

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 KIM [REDACTED] FRANZKE

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WITNESS STATEMENT

I, Kim [REDACTED] Franzke of [REDACTED] do say as follows:

1. I am the Principal of Tawonga Primary School. I have been in this role for nearly thirteen years. I was previously the Principal at Omeo Primary School. I am the main organiser for the Tawonga Primary School ski program. Students from Dederang Primary School also join our trips, as that school does not have the staff experience to run its own program. Tawonga Primary School's program has been in place for over 20 years.
2. At **Annexure A** to my statement is a PowerPoint presentation I prepared in 2022. I prepared this presentation by emailing the heads of ski programs from other schools whom I knew, as well as by asking people to pass on my questions to other school leaders. I received email responses to the questions, together with photos of each school's program. I then collated the responses into the presentation, together with pictures provided by the representatives and pictures I obtained from the relevant school websites.
3. I made this presentation because I had found out in talking to other heads of ski programs that Falls Creek had not asked schools about their position on the Project and road clearing before announcing the Project. With the exception of Falls Creek Primary School, no school had been consulted at the time I emailed the heads of ski programs, while Falls Creek Primary School indicated it was only consulted after the Project had been announced.
4. I believe that my views of the Project and the consequences of road clearing, as set out below, are consistent with the views of the various school representatives which I have collated into the presentation.
5. We run an all-inclusive program that includes 100% of the school children, including those with autism, hearing impairments and a variety of additional needs. To give all school children the experience of skiing, I need to provide 1-on-1 supervision to some students, for example with parent volunteers/additional Education Support staff. My insistence on running an inclusive program helps to teach resilience, independent, responses to changing circumstances (particularly adverse weather), support for classmates (in particular, more experienced older students helping to teach the younger students) and self-sufficiency in managing one's own clothes and other gear. Some students, in particular those with additional needs, will say that the ski program is the best thing they have ever done. For many students this is their first experience of the snow.
6. As a school principal, I strongly oppose the Project. My main reasons for opposition are related to safety, logistics and the loss of a key learning trail. While safety is my primary concern, it is convenient to discuss logistics first.

Logistics and time

7. Tawonga Primary School currently gets to Falls Creek using a 50-seater bus hired from Falls Creek Coaches. In the past, the coach was able to access Windy Corner directly, allowing for students to avoid transferring to different vehicles.
8. Two years ago, Falls Creek repainted the lines to allow more parking at Windy Corner. This meant that large buses were no longer permitted past the Resort Management Office at the bottom of Slalom Street (Slalom Plaza).
9. The result is that I call up Falls Creek before arrival and book shuttles from Slalom Plaza to Windy Corner. Falls Creek does a good job of catering to our school (together with other respects, such as free resort entry as a local school) to ensure that all students are brought to Windy Corner quickly. However, in peak periods it can be difficult to obtain shuttles and the group can become split waiting for follow-up shuttles.
10. Downhill skiers from Tawonga Primary School also leave from Windy Corner, as it provides direct access to the Wombats Ramble downhill run.
11. I am concerned that if all students were required to be brought to the ANARE shed by shuttle bus, or dropped off at the Nordic Bowl (assuming this was possible) this will add a significant amount of logistical time before the entire group is ready to go, particularly in bad weather conditions where it will take a long time for shuttles to return from the ANARE shed (more than twice the current distance from Slalom Plaza to Windy Corner), or the Nordic Bowl and along a slow road. We would likely end up with one group of students at Slalom Plaza, and another group several kilometres away at the ANARE Shed. This means that I would need to rely on another party making its own decisions, far away from where I am as group leader.
12. We are not able to drive our own minibuses up to the ANARE shed or Nordic Bowl. While I have a minibus licence, as do others associated with schools, the cost of obtaining an endorsement on our licences which would allow us to drive in the snow means it is impractical to get that endorsement. Further, if I am driving a minibus, then I would not be available to perform my role as the group organiser.

Safety

13. Safety is of course a key concern for me in running Tawonga Primary School's ski program. The safety requirements are particularly great because of the wide range of needs and abilities among my students (8-13 year olds).
14. The result of the wide range of abilities is that it is critical that:
 - (a) I know how each minute of the day could work out, and have contingency plans in place at all times;

- (b) the group remains as close to the Nordic Bowl as possible, so that I am able to see the entire group from a single point;
 - (c) as far as possible, the group remains together, which avoids needing to have an additional adult making a decision; and
 - (d) the group remains in sheltered terrain which optimises a positive experience for the students.
15. The current arrangement is optimal, because it means that students can put their skis on at Windy Corner (which, despite the name, is relatively sheltered compared with some of the inner trail network), can ski slowly up to the first hill on Bogong High Plains Road (without being faced with a downhill to begin with), have a wide trail which gives extra space for beginners, and can then experience two gentle downhills before arriving at the Nordic Bowl, where they can leave backpacks and other gear if required.
16. By contrast, if students were required to begin their ski at the ANARE shed, the starting point would become a very exposed carpark, close to Rocky Valley Lake. Students would then be required to ski either next to the cleared Bogong High Plains Road in close proximity to vehicles, or alternatively next to Rocky Valley Lake along the Boat Ramp Trail. I have concerns with being required to ski next to the road, while I also usually stay away from the lakeshore with students, given that some of the children with additional needs may want to go too close to the water. As it is, we do not go on or near the Dam Wall due the exposed terrain and due to the risks associated with it. We would be forced to do so if the road were cleared.

Loss of learning trail

17. The first hill on Bogong High Plains Road from Windy Corner is perfect for students to find their feet on skis, as described in paragraph 15. The gentle uphill grade means the students not gain speed or lose control. In addition, the road closer to the Nordic Bowl provides a perfect learning surface as it is relatively flat and wide enough for groups to train.

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


Kim  Franzke

Dated: 24th September 2024