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THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON SHORT STAY ACCOMMODATION IN TASMANIA MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON FRIDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 2018

Mr BRENT THOMAS, HEAD OF PUBLIC POLICY, AIRBNB AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Ms Armitage) - Welcome. All evidence taken at the hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege, but we do need to remind you that anything you say outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. There is a copy of information for witnesses if you have not read it or not aware of the process.

The evidence you present is being recorded and the *Hansard* version will be published on the committee website when it becomes available. The procedure we intend to follow: firstly, you have an opportunity to speak to your submission and then members will ask questions. We are seeking information specifically relating to the terms of reference. If you would like to start off and then we will ask you some questions.

Mr THOMAS - Thanks, Chair, and thank you everybody for the opportunity to be here with you today and for accommodating our alternative dates. We appreciate that.

My name is Brent Thomas and I have the role of Head of Public Policy for Australia and New Zealand at Airbnb. Also, relevantly, I'm a host. I live in Sydney, and my wife and I and three kids share our whole home when we're not there when we go away on holidays. I am also a guest and I stay with Airbnbs pretty much every week. I stayed at a beautiful place in Lindisfarne last night and a place in North Hobart earlier this week - Donna in North Hobart and Luke and Hayley in Lindisfarne.

I am joined today also by a number of local hosts and I believe the committee is going to have an opportunity to hear directly from them a bit later on. I want to make a short opening statement to open up the time for questions and answers. Today, I hope to provide some perspective on the current housing discussion and to outline some key data points from Airbnb, which will demonstrate that our community is not a big factor in the housing market.

At a high level just some comments about our community here in Tasmania. First of all home sharing is not new. The idea of staying in somebody else's home has been around for centuries. The idea of doing it on a global platform through the Internet is relatively new. Our company, our organisation and our community is a little over 10 years old.

Here in Tasmania, and around the world, Airbnb helps families to make ends meet. It makes travel more affordable and it creates local jobs. One of the things that is different about Airbnb from some traditional accommodation providers, and in fact a lot of other companies, is we're a community-based model. That means that our hosts take the overwhelming majority of the revenue. They list their home and they get to keep 97 per cent of what they list their home for.

In Tasmania in the previous 12 months, 283 700 guest arrivals came into Tasmania. To look at the demographics of our hosts, and you will meet some today, 68 per cent of them are women

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and about one-third of them are over 60 years. A typical host in Tasmania shared their home for 47 nights a year and they make about \$10 000 per year, not primary income, but income that goes a long way to contributing to a mortgage or paying off credit card bills. Commonly, and it is what my family does, contributes to paying for a holiday.

Deloitte found in a previous year, 2015-16, and we expect it would have grown since then, the guests spent \$86 million here in Tasmania and created 600 equivalent full-time jobs. To bring that to life a bit you know from your own travels when you stay wherever it is, for every dollar you spend on your hotel, your motel, your Airbnb, your caravan park or whatever it is, you tend to spend multiple amounts of other dollars on food, experiences and on some adventures. A lot of those jobs are in cafes, supermarkets, restaurants and so forth.

This is significant for the current terms of reference. More than two-thirds of our listings and close to 60 per cent of all guest arrivals are outside of Hobart and Launceston. Again, that is cafes, restaurants, and hotels benefiting for the first time from that regional tourism because the community spreads the benefits of tourism.

We do not tend to conglomerate only in traditional tourism areas. About 75 per cent of our listings tend to be outside of those specific areas.

A couple of other points. One thing that is worthwhile considering in this debate are some of the other macro effects that are driving the housing issues in Tasmania and in Hobart. One of them we can point to was released by CommSec this week with their State of the State Report. It found Tasmania is the rising star: population growth at 78 per cent; economic growth is significant as well; and dwelling requests are 18 per cent above the decade average. I have some handouts that I will hand around on this.

Mr VALENTINE - Can you revisit that 78 per cent; where are you getting that figure from?

Mr THOMAS - From the CommSec. The Commonwealth Bank has an arm, CommSec, and they do a State of the State Report. They rank the economic performance for different states. I am happy to stand corrected if it says otherwise.

Mr VALENTINE - I want to make sure that we get the right figures.

CHAIR - Population growth compared with the decade average, 77.9 per cent.

Mr THOMAS - Significant numbers of people are moving to Hobart permanently to live. I will pass a graph around about this as well, but what you are seeing is not enough houses being built for the people who are moving here to Tasmania. You actually have a declining rate of new housing approvals.

Mr VALENTINE - We can have a look at that later, so thank you.

Mr THOMAS - The second data point I want to point to is the 2016 Census found there were more than 241 000 dwellings, 54 000 rental dwellings - and this is significant - 32 000 vacant dwellings in Tasmania, so homes that are vacant. That is much more than the Airbnb listings. I will reference those specifically and pass them around.

I am sorry for our friend on the phone.

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Ms RATTRAY - That is fine. I am listening intently.

CHAIR - I can take a photo and email it straight through to Tania.

Mr THOMAS - While Julian is compiling that data, perhaps I will come back to it when it is ready so I don't take up too much time. There are documents I will pass around.

The first sheet is a list of myths. We are hoping to bust some of those myths today.

The second one I might talk to specifically. This one shows that Airbnb entire home listings that are booked for more than 181 nights a year make up 0.22 per cent, so one fifth of 1 per cent of the housing stock.

Mr VALENTINE - So that is your company?

Mr THOMAS - Yes.

Mr VALENTINE - Not all the other bits?

Mr THOMAS - No, that is the Airbnb community. One-fifth of 1 per cent make up that category. We would say much bigger factors driving the housing issues are population growth. Significantly the final sheet talks about your housing approvals per head. So it adjusts the number of people who are coming in and per capita looks at the number of housing approvals that have been made. What it shows in recent years is a significant decline.

If I can circle back to the CommSec data, 78 per cent above the decade average is the confirmation.

Mr WILLIE - That is only in one part of the city.

Mr THOMAS - In the CommSec Report?

Mr WILLIE - The approvals graph you produced.

CHAIR - Electorate of Clark.

Mr WILLIE - It is on the western shore of Hobart.

Mr THOMAS - Let me take it on notice. I think it talks to a broader pattern as well.

Mr WILLIE - With approvals, I believe it was last year they were almost at record highs; they have come back a little bit, but they are almost at record highs. The approvals are not the issue. It is the commencements and the completions of housing. There are not enough skilled workers to start building the houses and many of them are working on commercial projects in the city. That is more of the issue; not the approvals.

Mr THOMAS - That is consistent with some feedback that we've had from some locals having a lot of trouble getting that crucial labour. A lot of them, correct me if I'm wrong, have been put into commercial projects and the residential ones are much harder to get labour for.

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I have a few final comments, if I can, and then I'm happy to jump to questions.

CHAIR - That's fine.

Mr THOMAS - The final point I wanted to make is one of the other myths out there is the number of entire home listings on Airbnb and there is a bit of a myth about what an entire home listing is. In a lot of the data that is being relied upon, there seems to be an assumption that an entire home listing is always available, was previously something that people lived in as long-term renters or as owner-occupiers, and that that is no longer the case. That is not true. I will just talk to that with some specific examples.

We have Cathie here today - and I think you are going to hear from Cathie - she shares an entire home listing. It is the front of her house. It has never been rented out on the long-term market before. She and her partner, Colin, live in the back of that property and they share what is called a Californian bungalow at the front of their home. That is not a home that has been taken off the long-term market. That is Cathie and Colin's home.

