

**ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY
STANDING COMMITTEE**

INQUIRY INTO 2011 KIMBERLEY ULTRAMARATHON EVENT

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
THURSDAY, 10 MAY 2012**

SESSION TWO

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 2.59 pm**HALL, MR EVAN****Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Council WA, examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: Before we commence, I ask those in the public gallery again to refrain from using audio recording devices as they might interfere with Hansard, and also switch off your phones.

Mr Hall, thanks for appearing before the committee today. 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. Before we commence, there are a number of procedural questions I need you to answer. Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

Mr Hall: Yes, I have.

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

Mr Hall: Yes, I do.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read an information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

Mr Hall: It was a couple of days ago, but yes.

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

Mr Hall: No, I do not.

The CHAIRMAN: The committee has received your submission. Thanks very much for it. Do you propose any amendments to your submission at this time?

Mr Hall: No, no amendments.

The CHAIRMAN: Before we get into questions, do you wish to make a brief opening statement addressing the terms of reference?

Mr Hall: Yes. I would just like to talk to the submission, if I may; and thanks very much to the committee for the opportunity to make that submission and to appear before you. I will just let you know first of all that Tourism Council Western Australia is a not-for-profit membership organisation that represents tourism businesses, tourism sectors and tourism regions. One of the main reasons why we exist is to ensure the development of quality visitor experiences for people travelling to and within the state, and we also see we have a role in protecting the state’s reputation as a tourism destination. We are very strong supporters of the role of the government in tourism marketing to promote Western Australia as a destination for tourism, using both marketing and events to achieve that objective.

In terms of our submission, I do not have any particular knowledge about the specific event regarding the ultra-marathon in the Kimberley. What I did really want to go to was the issues of the minimum standards that should be applied for any tourism activity—events, tours or other activities that are endorsed by the government through funding or marketing, or through approval to operate on crown land. This issue has come up before, and I would just like to take the committee to, I guess, the previous inquiry, which I think was in 2005, 2006, when, following a series of deaths, unfortunately, of visitors in national parks in the north of the state, a task force was established for

visitor safety, which led to a review and some subsequent recommendations. At the heart of those recommendations was the recommendation to establish adventure activity standards, which are safety standards for high-risk outdoors events. They are industry standards established by a group called Outdoors WA, but were funded and developed with the assistance of the Department of Sport and Recreation. That more or less set some standards, or updated standards for the first time for industry standards for outdoor events. The second main recommendation effectively was to incorporate those standards into a program that we at the Tourism Council run, which is the Australian tourism accreditation program, which sets minimum standards for safety, but in fact for a whole range of criteria—some 14 criteria—ranging from environmental management to customer service, customer protection, insurance, risk management, and so on and so forth. So they are the standards that we have been rolling out to industry, and obviously on a voluntary basis, for them to uptake to improve the quality of tourism experiences and to protect the state's reputation as a tourism destination.

Coming out of that also, and eventually over a period of time, Tourism Western Australia and the Department of Environment and Conservation provided more or less incentives for people to take up the accreditation, and we have now reached the point where the policy of Tourism Western Australia and the Department of Environment and Conservation largely requires most tourism operations to be accredited, but not all tourism operations to be accredited, and one of the glaring exceptions is in fact events.

The other thing I would say, of course, is this is a policy that simply applies at Tourism WA and at DEC, and is not applied by any other government agency in terms of other forms of land or anything else that might be funded, as far as I am aware. So what we are looking at, I think, and what we would certainly like to recommend, is that tourism accreditation, including the adventure activity standards, should be more or less a minimum standard for all tourism activities, be they an event or anything else that is endorsed by the government through funding, be it sponsorship or other forms of funding; through marketing, for example, by being listed on westernaustralia.com; or through endorsement by way of licence or approval to operate on crown land.

I would like to stress, though, that I am not sure that this would be sufficient for what might be considered high-risk activity standards. I think there should be a minimum that the state government should have to assure itself that it is not in fact promoting a tour, a product or an event that is in fact going to be well below customer expectations or damage our state reputation. But I think there is a safety issue for more adventurous outdoor activities. We have a beautiful landscape, but obviously a very dangerous landscape at times in Western Australia, and that should be taken into account. So we think in those situations it is critical that there is not only a risk management plan—and certainly our accreditation program would require that a risk management plan is sighted and that they declare that that risk management plan meets the adventure activity standards, but we would not go and have a look at that risk management plan and say, “Well, in this situation we think it would not be sufficient for fire and so on. Let's take it to another level that clearly needs to be looked into”, and I think in that case it should be appropriate that the event manager does get an independent audit of the quality of the risk management plan, rather than merely the existence of a risk management plan, and that should, obviously, I think, be provided to Tourism Western Australia as part of that process of assessing whether or not an event should be funded.

