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 ROBERT CATTO-SMITH

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## WITNESS STATEMENT

## I, Robert Catto-Smith of

do say as follows:

- 1. I am a qualified cross country ski coach. I have a business coaching the number-one competitive grassroots ski club in Victoria, Melbourne XC Ski Club. I have over twenty-five junior athletes on a full-time coaching program. I have led groups of seven to ten athletes on training trips to Ruka, Finland in recent years. My athletes includes two recent representatives of Australia at the Youth Olympic Games (one in cross country skiing, one in biathlon), two athletes who achieved top-30 results in World Junior Championships (one in cross country skiing, one in biathlon), multiple Australian National Team members, and multiple winners of open Australian championship races.
- 2. Melbourne XC Ski Club uses the Falls Creek cross country ski trails as soon as snow conditions allow in Winter. This includes the first two weeks of school holidays in June-July. I then coach athletes on approximately 6 to 7 weekends at Falls Creek after the school holiday period during the snow season, primarily when cross country ski races are being held at Falls Creek.
- 3. Bogong High Plains Road is a key trail for the training I oversee, and has characteristics that make it highly sought after for me as a coach. These characteristics include:
  - It tends to hold the snow from early in the snow season, due to both its smooth surface and the fact that snow blows into the protected area close to the Nordic Bowl.
  - (b) It is out of the wind, meaning in bad conditions it is nearly always the best place to train athletes, with the best snow quality at most times.
  - It is wide, and usually has two sets of classic tracks set on the side. This means that
    I can run group drills and mini races (such as head-to-head sprints), while not
    presenting a hazard to members of the public skiing past.
  - (d) Just South of the Aqueduct Trail intersection, it is flat and then gently rising, which is perfect for technique training, particularly in classic technique. The road then rises more sharply, which is ideal for more advanced athletes.
- 4. The quality of the Falls Creek trails, of which Bogong High Plains Road is a lynchpin, allows me to offer a high-quality program to athletes. This has even caused two families, who previously owned property at Mt Buller, to purchase properties at Falls Creek. They moved because of the high quality of cross country ski trails at Falls Creek, particularly the inner trails.
- 5. The loss of Bogong High Plains Road would not only cause the loss of the perfect trail for conducting drills, but it would make warm-up skis more generally much worse, given that there

are few longer climbs in the vicinity of the Nordic Bowl that are sheltered, other than Hoppet Start, which is much less interesting as a warm up slope. Falls Creek's value as a training venue would be diminished significantly, and we would look at visiting other mountains as well during the snow season.

- 6. Alternative access from Windy Corner to the Nordic Bowl has significant issues for smaller kids:
  - (a) First, they would need to walk on or near one of the busiest downhill ski runs at Falls Creek, Wombats Ramble. The high traffic in the area means close supervision is needed.
  - (b) Second the walk up to the Aqueduct Trail is steep and not convenient.
  - (c) Third, the Aqueduct Trail from there to the Nordic Bowl is uncovered and does not have a protective fence or edge. Younger kids also try to lean over the Aqueduct to break and remove pieces of ice from the water surface, which requires frequent intervention from me to prevent.
  - Fourth, the Aqueduct Trail does not provide nearly as convenient access to the Nordic bowl as the Bogong High Plains Road.
  - (e) Fifth, the kids would have to take off their skis and cross Bogong High Plains Road to access the Nordic Bowl. This may not be easy, if there is a high snowfall, because there would be a drop from the trail onto Bogong High Plains Road, and the access point is not prepared properly.
- 7. Finally, I am concerned about the interface with vehicles, particularly when I am managing larger groups. My youngest athlete is in grade two (approximately 7 years old), while I have others in grades three to five. If we ran a session with younger athletes, they would need help crossing the road, and it would reduce our ability to split the group up if required. In addition, I am concerned about the sections where the cleared road is proposed to run alongside ski trail, both because there will likely be pedestrians on the trail and also because of the risk of cars entering the ski trail.

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



Dated: 24 September 2024

Place: St Kilda