



Oval Motel owner Gary Gibson is upset the Games have been cancelled.
Picture: Jake Nowakowski

“The English team was looking for accommodation two or three months ago ... they wanted to book the whole motel

Gary Gibson

Business left counting cost

Regional Victoria says it will need years of help to recover

**Mitch Clarke
Carly Douglas,
Julianne Strachan
Sam McNeill**

Regional businesses which were gearing up for an influx of visitors and a \$3bn cash boost from the Commonwealth Games say they have been left blindsided by its cancellation.

Victoria's peak tourism body says regional cities will now need to be supported for years to come because a \$2bn infrastructure spending package promised by the Andrews government to reduce the pain didn't compare.

"The host regions will suffer, not just from the visitors they expected to welcome in this period, but also the global exposure they expected to receive," Tourism Industry Council chief executive Felicia Mariani said.

Regional Cities Victoria chair Andrea Metcalf said it was "a disappointing day", adding the infrastructure spend would "not deliver the same benefits as broadcasting the best of regional Victoria into billions of lounge rooms around the world".

"(This) was an opportunity to showcase regional Victoria to the world, better connect regional communities with each other, and gain long-term

value from tourism, job creation, and attracting skilled workers to our regional cities," she said.

Australian Hotels Association accommodation spokesman Dougall Hollis said businesses had made investments to meet demand for the huge influx of visitors no longer coming.

"This was going to be a marquee event that would have brought international and interstate visitors to Victoria," he said. "There would be development applications with the council to build more accommodation and there would have been a lot of existing hotels planning renovations."

"Those upgrades may still go ahead but those businesses will have to look a lot more closely at the visitor numbers they can expect and what they can realistically afford."

"I don't know how much has been foregone but it would be a lot (of money)."

Nationals leader Peter Walsh said it was a "betrayal of regional Victorians".

Gary Gibson, who runs the Oval Motel Bendigo, revealed that he already had inquiries from English teams looking for accommodation.

"It was just going to be huge. The English team was looking for accommodation two or

three months ago, they wanted to book the whole motel," he said.

Golden Point's Sovereign Park Motor Inn owner Tim Canny said his hoteliers had been asked to submit their allotment of rooms to the organising committee by Friday. He was just about to offer up all 50 of his rooms for 17 nights.

"Like everyone we're in a bit of a state of shock," he said. "I thought it was going to be a sensational event for our city."

Golden Dragon Museum chief Hugo Leschen said it was "very disappointing" as he had just started to plan for the lead up to the Games.

Be. Bendigo business chamber spokesman Rob Herbert said local businesses had invested valuable hours of work into positioning themselves to play a key role in the Games. "It's difficult to quantify those losses," he said.

Shepparton mayor Shane Sali said his community was in "disbelief" that a year of planning had gone to waste.

"There was no sign of this happening whatsoever," he said. "We have been working closely with industry for nearly 12 months to develop early plans for how our visitor economy and key sectors ... could leverage this generational opportunity."

Ballarat Mayor Des Hudson said the announcement also "wasn't on any of our radar".

"We will adapt, we will pivot, we will absolutely be able to move forward," he said.

Latrobe mayor Kellie O'Callaghan said the Gippsland community had been stripped of the "big boost" it desperately needed.

"Regional Victoria has been indicating for a long time that we need more support," she said.

The latest blow to regional Victoria will be exacerbated by Daniel Andrews' ban on government print advertising – which includes major campaigns to promote tourism.

With 2.6 million Victorians reading The Herald Sun or The Age each month, tourism bodies warned other states could capitalise on the advertising vacuum to lure Victorians to their destinations rather than visiting the regions.

Opposition tourism, sport and major events spokesman Sam Groth said the world, watching on from afar, would now consider Victoria an unreliable partner.

"With this one decision, the Andrews government has sent a signal to the world that Victoria's flagship events are up for grabs," he said.

With Timothy Cox

WHERE THE MONEY HAS BEEN PROMISED

BENDIGO

BENDIGO BOWLS CLUB Redevelop five bowls and croquet greens

BENDIGO SHOWGROUNDS New exhibition shed

BENDIGO STADIUM Four new sports courts.

PRINCE OF WALES
SHOWGROUNDS MARKET

OPEN SUN 8:30 AM - 2 PM
Ph. 0407094805

BALLARAT

EUREKA STADIUM Expanding it by 5000 seats, new athletics track.

MINERS REST New competition grade oval, sports pavilion and change rooms

BALLARAT SPORTS AND EVENTS CENTRE Upgrades

BALLARAT TRAIN STATION Lifts and a connecting pedestrian overpass

CRESWICK MOUNTAIN 60km of bike trails



GEELONG

NEW AQUATICS CENTRE AT ARMSTRONG CREEK – Enclosed swimming pool, four indoor recreational sports courts, civic plaza

NEW INDOOR SPORTING COMPLEX AT WAURN PONDS – Multipurpose sports centre with six courts, gymnastics and dance studio

STEAD PARK – Hockey pavilion upgrade, new pitch, extra seating

A new training pitch and seating at Banyul-Warri Fields, Torquay