There is another woman who is with us today and she shares, according to our platform, two entire home listings, but she is in a two-storey home. Downstairs, what used to be two storage spaces or garages, have now been turned into two entire home listings at the same address. An entire home listing on our platform can be a little bit difficult to understand. It is not always a whole home. It is anything that has its own entrance, exit and its own bathroom. It can be a granny flat, it can be the downstairs and, in that case I just mentioned, it is actually two downstairs spaces.

The other one is the example of my own personal one, even though I am not living here in Tasmania there are a lot of people here that are like me. My wife and I share our own home. We share it for two or three weeks a year when we're away on holidays - when our three children, my wife and I are not there. That is an entire home listing, but it is not a home that has been taken off the long-term, residential market. That is our home.

One of the challenges you have, and the UTAS report uses some data from an organisation called Inside Airbnb, unfortunately that is an organisation that does not have access to Airbnb's proprietary data and they make some assumptions and errors that are wrong.

I will bring that to life for you. I just told you about my own house. They would assume correctly that my home is on Airbnb. They would assume correctly that it is an entire home listing. But they would incorrectly conclude that my home is booked out by other people for 50 or 51 weeks a year. In fact, my family live there for 48 weeks of the year and share it for two or three weeks. So they would incorrectly conclude also with my friend Cathie, and my other friend who is here today, is that those are homes taken off the market when they are not.

The final point I will make on that is - and you can do this on our app, I will show you - there is actually, according to the website, Australia's oldest pub is listing its rooms on Airbnb now. A number of hotels and traditional accommodation providers who have specific approvals in place are listing on our platform. Once again I make the point they are not homes that have been taken off the long-term market. They are hotel rooms and motel rooms that are just finding a new distribution channel to attract people from around the world in all sorts of different languages.

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The final point that I will make is that Airbnb used to be primarily about homes. If you think about your own trip, how do I get there, where do I stay, what do I do? We have always been in the 'where do I stay line', but we are now getting into the 'what do I do when I am there'. One of the hosts here today, Peter, shares a room in his home; I was there earlier in the week. He also shares an experience and he does a history tour around Salamanca. You can do a wine tour and you can, in other parts of the world, do samurai sword-making and all sorts of really interesting things. Local people, once again, sharing part of their life - not just their home but also their experiences and doing some really interesting things using a platform of trust. People can come to Hobart or Tasmania and book something really interesting to do as well as where they are staying.

Obviously, as policy makers, you are interested in the rules and regulations. Tasmania has led the way along with South Australia and some other states. Tasmania was one of the first movers to bring in state-wide rules and regulations about home sharing. They did that last year. Since that time, about 70 per cent of Australians are now covered by some form of state-based rules and regulations that we think are fair and innovative.

South Australia, Tasmania, New South Wales and Victoria have all done something at a state level. There is a draft bill before this parliament, or released for comment at the moment, that goes to look at some ways of enforcing those rules that were put in last year.

We want to continue to partner with this Government and you as parliamentarians to make sure that the existing rules work, to make sure they are enforceable, and to make sure that tourism continues to grow in a responsible and respectful way. We saw the front page of *The Mercury* today: international tourism up 21 per cent.

I feel like I have talked enough, Madam Chair, and I am happy to take some questions.

Mr VALENTINE - I don't think anyone denies that short-stay home-share accommodation is not something that is desirable in the market in terms of people wanting to use that type of accommodation. What we have to look at is to try to work out what the facts are. Part of that is the data side. You are saying Inside Airbnb does not have access to your full corporate data. For us to be able to basically sort through all of this, we need good solid data. What is your response to perhaps a request coming from Government to say, show us your data so that we know what, in fact, the real state of play is. It would not only be your company. It would be other companies like Home Away and the like. What is your response to that?

Mr THOMAS - It is a good question. Our response to that is very positive. We have data sharing agreements and memorandums of understanding with many governments around the world, and we have been trying to partner with the Tasmanian Government to share as much data as we are able to. The aggregate data is quite easy to share. Some of it is sensitive from a privacy perspective. The key factor is that the new legislation, the draft bill that is proposed, goes specifically to that point and will require all the platforms to share that data and to provide more transparency around exactly what you are asking about.

Mr VALENTINE - Yes, Tasmania was one of the first to move in the legislation side, but some would say that it was basically totally deregulating and now we have housing issues. I hear your arguments about the issue of what is causing that and there is a bit of conjecture around that. Quite clearly, data is really important to the whole of our opportunity here to look at the facts and

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come out with recommended findings and recommendations that are valuable and real rather than supposed.

Mr THOMAS - That is right. Today I wanted to bust some of the myths about the data that is out there. We have provided some data in our submission, some more data today, and crucially that proposed draft bill goes further to requiring all platforms to share more to help government to have the transparency that you are talking about, Mr Valentine.

Mr VALENTINE - The other aspect we have been hearing a lot about in our inquiry is this need for a level playing field: making sure that people who are using facilities out there in your accommodation space are going to be safe, with fire extinguishers in the right place and smoke detectors and lights that come on if there is a fire, and all those sorts of things.

What is your response to that in terms on compliance?

Mr THOMAS - I would say that there is nothing more important than safety on the Airbnb platform and it is our priority. There have been more than 400 million guest arrivals in Airbnb listings to date. There are about 2 million every night and negative incidents are extremely rare.

I do not think anybody seriously suggests, though, that the home they live in should be regulated in the same way a hotel is regulated.

Mr VALENTINE - That is, if it is a share arrangement as opposed to a stand-alone single.

Mr THOMAS - No, even somebody like me, it is a whole home when we go away. My family goes away, and people occupy the whole home. Our home has been development application approved, and has all the safety requirements that a home requires. I can have my brother come and stay, and he can bring his family. If he buys a meal, does that become a commercial transaction? I do not think anybody seriously suggests that just because you are sharing a room or the whole home that there should be an unreasonable regulatory burden.

Getting back to the other point that some hotels are now listing on our platform, I think there is potentially an opportunity for governments and policy makers to look at regulatory burdens on traditional providers and see to what extent they are still required and valuable. I don't think the answer is to place unreasonable burdens on the people like those sitting behind me today who share a room or their whole home when they are away.

Mr WILLIE - On that, the Building Code for a hotel is really quite extreme compared to a primary residence, which is classed at 1A. There is a Building Code classification in between there, which is a 1B, which is like your traditional bed and breakfast. We have heard evidence from the Fire Service that short stay accommodation guests might arrive late at night and they are not familiar with the building. The concern is that in the event of a fire there might not be hardwired smoke alarms, exit lights, illuminated hallways and those sorts of safety precautions. Many of those regulations that traditional bed and breakfasts have to comply with have come out of coronial inquests. Do you have any comment on that?

Mr THOMAS - The first thing I would say is that a lot of those traditional providers are listing on our platform. The second thing I would say is Airbnb actually makes people's places safer. I will give you a couple of specific examples. We've partnered and have an MOU with Emergency Management Victoria. Premier Andrews came to San Francisco and signed our most

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recent agreement, I think it was last year. We have partnered with them. In the event of a bushfire in Victoria people can use our platform and hosts can share their homes for free. In the event of a bushfire where people have been displaced from their home, or emergency services workers who don't have a bed, can stay in people's homes for free.

The second thing, Mr Willie, is that we are able to partner with fire services to help. You might have somebody travelling to Tasmania from China and English is not their first language - or any number of other places. In the event of a natural disaster we are able to communicate directly with hosts often in their own language through their mobile device. That is something they cannot do and they don't get access to elsewhere.

