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# **COVID-19 Response: An Event Industry Perspective**

**Submission to the  
Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry**

Prepared by

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**STRATEGY - CREATIVE - EXECUTION**

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## INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to properly summarise the experience of the last few years of an industry as large and complex as the Event Industry in just three pages. An industry that was hit harder by the pandemic than nearly every other industry. And, an industry that received practically no targeted support from the Federal government.

The Event Industry is a very large and complex industry that is still not at all understood at the Federal government level - as shown by current government policy.

The Event Industry largely doesn't exist in government policy as the government only values events where they generate hotel room nights or side trips to the penguins for the tourism industry or where an event is considered to be an Arts event. The vast majority of events - and hence work done by the Event Industry - is neither of these things.

It is important to note that the Event Industry and the tourism industry - while there is a very modest amount of overlap - are completely separate and different industries with different purposes, economic and operational models, and people and businesses. This was shown beyond any doubt whatsoever by the Victorian parliamentary inquiry that looked into support for the Event Industry and the tourism industry. In fact, that inquiry's final report was divided into separate halves - one for the Event Industry and one for the tourism industry - as they were so separate and different.

I believe I'm uniquely well placed to comment on the impact of the pandemic and the government response to the pandemic having spent most of my waking hours for a couple of years coordinating the Save Victorian Events campaign on behalf of much of Victoria's Event Industry. A campaign that actively involved over 2,000 people from more than 900 businesses from right across the Event Industry.

As part of this I dealt with a vast number of people right across the Event Industry both in Victoria and more generally around the country; with many people who worked for the Victorian and Federal governments; and with numerous members of the Victorian and Federal parliaments.

Save Victorian Events was the only group to do regular detailed surveys of the Event Industry during the pandemic. Some of the top line survey results are attached and we can make more of the detailed results available to the inquiry. We also heard and collected the personal stories of a huge number of people from across our industry.

I have written extensively about the Event Industry since the beginning of the pandemic, so the best way to explain the Event Industry - i.e. what it is, what it does, who is part of it, etc.... - and our experience during the pandemic without going beyond three pages is to link the Inquiry to documents that have already been produced and are in the public domain. These include:

## VICTORIAN PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO THE COMMONWEALTH GAMES

The Victorian 2026 Commonwealth Games was the main form of support the Victorian government announced for the Event Industry following the worst of the pandemic.

My submission to the current Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Commonwealth Games provides a very detailed description of the Event Industry and of our experience during the worst of the pandemic, as well as the current situation in our industry.

My submission can be found here as submission 9:

<https://new.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries/inquiry-into-the-2026-commonwealth-games-bid/submissions>

## SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE COMMONWEALTH GAMES

I've included a link to my submission to the current Senate Inquiry into the Commonwealth Games for completeness. Noting that most of the information within this submission is already included in the submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry.

However, this submission also makes mention of one of the core issues the Event Industry faced - which is it is not included in Australian Bureau of Statistic data as a lot of the Event Industry comes under the nondescript **ANZSIC code 7299 other administrative services not elsewhere classified**. A code we share with supermarket trolley collection service, meter reading services, and many other unrelated industries.

<https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=7861b9f1-ba3c-4f81-8db7-aa83c8650054&subId=747017>

## REVIEW OF THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

The Event Industry is arguably the largest of Australia's creative industries and brings together more creative disciplines than almost any other industry. A lot of the Event Industry has long been included in the ABS statistics and Federal Department of the Arts / Australia Council statistics about the 'creative and cultural industries' - yet traditionally most of our industry has been excluded from policy and support from this part of government. This was the case during the pandemic and remains the case today.

My submission to the recent Federal Government review of the 'creative industries' covers this in detail.

<https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/ncp1139-simon-thewlis.pdf>

## SENATE INQUIRY INTO COVID INSURANCE FOR EVENTS

During the pandemic the Senate held an industry into the issue of Covid insurance for the Event Industry. The submission I wrote on behalf of Save Victorian Events works through the issue of insurance for Covid-19 related risks for the Event Industry. Insurance - including for Covid-19 related risks - is still a huge issue for the Event Industry.

<https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=914c510a-8e73-497c-9112-cba757cca3ad&subId=716679>

It should be noted that the Victorian government did announce in November 2021 a \$230 million Covid related insurance fund for events. However it really only covered situations where the

government lockdowned the Event Industry and at the same time the Victorian government announced that there would be no more government mandated lockdowns.

## VICTORIAN PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO THE EVENT INDUSTRY

In early to mid 2021 the Victorian Legislative Council held an inquiry into support for the Event Industry. This inquiry provides a lot of good information including personal testimony from Event Industry people. However, it should be noted that this Inquiry was held before the worst of the situation in Victorian's Event Industry.

Much of the documentation for this Inquiry - including submissions, transcripts and reports - can be found here:

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/eic-lc/inquiries/article/4633>

The Save Victorian Events submission can be found as submission 7 at the above link or here:

[https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCEI/COVID-19\\_Tourism/Submissions/S007\\_Save\\_Victorian\\_Events\\_Redacted.pdf](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCEI/COVID-19_Tourism/Submissions/S007_Save_Victorian_Events_Redacted.pdf)

## UPDATES TO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

A very good source of information about what happened during the pandemic with the Event Industry is the update emails that were sent by Save Victorian Events on a very regular basis to the members of Victoria's Parliament and the Victorian members of the Federal Parliament between early 2021 and early 2022.