So I think that probably covers the main content—I am sorry I have rambled on for too long—going to the heart of the submission. But what I really did want to present today was an industry view on what we think is an appropriate minimum standard to protect the industry and our tourism economy and for the role of government, as well as what might be an appropriate standard in the case of adventurous activities.

The CHAIRMAN: The Tourism Council did not have any role with the ultra-marathon, did it?

Mr Hall: No.

The CHAIRMAN: You do not sit on the board of Tourism WA?

Mr Hall: No, no. We are a completely independent body/membership organisation. I mean, obviously we do have a working relationship with Tourism Western Australia, but no.

The CHAIRMAN: Of course. This tourism quality control issue, is that a national program or is it one that your Tourism Council has come up with?

Mr Hall: There are a couple of aspects and, unfortunately, it is a little complicated. But there is a national standard now called T-Qual. It is really more of a consumer mark for advertising by Tourism Australia, and that has really only just been recently established. To get that mark, which, as I say, a tour might have, you have to be a member of an accreditation program that meets that national standard. We are not the only accreditation program that meets that national standard, but I would say that that national standard largely revolves around consumer protection standards: do you have adequate insurance? You need to have customer service standards, a customer service procedure, a complaint handling mechanism. It is nowhere near as in depth as our accreditation standard. So it is a minimum standard that is required for an accreditation program to be able to carry that consumer mark. For example, the AAA accommodation star rating system meets that T-Qual mark but, of course, does not cover things like risk management for events. So there is that national standard. The adventure activity standards are not covered by that national T-Qual standard, for example, but are fairly common practice, to my understanding, across all the states. There are some variations, I think, from state to state, and I think ours is the only accreditation system that, for example, incorporates the adventure activity standards, and, to the best of my knowledge, ours is the only accreditation system that can, and does, cover events. Most of them are very sector specific. Ecotourism for accommodation or caravan and camping grounds is very sector specific, whereas the Australian tourism accreditation program is very much designed to be a program for every single tourism operation, be it retail or a tour or transport.

The CHAIRMAN: Your accreditation process applies to tour guides and tour operators—right—but not events?

Mr Hall: Our program does apply to events, and we have quite a number—well, about 14, 15 events that have been accredited by us. So we do this independently of Tourism Western Australia or any government agency because it is a good thing to do for the industry. The question really arises: what is the relationship when government is endorsing something in some way? The current Tourism Western Australia policy does require a tour operator, an accommodation provider, a transport operator to be accredited if it is going to be marketed by Tourism Western Australia—for example, being on the website or going on a trade mission to China. An event is not required to be accredited to be marketed. So an event can be on westernaustralia.com, for example, listed as an event; it is not currently required to be accredited. And, certainly, sponsoring an event, as in funding an event, is not required to be accredited. These are two different functions that Tourism Western Australia performs. An event can be marketed through Tourism Western Australia's marketing support functions without necessarily being funded or sponsored.

[3.10 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: When does an event become a tour, if it is a regular event and they are guiding people along a race?

Mr Hall: I think that is a very good question. I take the example of a four-wheel-drive tour that does a particular circuit on a regular basis. It would need to be accredited to be marketed by Tourism Western Australia. If the same thing was done on, say, an annual basis as a rally, my understanding is that it would not be required to be accredited. Similarly, if it was on DEC land, whether or not it was being marketed by Tourism Western Australia, it would be required to be licensed and therefore accredited; accreditation is a requirement for licensing. Again, if that tour was in the form of a rally that was held every year at the same time, you could get a two-month

licence from DEC that does not require accreditation. So you could be on crown land and have an event that is not marketed or sponsored, or you could be on private land, for example, and not require any government approval, but still be marketed and/or sponsored. I think part of the problem we are facing is that we certainly believe that there ought to be a minimum standard, and it really does not matter what crown land you are on or whether or not you are licensed by the Department of Transport to have an off-road tourism vehicle, or whether or not you are simply marketed or getting funding for sponsorship. It is too fine a line, really, about what sort of tourism activity is in or out, and I really think there does not need to be a line between that which is marketed and that which is funded directly in the form of sponsorship.

The CHAIRMAN: Is your burden of accreditation very high?

Mr Hall: It is broad. I would describe it as primarily a paper audit. The first time a business gets accredited by us, it takes a while, depending on the business and how good their existing procedures are. We see it very much as a sort of product improvement process insofar as our standard might be here; they might go through and be here, and we help them with their standard to be there, so they might be very good on consumer protection and dealing with booking and distribution systems, but need to address issues like sewerage, or they do not have complaints mechanism in hand and so on. So it is broad, and for the first time we require them to upload documents, so we do not just say, “Do you have a risk management plan? Yes, okay, that is fine.” We require them to upload it on an online system, and the first time they get accredited we do a site visit as well, and inspect some of those documents, and we obviously have a look at the business. Sometimes it can be very, very simple stuff; we see that they have an insurance form, we see that it is a standard insurance form and we check: “Okay, you’re doing some skydiving—are you sure it’s covered by your insurance form?” Those sorts of questions we will ask while we are going through that —

The CHAIRMAN: Do you check and look at the insurance?