Two other specific points about Tasmanian hosts - I'm not sure if we're still doing this, but we were certainly doing it at the end of last year - when they list on Airbnb they have access to getting a free carbon monoxide and smoke detector alarm through our company just by using our platform. We were sending that to people. If you have a situation where somebody's home is already DA approved, has all the safety things and needs for a home, but when they list on Airbnb they are able to get free -

CHAIR - A CO₂ monitor.

Mr THOMAS - Yes, CO₂ and smoke. The fourth thing is about the Tas Fire Service here, we reached out to them last year, well before this inquiry, and Merrydith might talk to you about it as she is the leader of our community. They have been along to our host community. They have been partnering with us and working with our hosts to make sure that we are educating hosts and guests to make sure that their offering is as safe as possible.

Mr WILLIE - It's still not a 1B class building is it?

Mr THOMAS - We don't think when somebody shares their home they should, for example, need a commercial grade kitchen. We don't think when somebody shares their home they need to necessarily have additional car spaces. Many people use Uber or a taxi to get around in Hobart.

We think those burdens would be unreasonable in somebody's own home. Once again the overwhelming majority of our hosts are sharing their own home - the home they live in. I am doing it for two or three weeks a year. If I have to get a commercial kitchen in my home that is unreasonable. Frankly, we -

CHAIR - Emergency lighting?

Mr THOMAS - That sort of stuff is going to be costly and time consuming and a lot of people just wouldn't list. That is going to drive down the offerings for tourists coming to Tasmania. I do say very genuinely that we want to pick up the engagement after this inquiry with the Tasmanian Fire Service, because there are some really good things we could do with them. There have been some comments about bushfire prone areas as well.

Mr WILLIE - I think the Fire Service audited all of the listings and 47 per cent of the listings were in bushfire prone areas in Tasmania.

Mr THOMAS - I would be interested as to how that compares with the percentage of homes in Tasmania. I suspect it is probably similar.

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Mr WILLIE - I am only testing evidence that we've heard, but their point is with the short stay accommodation building it is much different to say a primary residence where the occupants are familiar with the building and with their surroundings. With a short stay accommodation property, people might arrive late at night, they might not be familiar with their surroundings so in the event of a fire, that is a concern.

Mr THOMAS - I come back to the same point and that is that we come from a philosophy that says somebody's home is entirely safe for them to live in, it is entirely safe for them to meet somebody at the pub and bring them back, and it is entirely safe for them to share it with their family, to do a home swap, to have a neighbour come and stay, to have a cousin come and stay, whatever the case may be. The mere fact that you are sharing through a global platform, we don't think should place unreasonable burdens on those people. We want to be reasonable about that, Mr Willie.

In some strata buildings in Tasmania there is a slightly higher burden of people needing to provide reference to where the exits are and so forth. Some low burdens on people that make it easy to address some of those issues you are talking about, we are comfortable with. We are not comfortable with a situation where to share somebody's own home they have to jump through hoops, pay lots of money, and get a lot of red tape.

CHAIR - Thank you. If I could go back to a comment you made to Rob Valentine when you said 'we have been trying to work with the Tasmanian Government'. Can you expand on that? What have you been doing with the Tasmanian Government when you say you have been trying to work with them?

Mr THOMAS - We have been working with them. We have had ongoing dialogue since prior to the rules that came into place on 1 July last year, and we continue to have a dialogue with them about the enforcement side, about the data side and so forth. Home sharing is not new but doing it on a global platform is, and governments around the world are still coming to grips with how this stuff plays out. It is a journey. I do not see it as a finish line. It is like an ongoing dialogue. That is what we have been doing.

Mr WILLIE - On that question, the Government announced in March as part of the Housing Summit that you would reach an agreement to share the data with the Government. That has not eventuated, has it?

Mr THOMAS - The culmination of that is the new bill and legislation, but we did go a long way down that path and we were able to have a lot of discussions with them about data.

I can get into the complexity. Some of it becomes challenging from a privacy perspective. I mentioned this to Mr Valentine before, so the sharing of aggregate data can be pretty easy. How many are listings, how many are entire homes, typical nights booked, and so forth. What is much harder is saying that Mr Josh Willie lives at x address in Hobart and he has personally shared his home for that many nights per year. That is a challenge for our terms of service, and it is a challenge for us from a privacy perspective. The new draft bill goes a long way to address that issue.

Mr WILLIE - That leads to my next question. The committee would find itself in a difficult position I would imagine, you have made a number of claims today about certain data and we are

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unable to verify that, because as you say, there is no way for you to share that data with us at this point in time. It makes it difficult for our work. I am sure you are aware of the Institute of Social Change, the UTAS Report. Have you seen their latest housing update?

Mr THOMAS - Mr Willie, the first thing I have to say is I don't agree with the premise of your question. The committee has been faced with two sets of data. One is the one you are referencing which UTAS has relied upon, that is the Inside Airbnb data. That is not from our company and is not proprietary data.

Today you have from me, in our submission, the proprietary data we have provided. I really encourage the committee for reasons I have outlined, to rely upon the data that comes from Airbnb, not from a scraped data source that has all the flaws and problems with it that I outlined before, such as making a mistake about somebody's downstairs former garage being an entire home, or someone who is away on holidays being an entire home off the market.

If the committee, even after today, does not have enough data points from Airbnb I would be pleased to take further questions on notice.

What I am saying to you, and maybe I didn't do a good job of communicating this, we can communicate to the committee aggregate data. What we cannot communicate easily is the information of somebody's host's name, address and so forth. I do not think the committee needs that second bunch of data to make its findings here. The first part of the data is valuable. We have tried to give you that. If there are other parts of the aggregate data you would like, I am happy to take those questions on board.

Mr VALENTINE - You would give us the number of whole houses, truly whole houses as opposed to the host being on site versus the share housing that would be useful.

Mr THOMAS - We can give you some data points that help you down that path. To be open, our company is 10 years old and when you sign up as a host you give us a bunch of information. We don't always know -

Mr VALENTINE - Whether they are still operating?

Mr THOMAS - No, we know that. We can't always tell whether it is somebody's primary residence or not, but we do know that the overwhelming majority of our hosts are sharing the home they live in, their primary home.

Mr WILLIE - Just back to the UTAS Report, are you dismissing that? You are saying that UTAS is wrong with their data?

Mr THOMAS - Yes. The UTAS Report, as I understand it, relies upon Scrapes [?] data from inside Airbnb and has each and every one of those flaws that I outlined before.

Mr WILLIE - You are willing to provide data to verify that to the committee, with listings of whole properties.

Mr THOMAS - We have already tried to do that in our submission and today's evidence, but if there is further data you would like I am very happy to take those questions on notice and see what we can come back with.

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Mr WILLIE - The committee would like whole property listings across Tasmania, so that investment style where the primary resident is not present.

Mr THOMAS - Once again we don't always know whether the person is in residence or not, but we can give you the number of whole homes across Tasmania. I can do a lot of that now, Mr Willie, if you are interested?

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Mr THOMAS - Around Tasmania now we have about 5100 listings. That was at 1 October. As I say 68 per cent of our hosts are female; 31 per cent are over 60. The percentage of those, Mr Willie, that are entire homes with all of the things I just took you through before, usually somebody's primary home, could be downstairs, could be the garage, could be the granny flat, 76 per cent are entire homes. That includes people's whole home when they are away, the granny flat and so forth. Of those -

Mr WILLIE - That is a high percentage isn't it?

Mr THOMAS - It is reflective of the way people are sharing their biggest asset these days. It is exactly what I do.

CHAIR - Are you able to table that document, or are there things that you would prefer not to?

Mr THOMAS - I can't table this one, but I can definitely send you something. To the claim - and this is another interesting fact - that people are taking multiple homes off the market and one person is taking multiple homes off the market, 82 per cent of our hosts who have an entire home listing only have one.

