

IN THE MATTER OF AN APPLICATION BY AN OBJECTOR FOR
REVIEW OF A PLANNING DECISION

P469-2024

BETWEEN: **CROSS COUNTRY SKIING ASSOCIATION VICTORIA INCORPORATED**

Applicant

AND: **ALPINE RESORTS VICTORIA TRADING AS FALLS CREEK ALPINE
RESORT**

Respondent

AND: **MINISTER FOR PLANNING**

Responsible Authority

WITNESS STATEMENT OF LAURO BRÄNDLI

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WITNESS STATEMENT

I, Lauro Fadri Brändli of [REDACTED] do say as follows:

A. INTRODUCTION

1. I am a professional cross-country ski marathon racer. I am part of Team BSV Ibex, a professional cross-country ski marathon racing team based in Davos, Switzerland.
2. I have raced the Kangaroo Hoppet in 2019 and 2022. I intended to do so in 2024. In 2020 and 2021, the Kangaroo Hoppet was cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, it was cancelled for the first time due to a lack of snow, and was cancelled again in 2024 for the same reason.
3. The Kangaroo Hoppet has been a "Worldloppet" race since 1990. From 2024, it is also a Ski Classics Challenger Race. I explain the significance of these types of races below.

B. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE KANGAROO HOPPET

4. **Worldloppet** is an international series of long-distance cross-country skiing races that take place in 20 countries around the world. Participants can earn points and gain recognition by completing multiple races in the series. The series aims to promote cross-country skiing globally, encouraging both competitive athletes and recreational skiers to take part in these prestigious events.
5. **Ski Classics** is a professional long-distance cross-country skiing series that features a number of high-profile races around the world. The series includes both iconic historical races and newer events, and it attracts top skiers from around the globe. Ski Classics is known for its high level of competition, with professional teams and individual athletes vying for victory in each race. The series promotes the sport of long-distance skiing and provides a platform for both emerging and established athletes to showcase their talents.
6. The Kangaroo Hoppet is not a Ski Classics race, but is a Ski Classics Challenger race.
7. Ski Classics Challenger races are part of the broader Ski Classics series, which includes both professional and amateur-level events. The Challenger category is designed for recreational skiers and amateur participants who want to experience the thrill of long-distance skiing but are not competing at the elite level. While not as serious or gruelling as the professional races, Challenger races still cover significant distances, often ranging from 20 to 50 kilometres. Like the professional events, Challenger races typically require the use of the classic skiing technique, though some events, like the Kangaroo Hoppet, allow freestyle. Ski Classics Challenger races are an excellent way for enthusiastic skiers to engage with the sport,

experience iconic races, and be part of the Ski Classics community without the pressures of professional competition.

8. Ski Classics Challenger races are important for several key reasons:

- (a) **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Challenger races make the experience of participating in long-distance skiing more accessible to recreational skiers and amateurs. By offering a less competitive, but still challenging, alternative to professional races, they allow a broader audience to engage with the sport.
- (b) **Encourages Participation:** These races serve as a stepping stone for skiers who may not be ready for elite-level competition but are eager to experience the thrill of long-distance skiing. This encouragement helps grow the sport by bringing in new participants and fostering a love for skiing.
- (c) **Bridges the Gap:** Challenger races create a bridge between amateur and professional skiing, allowing enthusiasts to test their skills and endurance in a structured setting. This helps skiers gauge their abilities and potentially aspire to compete at higher levels in the future.
- (d) **Promotes Healthy Lifestyles:** By attracting skiers of various skill levels, Challenger races promote physical fitness, health, and an active lifestyle. They encourage people to engage in regular exercise and outdoor activities.
- (e) **Experience Iconic Events:** Participating in a Challenger race often means skiing the same routes as the professional races. This offers a unique opportunity for amateurs to experience the same iconic courses and environments, making the sport more memorable and rewarding.
- (f) **Community Building:** These races foster a sense of community among skiers of different levels. They create opportunities for participants to connect, share their passion for skiing, and support each other in a non-competitive environment.
- (g) **Economic and Cultural Impact:** Like their professional counterparts, Challenger races contribute to local economies and cultural events, drawing participants and spectators to host cities and towns.

9. In summary, Ski Classics Challenger races are crucial for growing the sport of cross-country skiing by making it more accessible, promoting participation, and fostering a supportive and inclusive community.