Mr Hall: We do. I have to say, insurance is, in particular, one of the areas that we cover very closely. It is obviously a core concern for consumers. Essentially, though, I want to say that it is a tick-a-box process: “Do you have this?” or “Make some comments about how you meet this standard”, upload any relevant documents and we then get them to tick a box. “Is your tour covered by an adventure activity standard—yes, no; do you apply the adventure activity standard—yes, no”. They then sign the declaration and we do the inspections on the first visit and come back once every two to three years for another site visit for confirmation. Every other year, between a site visits, they are required to upload documents that might be out of date—update their current insurance, update current DEC licence, for example, and we make sure they are covered. When we notice problems, we do obviously talk to them, and a lot of these are small businesses and relatively small organisations, and we help them lift the standard, but I cannot sit here and say, “Yes, we have a look at the risk management plan and make a judgement call about whether or not it is good enough”. What we are mainly doing is giving quality assurance to a government body, to a consumer, to another distributor who might be selling on to a travel agent in Germany that yes, they do have a risk management plan; yes, they have an environmental management plan; yes, they have a customer service standard that they apply. The other thing we use for compliance is a complaints handling mechanism, so if we get a complaint from a consumer or anyone else who purchases a product, which could be a wholesaler or a travel agent, for example, who is packaging up a tour, so you could have an event, flights to the event, accommodation at the event, and a post-touring option after the event, piled up into one package. Obviously those suppliers appreciate the accreditation because they know they have good quality product that they are putting in the package without having to go and check everything themselves, and that gets on sold. If they make a complaint—as in, customers turn up and the rooms that we booked were not available, or a customer turns up and says that the room was terrible or whatever the case may be, or the tour guide was rude, or whatever it is—we get those complaints and then we go through a “please explain” process with the accredited business. If they satisfy us, that is fine; if not, we give them instructions that they have to

do this, that and the following to maintain their accreditation standard, and if they do not do that, we will strike them off the accreditation.

The CHAIRMAN: You looked at this race. How could you apply your accreditation process to the RacingThePlanet race, recognising that was planned to be held over three years, at least?

Mr Hall: I am hesitant to make a comment because I do not really know anything about the ultra-marathon authority, apart from what I have read in the media reports. What I would say, though—I think it is in the submission—the accreditation is basically 14 key areas that we seek assurance on, broken down into a series of questions which are well and truly attributable to an event, and we have certainly developed expertise in how to apply them to an event. So, for example, when there is a human resource management component, we look at the job duty descriptions and so on and so forth and make sure that staff are well managed, but we have to make sure, with an event—we are looking for things like volunteers' insurance rather than just workers' compensation insurance, because a lot of events are run by volunteers. Have they taken that into account with their evacuation plan? Can they be assured that there is someone here who is a volunteer? Obviously, as we apply these standards, we look at how they are applied in the individual business or operation, but there is a skill and an art to it as well, and the more you do, the better at it you become, in terms of identifying issues. But as I say, we mainly do it to improve the quality of the product, not to say, "We really think you should do this to meet the highest standard," and we try to improve the quality of the product through that process.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: In doing your accreditation, do you require the organisations that are seeking accreditation to provide you original information, original documentation, and do you examine that in some way? Taking the insurance as an example, you look at it to make sure you are being given a document that is, in fact, a workers' compensation insurance certificate, but it is, in fact, a public liability insurance certificate. You look at those sorts of things.

Mr Hall: We certainly sight it; we require them to upload it, so we actually have copies on the system. It is largely run through an online system. The first time we accredit, and then when we come back for the subsequent visits, we will sight the documents as well. That is the minimum standard; we have learnt by experience that there are things for us to look for, which we do look for, but largely it is sighting; it is not sitting there and saying, "This is a good enough environmental management strategy," but if for example it does not mention sewerage, and we know it is an accommodation premises, we know to say, "Well, what are you doing about your sewerage, if this is a safari camp in a national park?" It is not just a tick-a-box process, but the only thing I can give you absolute assurance on is that which they do tick the box on, if that makes sense. But we keep an eye out and see basically ways that we can improve them, or what we have learnt from experience that are gaps, under insurance, that they might not have thought through fully when taking out the insurance. They might have taken out a standard tourism product, and we will say, "Actually, in this case, we've learnt from experience that abseiling's not covered by this".

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The point here is that you are not just relying on them telling you something.

Mr Hall: No, they make a declaration; they have to sign the declaration, upload the document and tick the box, and then we go and sight all the paperwork, but it is nonetheless a paper audit; it is not an assessment of how good the plan is.

The CHAIRMAN: On insurance, do you get the cover note plus the schedule that is involved with the insurance?

Mr Hall: I will have to take that question on notice as to the level of detail that we go through.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Also on insurance, is overseas insurance acceptable or not?