CHAIR - In fairness, I know people who are, but it may not be the majority.

Mr THOMAS - It is very much a minority. I had somebody say to me that there is this host in this part of New South Wales who has 50 or 100 listings. I met that host and she runs Ray White Real Estate. She does not own any of those properties. It is in the holiday home market. She is the host for multiple listings where people are sharing their holiday home through her, just like they would have 20 years ago they would have put a sign on her window.

Somebody, for example, lives in Hobart and has a place at Wineglass Bay. They might not want to look after it themselves and they may get a local real estate agent to be the host. That person may make a business out of it and look after multiple people's holiday homes and they are listed as the host.

CHAIR - We found that on the east coast at our hearings a couple of weeks ago.

Mr WILLIE - Do you have some data for the Greater Hobart area of whole homes listed, the percentage of them?

Mr THOMAS - Yes, I do.

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Mr VALENTINE - Maybe for a regional location as well.

Mr THOMAS - I have 1194 homes in the Hobart LGA.

Mr WILLIE - A whole home listed?

Mr THOMAS - No, sorry, that is the entire number of active listings.

Mr VALENTINE - What was that number again?

Mr THOMAS - That is 1194.

Mr WILLIE - How many of those are whole homes?

Mr THOMAS - I don't have that number. I would have to take that on notice. I expect it would be broadly consistent with Tasmania.

Mr WILLIE - Are you happy to provide that to the committee?

Mr THOMAS - Yes, I will have to provide that on notice.

Mr WILLIE - The committee is well aware of the housing challenges and you have listed those in your submission. We talked about approvals, commencements, completions - so the supply and demand - but Airbnb would be having an impact, given those challenges when whole homes are being taken out of private rental markets. You already have a tight market with supply and demand issues and then you add short stay accommodation on top of that. I guess that is where much of the public debate is coming from. Anecdotally, people are seeing it happen in their communities. I know of streets where there are five, six and seven listings, and that has issues not only for housing affordability but carparking, and those sorts of things. Does that concern you at all? Obviously you would like Airbnb to be embraced by all Tasmanians. It has significant economic benefits, as we all know, but isn't there a balance?

Mr THOMAS - Mr Willie, what concerns us is that the committee is provided with the proper information and looks at the macro drivers. You have a growing population, housing approvals coming down per capita, and only 0.22 of 1 per cent of entire homes in Tasmania that are being shared for more than half of the year. You have the university opening up more and more places, more and more people wanting to move here to live, and you have a growing economy.

Your political party's background, Mr Willie, is the impacts of negative gearing as well, and one of the things that a future federal government, were it to change, will address some of those things. I think there are much big levers available to state and federal governments than looking at an organisation whose community is one-fifth of 1 per cent.

Mr WILLIE - You have to look at the whole picture but you would probably agree there are some really big levers, like taxation planning - those sorts of levers. What I am trying to say is Airbnb is having an impact in a tight market that is having all those supply and demand issues. Does that concern you?

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Mr THOMAS - What concerns us is when our hosts are unreasonably scapegoated for a problem that has much bigger drivers and much bigger levers. I hope we will encourage you to hear their evidence as well. We are concerned that the committee gets the information it needs and looks at the biggest levers available to it, not at something that is one-fifth of 1 per cent.

Mr ARMSTRONG - We heard some witnesses from the west coast of Tassie regarding how people from South Australia are coming in, buying homes around there, reasonably cheap on the market, and listing them on Airbnb - no approvals, no nothing. This is happening on the west coast of Tassie, in Queenstown and Strahan. We have other operators there who are really struggling and who have worked with tourism to build the area up. These other people are coming in, buying homes and listing them on Airbnb with no approvals, no registration, no nothing with anybody around there. It is having a real impact on the traditional accommodation houses around there. What are your comments on that?

I can elaborate. They come in, they are paying the normal rates, they are paying no land tax, they are paying basic insurance - not covered by proper insurance because they are insuring it as a residential home. It is a big issue around there and having an impact on the motels. Motels are empty for a quarter of the year.

Mr THOMAS - I think you are referencing the traditional accommodation sector. I think the Tourism Industry Council business confidence index for April 2018 was 101.5 points - that is higher than at any point it was at last year, in 2017. I think business confidence in the traditional sector is actually up. Some of those traditional providers are listing on platforms like Airbnb, including Airbnb, and -

Mr ARMSTRONG - Because they can't get accommodation with Airbnb. But the ones I am telling you about are taking the business off them.

Mr THOMAS - Some of them are also listing on our platform; that is what I am saying to you. I hear what you are saying. I am saying some of those traditional providers are also listing on the Airbnb platform.

The other thing is that some of them benefit. For example, a traditional place has a café, breakfast place or a bar. Often somebody will stay in a local home but will have a meal, coffee or a beer at one of those local traditional places.

Mr ARMSTRONG - If they stay at a traditional place they would do the same thing. That is neither here nor there because they are going to eat or drink wherever they go. Just because they are staying at an Airbnb doesn't mean they are not going to eat or drink.

Mr THOMAS - This is also not a new thing. Thirty years ago somebody could have bought a place on the west coast with the approvals that it had to be home. They could have made it their holiday home where they come for a month or two a year. They could have got a local real estate agent to put an ad in the window or on the *Trading Post* or wherever.

Mr ARMSTRONG - What I am saying does this concern Airbnb that this is happening without any approvals or anything safety wise or anything?

Mr THOMAS - Again -

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Mr ARMSTRONG - You, as the Airbnb hosts, when somebody wants to list on the Airbnb do you have a checklist with them to say have you got approvals, do you have appropriate insurance? I heard you on the radio this morning say that as soon as you list with Airbnb you are covered by insurance?

Mr THOMAS - Yes, that's true. We've partnered -

Mr ARMSTRONG - \$1 million for public liability that is, isn't it?

Mr THOMAS - There is two parts to it and I will get the facts correct. There are two things if we bring it to life. Let us say you brought a place on the west coast, Mr Armstrong, and I came and stayed there. Let's say I accidentally burnt the kitchen down or I tripped down the stairs and broke my ankle. First of all both of those things are incredibly rare. We've partnered with the world's oldest insurance company, Lloyds of London, and both the host and the guest is protected. Our host guarantee protects hosts for up to \$US1 million, and that is free for all hosts. If you were to list that place you don't pay extra and you don't tick an extra box you are automatically covered by that. We also have host protection insurance that covers people for property damage or bodily injury again up to US\$1 million.

Mr ARMSTRONG - If one of those properties in there were listed with Airbnb and it burns to the ground you have it covered?

Mr THOMAS - Yes, but it is incredibly rare. I will bring this to life. In 2017 more than 49 million trips on listings worldwide, significant property damage - so claims that were reimbursed for over \$1000 is 0.004.

Mr ARMSTRONG - You have been through that and I understand that.

Mr THOMAS - I don't think I've given you that statistic, 0.004 of 1 per cent of stays would have a claim of more than \$1000.

Mr ARMSTRONG - It's been raised through the committees that Airbnb - I think Josh tossed the 1B class -

Mr WILLIE - Under the Building Code.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Under the Building Code and a lot of people have said yes that should be for safety reasons etcetera. It brings the playing field more even for the traditional accommodation houses. Do you think that is a reasonable thing to put on and who do you think should administer it? Should it be local councils look at it and should there be an annual fee for Airbnb hosts to pay to their local councils to do that?

Mr THOMAS - No, we absolutely do not think that would be appropriate for reasons that these are people's own homes, these are people's private property.

