operators that is set up at the start and they relay or they can communicate across the whole course from the start. Again, given the length of time the race runs over, the last couple of checkpoints may not be set up until towards later in the day, but I will have an overview of the communications from the start.

The CHAIRMAN: You had to cancel a race a couple of years ago—this year.

Mr Hewat: That was this January. That was the Bogong2Hotham race and that was the first time in 28 years that it had actually been cancelled during the race. It had been cancelled twice previously because of bushfires, but this year I had to make the call during the race. It is an alpine environment and the weather conditions can change quite rapidly, which is part of the reason why we rely so heavily on the radio operators. At the start, we monitored the weather conditions in the lead up to

the race and determined the safety of the race. There was nothing to indicate that it was going to be anywhere near the conditions that we experienced. The temperatures were predicted to be in the mid-teens, about 14 to 16 degrees, on the mountains, which is quite mild for the mountains. It is a summer race, so it can actually get quite hot there, but the weather was predicted to be some showers, but it was still going to be quite a reasonable ambient temperature. There was nothing to indicate that it was going to be a problem. There were winds forecast, but what eventuated was we had wind gusts up to 140 kilometres an hour that came in on top of the mountains, which creates risk of trees falling.

So, what happens is I start the race and I go to the mid-point of the race and then I go to the end point of the race, which is driving around two mountain ranges basically. When I got to the mid-point of the race, I was up behind Falls Creek, which is up in the Victorian mountains, and I was then exposed to the full weather conditions that had developed. So, it was quite clear to me that it was quite dangerous, so I spoke to the radio communicators who were on the end point of the race, which was the next main mountain range. They said it was as bad, if not worse, over where they were. So, I was going to confer with the local ranger who was on duty on the day and was coming to the checkpoint, but I decided there was no need to convene with him. It was quite clearly a dangerous situation and I made the call to abandon the race at that point.

There really is no easy access to remove the runners until they get to that point and the race had been already going for several hours by that stage. So, I decided the best and safest way was to just stop the runners once they got to that point rather than try to remove them from the course where they were. I used the extensive radio communications to pass that message back down the line so all the runners as they were going through were warned that was the case. So they all knew in advance. I organised for transportation. We set up emergency shelters at that point, at the abandonment point, to facilitate shelters for the runners as they came in and to coordinate their evacuation. I organised as many crew cars as possible to take them off the mountain as they arrived and organised for the local bus company to come and collect as many runners as we could and remove them.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Can I just ask whether you have sponsorship at all; and, if so, what for either of your events, and whether you have got any relationship or dealings with Tourism Victoria or a similar body?

Mr Hewat: In terms of sponsorship, I have had some minimal sponsorship in the past. For example, for the Great Ocean Walk last year I had a sock company provide me with a pair of socks for every runner. As a result of that I put their name on the website and all the documentation included that. On the banners their logo would have been shown. There were a couple of other sponsors that provide some spot prizes. I have a wine company that provides a bottle of wine for the winners and a few spot prizes. In terms of the involvement with Tourism Victoria, the 2010 Great Ocean Walk—the promotion around the race in terms of the media releases saying the race was on and they provided every runner with a little souvenir backpack and just the literature on the parks basically. So, it was fairly minimal. But there has been no monetary contribution. This has purely been a goodwill thing in terms of I get support and they get promotion, basically.

[2.00 pm]

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Has Tourism Victoria ever filmed parts of your race for use in their promotions at all?

Mr Hewat: No. The most it would have been would have been the marketing manager from Parks Victoria took some photos of the start of the race that year and put them on their websites.

The CHAIRMAN: In your submission you made a couple of comments in this area, and they are very interesting. In this case, Eventscorp Western Australia and Tourism WA gave some sponsorship and required to see the risk management plan and the insurance and whatnot. Like your comments on what is the role of a major sponsor, they gave the event some substantial sponsorship,

and it was supposed to be ongoing. What is the role of the sponsor versus the organiser, and who is really responsible for putting this thing together, in your view?

Mr Hewat: On the organiser, by far and away the lines of decision-making processes during the race have to be very clear, and the race director has to be not burdened by any pressure by any other outside contributors. Obviously, one of my concerns with RacingThePlanet was that they were possibly influenced by the fact that they had these outside influences in terms of sponsorship and the media coverage that was eventually supposed to eventuate from the race—that that may have contributed to the decision-making process. From my point of view, as a race director, I would not entertain any outside influences in terms of the decision-making processes and in terms of the likes of autonomy for the running of the race, and I have concerns that that has possibly been the case in the Kimberley race.