Mr Hall: Again, I will have to take that question on notice.

The CHAIRMAN: Overseas insurance or APRA approved insurance, or non APRA approved.

Mr Hall: Okay.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: How would an international company that comes in fit in with your accreditation scheme?

Mr Hall: I think there are some operational issues around events which obviously are not limited to our accreditation scheme or for any other assessment that you are doing. I personally think the best way to handle this is, if you flag upfront that being accredited is a selection criteria for going into the assessment process, you then get the accreditation done before they sit down and get assessed. I think this absolutely should be done for the regional events scheme. Certainly, once you go past the regional events scheme, you are talking about sums of money where it really is not at all unreasonable to require an applicant to be accredited.

[3.20 pm]

At most, accreditation is around \$1 500 for the largest business. We do not think that is an exceptional requirement. If they are overseas, we can handle the uploading of the material, the documents, on the online system. The site inspection component would be a challenge. I should bear in mind though that site inspection, for example, if we have a large business that has a chain of caravan parks or hotels, it is not like we are inspecting every hotel or caravan park; we will go to the head office and say, "Have you got the insurance form?" and so on and so forth, if that is where they keep the documentation that is being accredited. It would simply be a matter that that particular component will obviously need to be done before accreditation can be given. In that case they will come out here and they will do it or they will have a representative that we will need to speak to. It is the sort of question that I do not think we have dealt with in the past for an international organisation that is out of the country. I would certainly be happy to sit down with industry and with Tourism WA, for example, and say, "What is the best process to apply this standard in this situation?" It is the nature of the scheme. You know, I have hamburger stands in high visitation areas that are accredited; people sell pearls. It really is quite an applicable scheme to everything. It gets down to the standard you are trying to assure for the visitor, the tourist, and then we work backwards; how does that apply to this business and how do we get there? Our ambition is not to knock people out, but to make sure they meet the standard, if that makes sense. If it becomes an onerous process and you have to go and visit them and all that sort of stuff, it has cost implications for us, which I do not know the answer to. The easiest way to do it is they do not get to apply for government funding unless they have met the criteria, and in that way we can be certain in advance that at least those minimum standards will be met, before we even get into the assessment process.

The CHAIRMAN: Clearly you would have had discussions with Tourism WA along the lines of using your accreditation process as mandatory for all events?

Mr Hall: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: What did they say?

Mr Hall: We have raised it a couple of times. It would be fair to say we have always focussed on tourism product and accommodation, as have they. I think everyone, particularly after the deaths in the far north, focused on tourism product in national parks and getting that through. I think a not unexpected outcome of that is where the accreditation process and the government policy was saying, "You must be accredited", ended up being focussed on national parks and tourism products. We have been inquiring into events for a while, particularly when the royalties for regions \$10 million per annum was added; we thought that clearly there was going to be an expansion of the number of events coming through. We raised it with them at that stage. We showed them more or less the same document I provided you, the same schedule, about how the standard would be applied. I think we got caught up a little bit with the change of directors looking after Eventscorp. And we have recently raised it in the past, and I would not say I have a firm answer one way or

another; it has been an item for discussion. I have raised it recently with the tourism minister who encouraged me to come here and present it to you.

The CHAIRMAN: Have any major risky events gone through your accreditation process like Red Bull or others? I saw the list here, including the Ord Valley muster.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: The Gascoyne dash would be an interesting one.

Mr Hall: These are the ones that we have done. Can I put it to you this way: obviously you are going to focus on events. What we would try to encourage you to think about is all tourism experiences and not just events, and not just events that are sponsored by Tourism Western Australia. There are risks inherent in any four-wheel drive tour operation that goes on in this state. When you get out in the outdoors and get people out of their normal areas, there are risks involved. We have scuba diving dive shop operations and skydiving operations that are already accredited by us. There are some things you need to look for with events. What is the governance structure? It could just be a local organising committee. There might not be a corporate body that is responsible for it. These are the sorts of things you need to look out for. It could be highly reliant on volunteers. There are areas of perhaps greater risk that need to be looked at. I would actually go to what is the activity and whether or not it is an event that occurs annually, biannually or it is a one-off or it occurs every weekend on an organised tour. It is the activity you have to look for. A very good place to start is the adventure activity standards, which are developed. I did notice from having a look at the list that there was nothing specific for a foot race. Therefore, I certainly would recommend that an adventure activity standard was developed for foot races, be it a marathon or orienteering challenge or something like that. Looking at it closely, I would have thought ocean swimming might need an adventure activity standard. That has diving and snorkelling, but not swimming. Perhaps Outdoors WA—we would certainly be prepared to get involved—and the Department of Sport and Recreation should review all the adventure activity standards and say, “Is there something we might need to add in in the situation where this is being conducted as an event as opposed to a regular activity?” The best way to answer your question is that we have high-risk activities that have been accredited for many, many years and we do not see a huge difference, just because it happens once a year as opposed to every weekend as an organised tour.