Mr ARMSTRONG - No, sorry, these are the ones that people are not living in like the one I told you around the west coast where they just come in buy the home, spend two or three days there painting it, touching it up and then go back to South Australia and have somebody managing it. Nobody is living in it, it is specifically for Airbnb.

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Mr THOMAS - No, we would think that would be entirely unreasonable. People have been able to do that for decades, buy holiday homes, stay in it sometimes and share in it when they are not there. It has been DA approved for people to live in. We don't think there should be a significant extra burden. By the way there is an extra burden at the moment under the current regime for somebody who is in that situation. If somebody is sharing their own home, the home they live in -

Mr ARMSTRONG - No, we're not talking about people who are sharing their own home, so take that out of the equation. I'm talking about a person -

Mr THOMAS - Okay, so that specific person does have to go through a process now here in Tasmania. They do have to go to council. There are three types of -

Mr VALENTINE - Over a certain size.

Mr THOMAS - Yes, there are three categories: you own home four bedrooms or less and is 200 square metres or less; there is a place you do not live in, a holiday home, for example, or investment property that is four bedrooms or less; and there is a third category that is an investment property of five bedrooms or more.

I will assume for the purposes of this question that Mr Armstrong is asking about the second category it is four bedrooms or less, it is on the west coast and the person doesn't live there they are from South Australia to use your example. By the way I haven't met anybody like that here, but in that situation that person does have to go to council. It is called permitted development and they do have to pay a one-off fee and do a self-assessment form and then council has the opportunity to enforce that.

Mr ARMSTRONG - It is a change of use from a traditional home.

Mr THOMAS - It is not a change of use it is regarded as a permitted use. The person has to go through a process with their council.

Mr VALENTINE - It is not a DA.

Mr THOMAS - It is not a DA.

Mr WILLIE - A DA is over the certain size.

Mr THOMAS - I think there's three -

Mr VALENTINE - There are three and you are talking about the middle one.

Mr THOMAS - Yes, talking about the permit. There is exempt, there is permitted, and the DA.

Ms RATTRAY - I have received those graphs, thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to go back to the statement that you made, Brent, in regard to the 32 000 vacant dwellings in Tasmania. Can you give me some idea where you got that from? I was surprised at that number.

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Mr THOMAS - My friend may be able to get that for me whilst I attempt the answer, but I think it is 2016 Census data. It was vacant dwellings. I am not exactly sure.

Mr WILLIE - That would include commercial properties and others, wouldn't it?

Mr THOMAS - No, it was vacant residential dwellings. I am happy to take that on notice.

Ms RATTRAY - I would like that clarified because some people don't bother filling out Census forms. If there is no one there to fill it out then it may effectively look like a vacant dwelling but not be. Somebody has decided they are not going to be home on the night they are supposed to be. I am interested in that. From the electorate that I represent, it is very rare for a dwelling to stay vacant very long. There is always someone looking for housing in some way, shape or form so I am quite interested in that.

I am interested to explore the MOU a bit more, Brent, while you get that other information if you can, or I am happy to take the more detailed information on vacant dwellings into the committee process when you can. The MOU with Victoria, can you expand on how that came about? Is that something your company is looking to do with all state governments?

Mr THOMAS - I just received something that may help us with that Census data in a sec.

The MOU with Victoria is based on something we have done elsewhere around the world. It first came out of Hurricane Sandy, the big hurricane that swept New York City a number of years ago. Crucially it was not our idea as a corporation. It came from our host community. Our hosts in New York City were saying they were trying to help with money, food hampers, baskets and things but would like to do more. They would like to list their property, to share rooms or homes with displaced people and emergency services workers.

At that time, and I might get some of the details slightly wrong here, but the broad theme is you previously were not able to list a space on Airbnb for less than \$10 per night and obviously through this process we wanted to be able to do it for free. Out of that became the movement from our hosts calling on us to get involved in emergency situations.

That has been the basis of the arrangement with the Victorian State Government, Emergency Management Victoria. It then goes beyond that. Again I am not super close to the detail, but it goes beyond saying we are going to work with our host community to provide places for free in the event of an emergency. It goes to also contemplating and gaming out with Airbnb Emergency Management Victoria. How would that work? How would we communicate with our hosts? What would we say to our guests? Let's pretend there is a bushfire in *x* place in Victoria. How do we contemplate we might be able to work together and help. That is the bones of Victoria. I am not super close to it but I do know that relevantly for your specific question, yes we would be happy to do that here in Tasmania.

Ms RATTRAY - Is that the only aspect of the MOU around sharing home stay accommodation in the event of a bushfire or an emergency?

Mr THOMAS - Yes. It is not the only part; it is a significant part. I also have a bit of a role in some other parts of the world and I know for example we communicated directly with our hosts in Bali when there was a volcanic eruption over there. We have a similar MOU with the City of

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Auckland in New Zealand that I've been involved in. Auckland is vulnerable to tsunamis, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. Once again there is a role there where we have educated our host communities and we can help, through them, to provide accommodation in times of emergency. The other big one and we had a couple of scares in - at least one scare I can recall in Auckland where we had to communicate with the council's emergency department about whether we do or don't warn our hosts and warn our guests around a pending natural disaster.

Ms RATTRAY - Are you willing to provide the committee with a copy of the MOU? Is that something that would be -

Mr THOMAS - If it's not sensitive I'm very happy to, and if it is I am very happy to provide a summary of what it includes.

Mr WILLIE - You could provide it to us in camera if you wanted to and keep that from the public.

Mr THOMAS - It may be that we're entirely happy to share. Let me take it on notice and see what we're able to do, but definitely happy to provide that to the committee. If the committee was so minded we would like for that to be something that you considered.

Mr VALENTINE - It would mean we wouldn't be able to use it in the final report in terms of quoting from it if it was in camera.

Mr THOMAS - I will see if I can get it for you out of that.

Mr VALENTINE - It would be preferable if we could.

Mr THOMAS - Do you want me to address her other question?

CHAIR - If you like.

Mr THOMAS - The question was about vacant places -

Ms RATTRAY - It was about the 32 000 vacant dwellings in Tasmania and you thought it was from 2016 Census data.

Mr THOMAS - I have a screen shot of that here, 32 135 and they are unoccupied private dwellings. They are private dwellings. They are not commercial dwellings.

CHAIR - I would like to go back before we go onto other. It was something you said previously when you were talking about the insurance, Lloyds of London. Are there any exclusions? We all know that most insurance companies if they can get out of something - are there certain requirements that the host has to have before they are covered by your insurance?

Mr THOMAS - No, there are not, but there are some exclusions. I'm not an expert.

CHAIR - They don't have to prove that they have - I see that it is self-assessment on your fact form. Do you randomly check the self-assessment from time-to-time to make sure that people have the things they say they have, or do they just tick a box and you take it?

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Mr THOMAS - The answer to your first question is that I'm not the insurance expert, but I understand there are no prerequisites and that every single host has access to both the host protection insurance and the \$1 million host guarantee, so no prerequisites for that.

There are some exclusions. I know some companies like IAG offer something called share cover and that goes over and above and provides insurance for some things that may not be covered.

CHAIR - I was thinking along the lines if there was a fire, someone was injured and there weren't wired-in smoke detectors, but they have ticked that there were, would that be covered? Would your insurance automatically cover someone, or would it not be covered because they haven't met the requirements of having the wired-in smoke detectors they said they had - I haven't seen your form.

Mr THOMAS - It's a good question. I don't want to mislead the committee, I think they are covered, but I'd like to take it on notice and get back to you specifically.

CHAIR - If you could, it is an interesting one whether people believe they are covered or they actually are covered.