The CHAIRMAN: Any other issues you want to bring up?

Mr Hewat: I just would like to point out that just while I was planning for presenting today to you, there have been many races that have been cancelled or abandoned internationally at very short notice as a result of extenuating circumstances, more often than not fires, and some have been because of floods. But races like the Western States 100, which is the original and the oldest 100-mile trail race in the world, in 2008 it was cancelled a couple of days before because there were bushfires in the region and they saw it as a danger to the runners and the volunteers and the organisers. In 2002, the Hardrock 100, which is considered to be one of the toughest 100-mile races in the world, was cancelled because there were forest fires in the region. Badwater, which is the one that goes through Death Valley, is actually a road race, but it is one of the biggest ultra-marathons in the States over 150 miles through the desert. They actually had floods one year, and they actually planned to re-route the race as the race was in progress because they realised that there were dangers, so they were going to actually change the course to ensure the runners' safety. So there are fairly significant precedents that people do actually—organisers do recognise the risks and will cancel races if they think there are dangers there.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay. One piece of information we got is that on the second checkpoint, in the case of the 2011 Ultramarathon in the Kimberley, the organisers were told that there is a fire coming your way and it will be there in about two hours; right? Some of the people were coming to, and some of the people were, I think—this is my memory—at checkpoint 2. They were not sure what direction it was coming from, I believe; I think that is the case. What would you have done? What decision rules do you think should have been put in place, because the key issue is what decision rules you have. In risk management, you identify the risk, but what do you do about it when you make these decisions?

Mr Hewat: Okay. Not being familiar with their risk plan, in my risk plan I have evacuation points. With the Great Ocean Walk, the one that I provided you with, it actually has all the points along the course that we can evacuate runners from and their access points. I had communications, as I said, from checkpoint to checkpoint to checkpoint. What I would have done if I was in that situation, if I was the race director and was made aware at that time that they were the circumstances that they were faced with, my first point of call would have been to cancel the race. I would expect to know where all the runners are relative between checkpoints at very short notice. Given the communications that I would rely on, I would want to know where all the runners are, and then I would be instigating how I am going to get them out of there or how I am going to remove them from the course. Obviously, you deal with the ones that you can immediately, which are the ones that you can actually see that are around you, and then you rely on the ones at the next checkpoint to do the same thing, and then you have got to identify what runners are going to be in between and potentially exposed to any danger. If you do not know where the fire is, that makes it very difficult, in which case you rely on whatever communication you have got, and, obviously, they did not have a great deal. In this situation, I was surprised, when I was reading about this, that they did not

actually use the helicopter that was doing the filming to actually go and have a look to see what was going on. From what I understand, that helicopter left and followed the lead runners and continued the filming, which I thought was bizarre. They were given this information and instead of actually dealing with the potential risk, they still continued with business as usual, the helicopter, the pilot and the runners. What I would have been doing was saying, "Okay; we've got a fire coming. The race stops. Everybody who is at a checkpoint stays at the checkpoint until they can be safely evacuated, and then we've got to deal with anybody in between." If you have got a helicopter, as they did have at their disposal, I would have been identifying where the runners were and then work out access points for—and I gather a fair bit of this course was on four-wheel-drive road. I would have been sourcing access to get these people out. For example, in the Bogong2Hotham we had to cancel, we had some runners that were getting hypothermia. Actually, one of the runners was a runner in the Kimberley race. She was being kept at one of the checkpoints. There was a hut there so she could be provided with shelter until we got a four-wheel drive to go in there and evacuate them. I got a four-wheel drive and keys to a locked gate so they could go in and evacuate them. It was a much smaller situation, but given what they were faced with, you have to just break it down and deal with each checkpoint and then the people in between. I was quite concerned, reading through the submissions just on that, that even despite they were dealing with the issue with Kate and Turia, when the race was actually abandoned, there still did not seem to be any specific process for accounting for where the other runners were. They seemed to be making their own way back in, and they were relying on volunteers to go and find them or to collect them. There did not seem to be any systematic process put in place in terms of evacuating those that were still out there, even once they had cancelled the race.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay. I will read a closing statement. Again, thanks very much for your evidence. It has been very, very helpful. We do not have any questions to give to you. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Please make these corrections and return the transcript within 10 working days of the date of the covering letter. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be introduced via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on a particular point, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of the evidence. Again, thanks very much. It has been very helpful.

Mr Hewat: No worries. Thank you for the opportunity.

Hearing concluded at 2.09 pm