The CHAIRMAN: If I were an event and I had come to you and went through your process, let us say a foot race through the Kimberley, would you have told me to go around and talk to all the government bodies that might interact with me, like FESA, St John Ambulance, local shire, SES, the police?

Mr Hall: We do very much get into detail. I am sorry, I really do not want to answer questions for which I do not know the straight answer. I will need to talk to the staff and take it on notice. We do go through very specific things. We know what licences to look for. At the end of the day, we are asking them to declare to us that they have been to all the appropriate government agencies. Certainly there is a section—section 2, I think— about licences and permits where we say to them, “Do you have every licence and permit that you need?” They say, “Yes.” We also know from experience that there are some they possibly do not realise they need. We have learnt from experience, because when we go out there and ask, “Have you checked for such-and-such a licence?” the answer is “No, I didn’t know I needed to get that.” That is what comes from experience. We go out and visit 300 businesses each year. We sit down with a lot of these mum-and-dad operations or it could be a skydiving tour or a scuba diving thing. We sit down and say, “Are you aware of this?” This is where you pick up areas, or we get customer complaints coming through and we start to notice a trend and we start to raise this issue with it. If we know there is an issue out there, we will obviously address it while we are doing the accreditation. But, at the end of the day, the only thing I can assure you of is that they have signed something that says, and declared, “Yes, I have every licence and permit that I am required from every local, state and federal authority.”

The CHAIRMAN: What timing would you expect this accreditation to take place? Is it significantly before the event or before the money?

Mr Hall: I think that is an operational matter that I probably need to think through in more detail about how to get there. Part of it goes to what events Tourism WA should be involved in anyway. I would say this: one-off events, to my mind, are typically not the best things to be getting involved in, largely because they have fairly limited marketing value. If your event is designed to attract visitors to the state, including in the case of the ultra-marathon, for the purpose of Tourism WA the sponsorship was more designed to gather publicity, which is a legitimate purpose. But most events are designed to attract visitors to the state. Your ideal event is one that is owned by the state, not somebody else, and that sits within an events calendar that you predictably market year in year out so that people over time know that there is this good event. Do they turn up to the first one? No, they might not even have heard of it. If it is a one-off event you do not get as much out of it. If you have a calendar of events, it is an event that cannot be taken away—unlike Red Bull, a V8 car race or a Grand Prix. If you have these events that are owned by somebody else, then they can always be taken away from you. The more you fund them and market them and the more successful they are, the more value they are and the more you have to pay to keep them. Your best form of event is one that we own that inherently markets the destination, because the nature of event shows off the destination; it cannot be taken away from that destination and it occurs at the same time each and every year so consumers come to think, “Yes, I will go to Canberra for Floriade.” That is a classic, good event; everyone has heard about it and the reason why they have heard about it is they have run the same event since I do not know when!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Since 1988.

[3.30 pm]

Mr Hall: There you go. It has been going for a very long time. People get to hear about it and they know it is on. We would certainly like to see recurring events being accredited. Those recurring events should be the sorts of events that are marketed by Tourism WA and the sorts of events that are looking at sponsorship arrangements with Tourism WA. If you get into a one-off event and accreditation has to be done by a certain time, yes, we are getting into some operational issues which I think we should sit down with Tourism WA to discuss. We think the first policy position should be that any event that is endorsed, supported, funded, marketed and approved by the state ought to reach a minimum standard because essentially you are saying it is a good thing to do. You need to ask whether it is a good thing to do. Can I at least be assured that there is a customer service standard there? This obviously gets more difficult with a one-off event but we will work through it.

The CHAIRMAN: You have done accreditation for the Ord Valley Muster and the Kimberley Moon Experience. Can you provide Tim with some information on that?

Mr Hall: If I can, I certainly will.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I do not mean to say that that is not a good one but the Gascoyne Dash is probably more applicable. I am assuming that the Kimberley Moon Experience is just the concert.

Mr Hall: You are taking me to a certain level of detail. I am not even 100 per cent sure whether we have confidentiality arrangements signed. If there is any particular example that the committee would like to see and I am able to do so, I am more than happy to make that available.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay. I want an example of a risky event that goes through an accreditation process.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: The Ord Valley Muster is not a mustering thing; it is just the title of it.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Mr Hall, I just want to draw your attention to page 14 of your submission. I understand this is an extract from your checklist—“Section Nine: Risk Management”.

Mr Hall: This is something that we initially put together for Tourism WA. Here is the standard accreditation and here is how we would apply it in an events situation.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I am just clarifying that that is your actual —

Mr Hall: Pretty much.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Under “Emergency & Evacuation Policy”, the third dot point states —

- site plan, with access points for emergency services, evacuation exits and meeting areas

Is that clearly contemplated by your criteria?