Mr THOMAS - Some of the exclusions go to, for example, jewellery and some other things. We definitely cover the very big things.

CHAIR - I'm thinking more of personal injury or property.

Mr WILLIE - In your submission you talk about the economic benefits, \$86 million, which supports 599 jobs. How is the job figure calculated?

Mr THOMAS - That's a good question. The former premier of South Australia, Mr Weatherill, is an economist and a bunch of other people went to Deloitte Access Economics and Deloitte did the report on this. I will explain it as a non-economist as simply as I understand it -

Mr WILLIE - To another non-economist.

Mr THOMAS - More and more people come to Tasmania and they stay in local homes and then they go to Woolworths or Coles to buy groceries, they go to the café and buy more coffees, we ate at a great restaurant last night here in Hobart, so more and more spending. What happens with the incremental spend with more people coming and doing all those things, eventually it triggers more check-out people having to be put on, more chefs having to be put on, more cleaning staff, people who sometimes will get their Airbnb commercially cleaned. Obviously, that feeds into all of those things.

I have the Deloitte report here and there is a section that talks about how they generated that but that is as simple as I understand it.

Mr WILLIE - How many direct employees do you have? Is it only your two new lobbyists, Brad Stansfield and Brad Nowland, or do you have other direct employees in Tasmania?

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Mr THOMAS - It is interesting. My previous job was at MasterCard. When you think about the MasterCard in your pocket, it probably wasn't given to you by MasterCard; it was probably given to you by a bank. Same as when you go to a shop and you use your MasterCard on a device there, that device was probably not given to the café by MasterCard, it was given to people by their distributor.

Our distributors in Tasmania are our hosts. So it is about the people like Merrydith and others who you are going to hear from. They are not employees of the company but they are our representatives on the ground. They are our community and so are our guests. It is a bit like our hosts are our partners. They are doing that.

In terms of our representation, nothing is more important for our community than giving them great representation and we do that in all sorts of places including with some locals here in Tasmania.

Mr WILLIE - So you have two direct employees in Tasmania? Is that what you are saying?

Mr THOMAS - The two people you reference are not employees.

PUBLIC

Mr PETER LUTZ, AIRBNB HOST, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Welcome to the table.

Mr LUTZ - I have prepared a statement. I entered the short term rental market about two years ago after retiring from my career in the hospitality industry, renting out a single room in my house for short term rental only to have an additional income as well as a retirement project.

Openness and trust are very important to me. As I have engaged with my neighbourhood before joining Airbnb to discuss and solve possible upcoming issues.

Having strangers living in your house was a difficult proposal in the beginning, but the Airbnb online platform offers many opportunities to communicate between guests and host and reward quality service. As a responsible host, my guest's privacy, safety and wellbeing are of the utmost importance to me covering all aspects of insurance, fire safety and emergency procedures. After much uncertainty at the start regarding short-term rental regulations the current Government ruling gives me confidence and certainty to invest even further in the future to improve accommodation and services to my guests.

In January 2017 I was one of the first to join the Hobart Leaders Host Club, a committee acting and working with other hosts, engaging with the community and small local businesses. Meetings are held on a regular basis offering useful assistance and recommendations to other hosts, working on community projects and reaching out to local business. Since last year we have organised several meetings for hosts, invited a wide range of guest speakers, including fire safety experts, insurance advice, tourism operators and small local business. We also organise several small business expos for hosts, as well as several to promote local business and recommend venues, tourist attractions and services to hosts and guests.

The response from the business community has been overwhelmingly supportive and positive, recognising the growing importance of the short-term rental market to their business. Working and engaging with the local community has always been an important point for me to join the Leaders Host Club.

In November last year we successfully completed our first community project, a community library at the entrance on John Turnbull Park, Lenah Valley with the support of the Hobart City Council and Lenah Valley Primary School. The project has been a huge success encouraging young and old to enjoy literacy at the convenience of the neighbourhood with no reported damage or vandalism ever since. If I could table that project that we did last year. Currently we are working on a similar project for the suburb of Howrah and others to follow.

In July, Airbnb rolled out *The Quality Experiences for Guests* to book while staying in Hobart. With my previous hospitality background and tour guiding experience I applied and secured two experiences. The response has been fantastic and bookings are steady ever since.

How would I describe my Airbnb short-term rental experience? I treat each booking and guest professionally over a range of activities and experiences, advise on local attractions, restaurants, bars, and upcoming events, and even collected guests from the airport on occasions. For my Chinese visitors I have translated my service and recommendations into traditional

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Chinese language. To stay in touch with the local Chinese community I attend the events and talk to members of the Hobart Fujian Association on many occasions.

I have been very privileged to meet and host guests from all continents, most are very appreciative about the hospitality and warm reception and recommendations offered, with invitations to visit many of our guests overseas.

The current rules in short-term rental are working very well for me as a host and small operator. Under no circumstances would I consider long-term rental for my property and home. I would like to continue in my current role under the current regulations hosting guests, working and engaging with local business operators, continue working on community projects, and be a proud tourism representative for our island state.

Mr ARMSTRONG - For clarification, did you say you had a single room that you rented?

Mr LUTZ - A single room, yes.

Mr THOMAS - Could you talk about the experience you offer?

Mr LUTZ - Yes, I offer a one-and-a-half hour history walking tour once a month around Battery Point and I am also a qualified chef and do cooking classes.

Mr VALENTINE - What sort of feedback do you get from your patrons that are using your services, not about you in particular but the reasons why they use Airbnb? Do you ever get much feedback in that regard? Like, 'We use this because X, Y, Z.'

Mr LUTZ - Yes, I think what they like is the close personal relationship between guests and host, I guess. Also, my guests are very appreciative about recommendations we do, especially travel time. Sometimes it is underestimated travel time going north, east coast as well as local recommendations for perhaps bars.

My background is serving in hotels where I have worked all my life in big hotels, working at the Casino here for 30 years. It is a niche market for guests to get a bit more personal experience.

Mr VALENTINE - It would be a bit hard and you probably don't keep these sorts of records, but the percentage of people that might be travelling from other parts of the state to stay in your accommodation as opposed to coming from interstate or international. Do you have any -

Mr LUTZ - State, probably about 10 per cent maybe only in Tasmania. The majority come from interstate and probably about 40 per cent overseas. I have a massive Chinese market, Singaporean, and Hong Kong. The main attraction here is Tasmania but also to see the southern lights. Our property, my house, is located not very far away from the beach so doing night excursions and tours to see the southern lights. It is a big attraction for the Chinese market.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you for sharing your experience. It sounds fantastic and you are showcasing some of the best parts of Hobart. Well done for getting involved in the local school, it is in a great electorate.

Mr LUTZ - It was a very successful project and I wanted to get the local community involved, especially the school, to share some of the project. I was warned by council officials

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that there had been damage before and it was threatened that the project would be demolished if any damage occurred but after years, it is very successful and we get the engagement of the local community in Lenah Valley in refilling the books, especially the kids, they take it on and it is their project as well. That is what is important to me, to involve the teacher, the school kids so they take some ownership of the whole project.

Mr WILLIE - Fantastic. Do you think your circumstances where you are letting out a room should be approached differently when it comes to regulation to say your investment property? Do you think that different regulations should apply to those two scenarios?

Mr LUTZ - I am in the property market well before Airbnb. We have a managed apartment, a holiday apartment, in Queensland. I have a long-term rental house in Taroona as well and I share my home, only a room. I don't think should be approached differently. I have no regulations on my holiday apartment, and I have no regulations on my long-term so why should I be punished and get regulations on my home sharing?

Mr WILLIE - So you think the letting out of one room should be the same as investment properties as far as regulations go?