These update emails are very detailed and provide a contemporaneous account of what happened to our industry as well as the views of people within our industry. Some included numerous direct quotes from members of Victoria's Event Industry.

Our tracking showed that these emails were very widely read by members of parliament.

I would be happy to make these emails available to the Inquiry.

## SUMMARY

Again, it is impossible to even start to outline in just three pages what has happened in the Event Industry over the last four years, or in the couple of years where I spent nearly every waking hour working in support of the Event Industry.

Noting also, that it is still a really challenging time in the Event Industry so it is not easy to divert time to compiling detailed documents that may not be read.

I'd be happy to share more of what we experienced and learnt over the last four years with the Inquiry. It would be a travesty if the mistakes and experiences of the pandemic - as they relate to the Event Industry - were not learnt from.

And certainly from a Federal Government policy perspective, nothing has changed for the Event Industry since the beginning of the pandemic.

## APPENDIX - EVENT INDUSTRY SURVEY RESULTS

Some of the top line Save Victorian Events survey results:

- February 8 2021 survey results
- August 30 2021 survey results
- January 18 2022 survey results



## **Final Survey Results: The Devastating Impact on Victoria's \$10+ billion Event Industry**

### **IMPACT ON VICTORIAN EVENT INDUSTRY COMPANIES**

By companies we mean event organisers and the vast array of suppliers to Victoria's event industry such as: AV, audio, lighting, theming, expo, marquees, catering, etc...

**Income from April to December 2020 was down 85%**  
**Forecast income for January to June 2021 is down 76%**  
**Forecast income for July to December 2021 is down 67%**  
(compared to the same period in pre-Covid years and excluding government support)

**94% of companies are currently receiving JobKeeper**

**Receiving JobKeeper has enabled:**

**38% of companies to keep all staff on**  
**47% of companies to keep some staff on**

**If JobKeeper ends in March:**

**43% of companies will need to let staff go**  
**An additional 40% of companies will potentially need to close their business**

So **83% of companies in Victoria's event industry will be severely affected** by the ending of JobKeeper - if it is not replaced by some other form of financial support.

### **IMPACT ON FREELANCERS AND CONTRACTORS**

These are the highly skilled professional service providers such as producers, production managers, stage managers, technicians, risk managers, lighting designers, etc.... who play such a critical role in the planning and running of events.

**Their income from April to December 2020 was down 89%**  
**Forecast income for January to June 2021 is down 80%**  
**Forecast income for July to December 2021 is down 67%**  
(compared to the same period in pre-Covid years and excluding government support)

**77% have had to seek work outside of the Event Industry to survive.**

**69% will need to get jobs outside of the Event Industry if JobKeeper ends in March.**

### **IMPACT ON VICTORIAN EVENT INDUSTRY WORKERS**

**Only 27% of people who were working full time in the Victoria's Event Industry pre-Covid are still working full time in the Event Industry.**

**35% of people who were working in Victoria's Event Industry pre-Covid are no longer working in the Event Industry at all.**

The survey was conducted by Save Victorian Events from February 3rd to 7th with more than 360 businesses and more than 200 individuals from Victoria's Event Industry responding.

Contact: [help@savevictorianevents.com.au](mailto:help@savevictorianevents.com.au)

# The State of Victoria's Event Industry

Survey Results - August 30 2021

## Earned Income - Businesses

**Only 19%**

of normal income  
for Apr 20 - Aug 21

**Only 18%**

forecast income  
for Sep - Dec 21

**Only 34%**

forecast income  
for Jan - Jun 22

## Cancelled Events and Projects

**34%**

have had ALL cancelled  
until the end of the year

**61%**

have had MOST cancelled  
until the end of the year

## Losses Due to Recent Lockdowns

**29%**

of businesses  
lost \$50-200k

**35%**

of businesses  
lost \$200k-\$1m

**20%**

of businesses  
lost over \$1m

## Impact on Workers

**Only 40%** of permanent staff are still employed

**Only 16%** of the highly skilled freelancers,  
contractors & casuals are still employed

## Reduced Business Capability

**Only 52%** of their pre-pandemic capability and  
capacity to deliver events & projects

## Business Survival

**Only 27%** likely to survive to the end of the year

**26%** unlikely to survive    **47%** not sure if they will

# The Impact of Omicron on Victoria's Event Industry

Survey Results - January 18 2022

## Companies: Earned Income

Apr 20 - Aug 21

Sep - Dec 21

Jan - Mar 22

Apr - Jun 22

**Down 81%**

**Down 66%**

**Down 68%**

**Down 58%**

(Actual. Pre-Omicron)

(Actual)

(Forecast)

(Forecast)

Earned income of Event Industry companies compared to the same period of a normal year. Noting this is an average so many have earned a lot less or more.

## Freelancers & Contractors: Earned Income

Apr 20 - Aug 21

Sep - Dec 21

Jan - Mar 22

Apr - Jun 22

**Down 84%**

**Down 65%**

**Down 71%**

**Down 55%**

(Actual. Pre-Omicron)

(Actual)

(Forecast)

(Forecast)

Earned income of our vitally important Event Industry freelancers and contractors compared to the same period of a normal year. Again, this is an average.

## Current Outlook for Events in 2022

January & February Events

March & April Events

May to December Events

**46% - Cancel**

**22% - Cancel**

**9% - Cancel**

**28% - Postpone**

**30% - Postpone**

**12% - Postpone**

**16% - At Risk**

**36% - At Risk**

**44% - At Risk**

Current expected outcome for events. Hence the urgent need for financial support and measures to help restore confidence in events.