Mr Hall: Yes.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Below that, the next area for consideration is “Emergency Contact Numbers”. The fourth dot point states —

- who else needs to be contacted in an emergency such as: the family of anyone involved in a serious incident, employees, volunteers, contractors, etc., ...

Again, is that the sort of thing you are contemplating in your checklist?

Mr Hall: Absolutely. I just want to be clear on this point though that we are largely asking, “Do you have procedures to do this? Give us paper copies of that or upload it on the online system and we will go and check it.” We are not checking the emergency contact number for every participant. We are not going to that level. We are checking processes.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I am making it clear in my own mind that these are the sorts of things that your organisation, which is an industry peak body that people subscribe to, is looking at in making a decision about whether you give those events a tick and they get to use your symbol or whatever.

Mr Hall: Yes.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: How many employees do you have in the organisation?

Mr Hall: I have two.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Is it entirely paid for by subscriptions from your members?

Mr Hall: Not even that. We are moving to a situation in which hopefully we will be breaking even this year. As an organisation, we work on a not-for-profit basis. We very much see the accreditation program as one of the things that we do for industry to raise the standards, to protect consumers and therefore protect the industry and protect the state’s reputation. We keep it as low cost as possible. Quite often with the accreditation program, for example, we have developed areas with the assistance of the state or, for that matter, the federal government because at this stage, in terms of the dollars, I would be lucky if I scrape in without making a loss on the accreditation program this year. Our main intention is to keep it as cheap as possible so a mum and dad bed-and-breakfast operator or a small business now doing a four-wheel drive tour finds this an accessible and affordable system, which means we visit every part of the state.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Despite those restrictions, are you still able to contemplate all those issues in your process?

Mr Hall: Yes, again, largely by relying on asking, “Do you have procedures?” “Yes, I follow the procedure.”

The CHAIRMAN: If I was a large one but not here all the time, I could always hire someone to do this for me on my behalf to you?

Mr Hall: Indeed, as long as the person making the declaration has the authority to do so.

The CHAIRMAN: Are there plenty of people around who could help new entrants?

Mr Hall: Yes, in the past consultants have assisted businesses become accredited, absolutely.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Has the Tourism Council considered the question of reputational damage of the outcome of the Kimberley Ultramarathon?

Mr Hall: I thought you might ask me about that. I have to be honest and say that I do not think there has been but our concern is that we really should not be in this situation. Obviously, the whole point of sponsorship is to improve the destination's reputation. We do monitor this through useful tools such as Google Earth, though I would not say it is a sophisticated means of monitoring. We keep an eye on what is being said in the international and east coast media about tourism in Western Australia. We certainly monitor that. There has been international media about it and there has been some commentary. I would make this comment. In the time that I have been in the state, which is almost a year now, and in this role, two things have come up. One was obviously the Kimberley Ultramarathon event and the other one was the four-wheel drive bus that rolled over in the dunes at Lancelin. Without a doubt, that one caused us reputational damage. I think it was very much picked up in the South-East Asian press. There was a fair bit of discussion about it. It was a Singaporean tour group. That got talked about and then the story just kept going on and on. At one stage there were reports of people's passports having been taken, all of which was not true, but this media stuff was going on and you absolutely lose control of it and it is just out there. I think that one did do us reputational damage. Has this damaged the reputation of the Kimberley? The best guess from the media that I have seen is no. I cannot give you a definitive answer without monitoring the brand of the Kimberley overseas and so on. The objective of sponsoring the event was not achieved. That was to improve the reputation, and I do not think that could be achieved at all. I think it is a good example of why we need the minimum standards because neither of those incidents—be it the four-wheel drive sand dune tour or the Kimberley Ultramarathon—was accredited and neither was required to be accredited.

The CHAIRMAN: One of the big issues we face with a tourism event is that it might be sponsored by Tourism WA and it might not be.

Mr Hall: Correct.

The CHAIRMAN: But we want to avoid dangers and risks. Who is best placed to ensure that the party putting on an event goes through the proper processes to ensure that the organisation is organised well from a consumer point and also safety? As you say, it could be DEC or a range of agencies participating in some fashion but they might be operating in silos. What is the best way to make sure that these happen?

Mr Hall: The only way that I am aware of is the process that asks questions such as: do you have your licences from everybody? Do you cover environment? Do you cover your relations with the local Indigenous community? Do you have appropriate standards for your staff? Do you have insurance? I think our accreditation program is the only point where that is done across the breadth of that. You can rely on government agencies to ask what they need to ask for their processes and no more. Maybe someone out there will do the right thing and say, "I think you need to go to DEC about this" but they are not required to and they do not do it on a regular basis.

Can I get to what I think might be the heart of your question, which is, who is responsible for this? Overwhelmingly, this is the owner and the operator of the event or the tourism product. It is their job, it is their customer and we are very much of the opinion that industry must be responsible for the customers, and this is where the responsibility lies.