Mr LUTZ - Yes. As far as I know there are no regulations on investment properties.

Mr WILLIE - You have to obtain the permit.

Mr THOMAS - It is different in Queensland.

Mr LUTZ - Queensland, yes.

Mr WILLIE - Okay, but in Tasmania they are treated differently. Do you agree with that approach?

Mr LUTZ - The current regulations work very well for me. I am also aware of fire risk and safety procedures, being the supervisor and manager in the hotel industry. I know all about management risks, fire safety. In my home I have a guest manual and I go through the guest manual every time when they check in. It does not matter if they check in, in the morning or at 11 o'clock at night. I go through all the points and one of the points is emergency hospitals, doctors, emergency procedure, fire procedure, so we have a security point where we meet in case of a fire. That is all documented. I went to the hearing with the Hobart Fire Safety so I have fire extinguishers and wired alarms all over my house.

Mr WILLIE - That is great. I am sure your previous experience through your employment is very advantageous now.

Mr THOMAS - Mr Willie, our host community is broad and diverse and have their own views, but broadly their feedback to us is they are very supportive of the current rules and regulations and they are supportive of the Government's new draft bill.

Ms RATTRAY - The experience does sound awesome, Peter, so congratulations. Do you think the visitors who use your experience would still come to Tasmania, or do you think the fact that you do such a good job in promoting Tasmania and providing those experiences means that they would not have possibly come to Tasmania otherwise? Do you have a view about that?

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Mr LUTZ - I think a bit of both. I think Tasmania internationally has a very good reputation as a tourism destination. Also my host community would be good representatives of Tasmania providing a fantastic experience. Part of that experience is the closeness to the guest, offering services that you don't get in hotels. I also do local recommendations to local attractions, restaurants, bars and the total package of that experience makes them come back. Many of my guests return and friends of my guests stay, as they have been recommended and they are coming to Tasmania to visit. The news is definitely spreading.

Mr THOMAS - If I could add, this might be helpful, we've got some data that shows about 33 per cent of our guests say they wouldn't have taken a trip if it was not for Airbnb. A lot of people are choosing to travel not in the same way their parents and grandparents once did.

Ms RATTRAY - Thank you. I appreciate that and all the best for the future.

MR LUTZ WITHDREW.

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Mrs MERRYDITH CALLEGARI, Mr COLIN APPLEBY AND Ms CATHIE MAXWELL, AIRBNB HOSTS, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Welcome all. You have heard us introduce who is around the table and the fact that what you say here is protected by parliamentary privilege, but it may not be outside of the hearings. There is a sheet there about evidence if you just want to have a glance at it, the evidence that you give. It is being recorded and as I have mentioned it will be available on the committee website when it becomes available. Much along the same lines if you have some comments you might like to make and members can ask questions. There might be more questions for you, Brent, after the committee has listened to the hosts. Who would like to go first?

Mr APPLEBY - I think I am volunteered to go first. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. My wife retired three years ago after 46 years running a hairdressing salon. She found that she missed her client contact severely, so over the last three years we have offered our house - I say house, but I will explain later - on the short-term rental market through Airbnb, which is one of the platforms available today.

We close our Airbnb in the colder months, so it is only available during summer, late spring, early autumn. That allows us to travel overseas, which is partially paid for by the Airbnb earnings.

We provide a highly personalised, high quality experience for our guests and have over the last three years met a large number of lovely people, both as hosts and guests. We have gone overseas and used Airbnb overseas. A number of those have actually become friends.

We live on the property. We are a bit unusual; we live in an auxiliary building. We downsized but we kept the main building as our Airbnb, so it is all on one title.

Mr VALENTINE - To explain, is that in a chalet arrangement where you are in the chalet and the house -

Mr APPLEBY - I guess you could call it a granny flat. Council defines it as an 'auxiliary building'.

The building is three bedrooms and two bathrooms, and has been Cathie's principle residence since 1984. I came along a bit later.

As we are living adjacent to the home, we are accessible to our guests at short notice and can ensure there are no problems with noise, the house alarm, which can be difficult, parking, et cetera, as we respect our neighbours and we don't want to cause any problems.

We occupy a niche in the short-term market as we can accommodate seven to nine people in comfort with room for them all to congregate in the lounge, dining room or the kitchen, which are large rooms. A group of that size would need to book three to four hotel rooms and possibly still not have room to meet together.

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We promote local businesses where possible and employ locals to assist us in preparing the home. We employ a laundry service, we have a gardening service to keep the gardens neat and tidy, and we have assistance with cleaning on occasions.

We always meet our guests when they arrive and walk them through the house. I like showing them all the features, the location of the exits, show them how to work the alarm - which I said is a bit tricky, and we show them all the safety features - wired-in smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detector, we have exit signs, fire blanket, and fire extinguisher. All that is shown to the guests.

We attempt to provide all the amenities of a normal home over and above the normal you would get in a hotel, such as a welcome platter featuring Tasmanian produce. In the bathroom, for example, we have a professional hair straightener, selection of perfumes and colognes. In the kitchen we have a rice cooker as requested by our Asian guests, a coffee machine using Tasmanian coffee pods, and a charging station for phones and tablets, which is vitally important for guests.

We advise guests, based on their interest, what to see and what to do in southern Tasmania, and we also have a number of brochures from tourist operators in the house and we assist them wherever we can in other ways.

The example I will give is, we had a party of guests flying in from interstate. The plane was delayed by six hours which meant people arrived at our place after 9 p.m. They asked us to book a restaurant, but that was impossible because we found the kitchens were closed by then. After some backwards and forwards emails, I went to the local pizza house, bought them some pizzas, and arrived back at the house as their car pulled up. My wife will give other examples.

Mr THOMAS - I hope they gave you five stars.

Mr APPLEBY - They did. I would say we have been super hosts since we joined Airbnb which is 4.9 or better. On top of welcoming them we also farewell the guests when they go and make sure nothing has been left behind. Despite that we have discovered a few items left behind.

Mr VALENTINE - Not the other way round, a few items missing?

Mr APPLEBY - No, we have never had a problem with that.

One final comment, not only do we thorough enjoy what we do, I believe that the short-term rental market helps offset the lack of accommodation in Tasmania in the warmer months. We offer a service in that aspect.

Mr THOMAS - I briefly underline the point that the property appears as an entire home listing on our platform. It is not a home that has been taken off the Hobart housing market.

Mr APPLEBY - As I said, it is our principle residence since 1984.

CHAIR - So you would never have anyone renting it out full time?

PUBLIC

Mr APPLEBY - No. The nice thing about Airbnb is if you do have any problems with a guest, they are gone in a week. We have not had any problems yet. If you have a tenant, you will have problems over the longer term.

Mr VALENTINE - With respect to that, have you ever let that out as a long-term tenancy in the past?

Mr APPLEBY - No.

Mr VALENTINE - And your reasons why you would not do it? Is it because of possible damage to property, or other reasons, or you don't want people living that close to you?

Mr APPLEBY - We really don't want people living that close to us. The two houses are very close together as we occupy probably half the backyard with the auxiliary building.

Airbnb guests - they come, they sleep, they go out and see the sights so you don't see them during the day.

Ms MAXWELL - We don't see them much at night, they are normally sleeping by then - the restauranting and sleeping. I think the fact that after being such a quiet profession, I totally missed it, and that is why I went to Airbnb and we have only used Airbnb, nothing else.

I found the excitement - I think we have a lot to offer - because we are very good ambassadors within Tasmania and having been in the salon for so many years we certainly know what is there, what is available, what is on, where to go to, what is new and in Hobart at the moment, that is pretty full-on. There are so many new things taking place at the moment.