10. The Kangaroo Hoppet is well-regarded in the international ski racing community, particularly among those who follow or participate in long-distance cross-country skiing events. It is the largest and most prominent cross-country ski race in the Southern Hemisphere. The race attracts a mix of elite skiers and amateur enthusiasts from around the world. Its reputation is

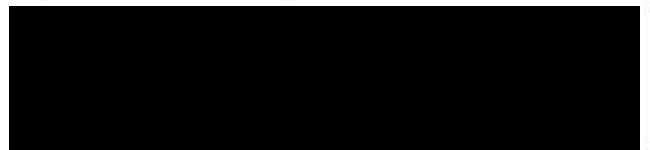
bolstered by its challenging course and unique setting, incorporating spectacular loops on the Bogong High Plains. The Hoppet has established itself as a significant event on the international cross-country skiing calendar.

C. REPUTATIONAL IMPACT OF PROJECT ON FALLS CREEK ALPINE RESORT CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

11. The Kangaroo Hoppet plays a significant role in enhancing the image of Falls Creek as a premier cross-country ski destination, for the following reasons:
 - (a) **Increased Visibility:** As the largest and most renowned cross-country ski race in the Southern Hemisphere, the Kangaroo Hoppet attracts a global audience. Its international reputation helps put Falls Creek on the map as a notable cross-country ski venue, drawing attention from skiers and enthusiasts worldwide.
 - (b) **Attracts Competitors and Spectators:** The event brings in elite skiers and enthusiasts from around the world. This influx of participants and spectators boosts the local economy and creates a vibrant atmosphere in Falls Creek, showcasing the area's appeal as a winter sports destination.
 - (c) **Showcases Terrain and Facilities:** The race highlights the quality and diversity of Falls Creek's skiing terrain and facilities. It demonstrates the region's capacity to host major events and provides an opportunity for skiers to experience its trails and amenities.
 - (d) **Promotes Tourism:** The event generates interest in Falls Creek as a year-round destination. Skiers who visit for the Hoppet may return for other winter sports or recommend it to others, further establishing its reputation.
 - (e) **Community and Cultural Impact:** Hosting a major event like the Kangaroo Hoppet fosters a sense of pride and community in Falls Creek. It also enhances the local culture around winter sports, encouraging more participation and support for cross-country skiing in the region.
12. Overall, the Kangaroo Hoppet serves as a powerful tool for promoting Falls Creek, helping it gain recognition and attract visitors interested in cross-country skiing and winter sports.
13. If the Kangaroo Hoppet could no longer take place, I consider that it would be a huge threat for Falls Creek as a cross-country ski destination and the whole cross-country skiing community in Australia. Falls Creek would lose its visibility on the global cross-country skiing stage, making it less known to potential visitors and competitors. The Kangaroo Hoppet helps position Falls Creek as a key destination for cross-country skiing and without it, the reputation as a skiing hub would suffer immensely.

14. I understand that the Proposal would mean that FIS races could not take place anymore and that no replacement course could be found. If this is true, I think it would be a big threat for the local and national development of Australia's professional cross-country skiing sport industry. The races would have to take place somewhere else, resulting in Falls Creek completely losing the importance of being a training base for the national team and local skiing squads as well as international skiers, who come over to Falls Creek for training and racing. FIS races are prestigious events that attract international skiers and media attention. Without these races, Falls Creek would lose some of its global visibility and status in the cross-country skiing community.
15. For me personally, there would be no reason anymore to come to Falls Creek to ski if the Kangaroo Hoppet and FIS races could not take place. Even as a recreational skier, the experience of Falls Creek would be reduced if the road was clear of snow.
16. Compared with my home country of Switzerland, alpine (downhill) skiing at Falls Creek (and Australia generally) is not of a world class standard. Cross-country skiing at Falls Creek on the other hand is amazing and allows me to experience the sport in a completely different environment and landscape compared to Europe. I have already encouraged about 10 skiers to come and spend the winter / European summer at Falls Creek so far. If the road was cleared, I would no longer recommend those Europeans to visit Falls Creek for the Australian winter.
17. I will be in Switzerland in October 2024. I will not be able to attend a hearing in person but would be able to give evidence by video link.

The evidence contained in this witness statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.



Lauro Brändli

Dated: 24 September 2024

Place: Davos, Switzerland