[3.40 pm]

I think the question that lies when you have government endorsement in some way is: I do not take on responsibility for the customer or the participant or the visitor or the tourist, or whatever they are in that situation. That is clearly the organiser of the event, the owner of the safari camp or, the four-wheel-drive tour operator. But when you involve the government in saying, "Yes, you can use our land", or, "Yes, you can be on our website", or, "Yes, you can get sponsorship funding", there is an

onus that then comes on to say, “I am kind of recommending it; I am endorsing it. What have I done or what has the government done to assure itself of that?” So there is a risk. Certainly I spoke to some board members about this; there are a couple of different risk management scenarios that need to be looked at here. From my perspective, I am concerned about risk management for the interests of the industry and the destination, in that a terrible event or a bad customer experience can affect everybody else: “I had a terrible experience on a camel tour on a beach somewhere; I will write about it in a blog”, and everyone thinks it is a terrible experience, and then nobody goes to that beach and they do not stay there. That is my concern as an industry body. For the person who owns that product or owns the event, their risk management is about: how do I make sure that I deliver safety and so on to the customer? Because that is, without a doubt, their legal and ethical responsibility. For the state government it is: “Having put our name to this in some way, what is our responsibility to make sure that the objectives for doing so are achieved?” I would say that includes lot of what we find we are responsible for: destination, reputation, good value for taxpayers’ money, can this event backfire?—all this sort of stuff that really ought to be looked at. I would say—I am going about it in a roundabout way—that different stakeholders in the process have different things they are responsible for and different things they must do risk management assessments about. I know the onus here is going to be on safety for an event that is sponsored by Tourism WA. But I am just as concerned whether a big event that is advertised on the website that might be perfectly safe—a food and wine event or whatever—has a good plan to deal with what happens if it rains, or what happens if the touring act that you have funded to go out to a regional town cancels; do you have a policy in place to deal with that, to tell people before they turn up and so on and forth? Otherwise you are incurring reputational damage to the state and so on and so forth.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Mr Hall, I think you make a good point, that an event does not necessarily have to be sponsored; if it is on the Tourism WA website, then people are going to draw some kind of conclusion that it has some form of government approval. At the very least they are going to know that the government is aware of it and the government is promoting it via its website, even if there are no sponsorship dollars involved. It occurs to me that your checklist is a lot more comprehensive. It strikes me that perhaps is a better way of going, in that it flows on to your full accreditation process; that could be a better way of going than the contract process that Tourism WA does. And I note that it only has a contract when it sponsors an event; if there is no sponsorship, then there is no contract.

Mr Hall: Yes.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I am guessing that there is no contract with people who they merely put on their website and promote. I suppose what I would like is some advice from you as to how you think this is best handled in the future. We are looking at what occurred here, but we are also looking at making recommendations for the future, and one of the things that you said that interested me was, potentially, an independent audit of risk management. Because it occurs to me that what happened with the Kimberley Ultramarathon is that the contract was signed the day before in Kununurra, the risk management plan was sighted the day before in Kununurra, and it seems that at this stage Tourism WA just says, “Yes, we need to see these things”, but there is no actual proper checking. We had Ms Lamont say, “We don’t have the capacity to assess their risk management plan”, yet in your conversation you have said you could require an independent audit of a risk management plan —

Mr Hall: I would not say that we would require an independent audit.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: No, I did not say you would, but you said that that could be a requirement for some events.

Mr Hall: Absolutely; it could be a policy initiative that you might look at. Certainly I would make a recommendation that—to my mind there should be no separation between events and any other tourism activity, and there should be no separation between whether or not you sponsor it, market it

or in any way endorse it. There must be a minimum standard of quality assurance for the government, as well as for the customer, as well as for the industry. But I think also common sense tells you that certain adventurous activities—again, let us not just limit them to events—you might simply want to say, “Let’s not just leave it at where I leave it at. Have you got a risk management plan?—Yes. Have you uploaded it?—Yes. Have I seen it?—Yes. Have you assured me that it meets the adventure activity standards?—Yes.” But have I gone through and read it and envisaged this scenario? My staff out there are not doing that sort of stuff; it is paper audit, verification that exists. For anything covered by the adventure activity standards, I would have thought that at best it would be the person who is particularly singing out and saying, “I want event sponsorship money”; that Tourism WA say, “Well, yes, but one of the criteria in the contract is that if you are going to be given some money, you must provide us first with not only a copy of the risk management plan, but also a copy of an audit by someone who really does know what they are doing in a situation like this.” And saying, “Yes, we think this risk management plan is of sufficient quality, not just that it exists, that is sufficient for the situation.” That means that in one situation this might be a marine expert; in another one it might be a fire expert; it depends on your location, it depends on the event. We will not have the expertise and I do not imagine Tourism WA will have the expertise. But we should not get away from the fact either that this work should be done anyway by the event organiser or by the tourism product. So I do not think we are actually asking for anything that is particularly onerous, because this is their responsibility.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The concern is that we do not want to create so much red tape and make it so onerous that we do not get any events here at all.

Mr Hall: No, absolutely; that would be of great concern to us. But the onus of responsibility is on the event organiser, is on the person who owns the hotel, is on the person who operates the four-wheel-drive tour, and they have their adventure activity standards. They are the ones who should be applying them to their business, to their tour, to their event.

The CHAIRMAN: But part of the task would have been when you choose the people you fund or sponsor, you should have an assessment of their competence. In this case it was RacingThePlanet, but other times you choose Red Bull or round the world races and whatnot, and you should know the processes that those organisations have in place.

Mr Hall: You should assure yourself of them, I think would be —

The CHAIRMAN: I mean, Red Bull, you know they have done this thoroughly in a whole range of races, you see it. But do you not think that if you are going to sponsor them to the tune of \$900 000 over three years that you would go out there and do some due diligence before you actually entered into the discussion with them?

Mr Hall: I think the due diligence should be done—well, the first thing I will say is that for any event, absolutely, I think the accreditation should be a minimum standard. On top of that, for anything that you can reasonably say, “Look, there are some risks here”, your due diligence would be, “Yes I need to assure myself, over and above the fact that there is a risk management plan, of the quality of the risk management plan.” Whether or not one of your staff members is going out and doing that, as opposed to someone who is paying for someone who knows what they are doing to go and do that, I think, is a different matter. To be honest, I would not like to see the events budget chewed up paying for staff to be going out and doing risk management plans; it should be the responsibility of the person who owns the event to get that done.

The CHAIRMAN: That is right.

Mr Hall: And if the requirement now is that I need someone outside that event to sign it off who has got some expertise and present that to Tourism WA, then so be it. I certainly think that should be looked at for any of those activities that carry some risk, and I would say that the list is the adventure activity standards.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Could I just draw an analogy there? For the V8 Supercars the event owner is Avesco.

Mr Hall: Yes.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: But they need to be licensed by CAMS to run their event. That is a separate organisation with lots of years of experience, so that when Tourism WA sponsors the V8 event, they know that there is a separate process to ensure that the risks are looked at. So that is a good way of —

Mr Hall: Absolutely. You need some expertise, and sometimes that will be a government agency and sometimes that will be someone externally. We think the costs should be provided by those who are getting the benefit, which is the owner of the product or the event. If I can just go back to one of the values of the accreditation, because you are relying on this agency who licenses that with the experts in that, who gives you the minimum assurance on everything, you know, and I think that is where the accreditation comes in. But I do not want to oversell it and say that this is the rolled gold standard on risk management, on sewerage, or whatever it is. It is minimum standard on everything that you would want to assure yourself of.

[3:50 pm]

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: But I mean with events, for instance, if you are running a foot race, there are organisations that accredit foot races; if you are running a swimming event, there is an organisation that does that; if there is a yacht race, there is a federation for yacht-racing organisations; in motor sport there is CAMS—there is a whole range of groups. As a government you can say, “Well, I’ve got confidence because they’ve gone to this outside organisation, if it’s on my checklist.”

Mr Hall: That is right—a state government body that might have expertise in this particular matter, or I am going to an industry body. For example, Outdoors WA is the body that sets the industry standard for organised activities in the outdoors, such as abseiling, canyoning and so on. They have developed those standards. It is just one of the very many industry and government standards that need to be checked. The accreditation is a paper audit—all of them are checked. Again, there is some art in this. I am looking at this event. I am good at picking which events to sponsor and market, because that is my job as Eventscorp. I will have a mind for there being some risks associated with this particular thing, so we will require something of the applicant. Clearly, there is some expertise that does come in at this point. In terms of the assessment, the core role for Eventscorp has got to be, first and foremost, whether this is going to bring in additional revenue into the state, because this is my job, by bringing in visitors, or is it going to give me dollar-for-dollar the cheapest kind of TV advertising I can get, much cheaper than if I had shot my own ad if I had basically paid someone for publicity. The assessment has got to start off with: am I getting value for money there? But there is other stuff, such as: what is the risk here? Okay, it might be the best value for money in terms of getting lots of visitors turning up, but does it suit my brand for Western Australia? Do I have control over this sufficiently that I can put it into the events calendar? No? I might not consider it then. Or is it simply dangerous or does it have a bad reputation? If so, I might walk away. All those, I think, are legitimate assessment processes for Tourism WA because that is their risk management process that they have got to go through as opposed to the events risk management process or, for that matter, our industry risk management process.

The CHAIRMAN: Very good. Thanks. I will read a closing statement. Thank you for your evidence before the committee today; it has been very helpful. 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 cover 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—Tim will be in touch with you on those—or elaborate on a particular point, please

include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return the corrected transcript of evidence. Thank you very much.

Mr Hall: Thank you. I do have for you some simple pamphlets that we hand out to the industry about the accreditation program to give you a sense of what we are talking about, plus an example of a customer complaint form, which we follow up.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 3:53 pm