I think the fact that we offer something that perhaps a hotel doesn't but it is still a complimentary thing. We accepted a booking last New Year's Eve from a group trekking the Overland Track and they were arriving on New Year's Eve. I said would they like us to book something for them - a restaurant - but we would need to book it in advance. They suggested they would probably be pretty tired and weary so I said, 'Can I prepare something for you?'.

They were pretty excited when they opened the fridge and saw salmon, prawns, oysters, cold meats, dips, cheese and they said, 'Can we have Tasmanian boutique beer, cider and wines'. Well, it was a good shopping list but they were pretty impressed. They arrived late in the evening and they were just thrilled with the platters that we provided.

On another occasion we had guests from China who requested that we organise for them to visit the strawberry farm at Sorell. After some research we had to inform them that the farm was closed. It was closing early for road works. They were pretty upset. After exchanging a number of emails we managed to ascertain that they would be happy to look in our backyard.

We were amazed how interested they were in our strawberries, our tomatoes and our lemon tree. Many photos were taken in front of that lemon tree and our modest crops were very appreciated.

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It is important for us to remember that most Asian guests live in large cities, in apartments, have never seen planted crops in real life and I had no idea so I have just put to raised beds in this week and they have now got all their goodies in there.

I think the fact that we use local food shops, our local butcher - all of those things - they are so excited to think that that is where we are. From our Airbnb experiences with our host group - our host community - we have managed to meet lots of tourism people and what we have done now is we have all the brochures there but because we have met a lot of tourism people, themselves, we can tell them straight upfront what is really great about it.

I have had my house since 1984 and it has been my principal residence in that time. Thank you.

Mrs CALLEGARI - Good morning, my name is Merrydith Callegari. I live in Lenah Valley and I would like to thank you for allowing me to tell you about my hosting journey today.

CHAIR - We are very happy you are here.

Mrs CALLEGARI - A few years ago I had to retire from full-time work due to illness, however I still had a need to be productive and earn an income and save for my real retirement.

About that time my best friend listed her in-home apartment on the Airbnb platform and started hosting. By the way, her is called an entire house but it is an in-home apartment. This made me think about our home. We had a great guest apartment downstairs and we have been hosting friends, family and even strangers from the mainland and overseas for years, free of charge.

I thought, 'Why not use it to earn extra money?'. Our home was sitting there mostly unused since our kids left home. It just needed a little facelift, some extra insurance cover, some safety features including all the required fire safety requirements and a bit of photography for the platform. We listed two and a half years ago and we love it.

We have been super hosts since just after we started which means that we are rated consistently at an average of 4.9 out of five stars for things like cleanliness, accuracy, check in, communication, value, et cetera. Airbnb allows us to rent our apartment out when we want. If there is a time we don't want visitors we block it in our calendar.

Short-term renting means no difficult tenants who you cannot get out of your home. Like many others I would never rent long-term in my home. Robbie and I are passionate about Tasmania and we love recommending great Tasmanian businesses or places to our guests. Our state needs tourism and we think STRs - short-term rentals - help Tasmania meet the accommodation shortfall. However, now they have become more than that. Many of the people we host tell us they only stay in STRs as it is a friendlier style of accommodation. It is a greener option as it utilises unused parts of existing buildings. It has made travel more affordable so that they can travel further and more often.

I talk to other hosts regularly due to the fact that I'm involved in the Host Club and many tell me they don't know what they would do without the income from their listing. Many are baby boomers, like me, who don't have large super funds and this money helps them pay their

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mortgage, live a little better, travel themselves, and maybe save for a rainy day. Airbnb is unique in that it empowers hosts, it develops trust between hosts and guests, it encourages personalisation of listings, it helps visitors feel like they belong in a city rather than just visit it, and it encourages community.

For me, trust is a big thing, but most of all I love the sense of community. As our city gets larger it is good to find community. I get it from the interaction with guests who sometimes become friends and from the wider host community. Early in my Airbnb journey I started Tassie's first Airbnb Host Club mainly because there was a constant need for advocacy with regard to government regulation and claims that we are somehow responsible for housing shortages, but also because I saw the need for hosts to have a network or community of hosts.

Our club started in January 2017 and along with a small, but dedicated, group we organise meet ups. The meet ups vary, but they consist of things like social meet ups, information and workshop meet ups, especially when there is a need for advocacy, or we've had the Fire Service come, we've had insurance talks and we've had tax information. We stress the need for fair regulation. We have small business expos where we give Tasmanian businesses a forum to link with STR hosts, which is not done anywhere else. We have community projects where we give back to the community. Peter talked about our community library, which is opposite my grandchildren's school. I check the library every week when I drop the grandchildren at school and it is ticking along beautifully. The Lenah Valley Community Association recently messaged me to say that the children's drawer was empty after school holidays and could anybody fill it. Straight away there were people from the community saying, 'We've got some books' and they filled it up. It is wonderful.

We also do what we call 'merchant walks' where we take people from the host community around various areas, such as North Hobart. We take them to meet the different business owners in the area and they can then tell them what they can offer to the guests. We also provide free host tools to assist with professionalism.

In closing, I believe that Airbnbs or STRs are vital if we are to continue to take advantage of the current tourism boom and forever dispel the 'Slobart' tag that has haunted me for many years. They have their own niche role and meet a need that hotels don't. Unlike many hotel chains all bar 3 per cent of my guest's total spend stays here in Tasmania.

I understand that Government needs to answer the concerns of the wider Tasmanian community and implement fair home sharing rules, but I believe that for those who, like me, host in their principle place of residence there should be no or little restriction. Why should the Government be able to tell me who I can host in my own home and for how long? Government does not regulate long-term rental that way. They are not regulated out of existence. If our children want to come back home to live, as they did a while back with their husbands and families, no-one legislates against them. If I have non-paying guests, no-one cares. Why should that change just because I am doing it on an Airbnb platform and earning money that may save me if my country cannot give me a pension in the future? My neighbours are not disadvantaged because I have strong house rules and my guests are more respectful of the neighbourhood than some of my neighbours.

Whilst this is my journey and the opinions expressed are also mine, I am confident that a majority of hosts have similar opinions. Thank you for listening.

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Ms RATTRAY - Thank you very much for sharing your story. Merrydith, when you first established your Airbnb - and you have talked about the compliance you undertook - who advised you about that, or was it something you did off your own bat?

Ms CALLEGARI - It is something we did off our own bat. There are things on the platform that tell you what is expected.

Ms RATTRAY - You have your own insurance on top of the Lloyd's of London insurance that comes with being an Airbnb host?

Ms CALLEGARI - Yes. Airbnb do encourage that.

Ms RATTRAY - But you have your own insurance?

Ms CALLEGARI - We do, yes. I think it is important. There are a lot of other things that can happen and I would prefer to err on the side of caution rather than not.

CHAIR - And a million dollars is not that much when it comes to claims.

Ms CALLEGARI - No.

CHAIR - Any more questions, Tania?

Ms RATTRAY - No, it was very well explained.

Mr WILLIE - Both the situations you have described, if it gives you any comfort, the committee has not heard a whole lot of evidence against those sorts of situations. If that gives you some comfort, I will share that with you.

Ms CALLEGARI - There are some issues that impact on people like us in the community who are doing it. There are things that impact on us - even though we are in-home, the perceptions in the community impact on us. Statements made by the university - I have had email conversations with Peter Phibbs from the New South Wales uni and with Richard from the University of Tasmania. They have upwards of 6000 overseas students per year - where do they stay? The university can only accommodate 1000 to 1500 of them.

Mr WILLIE - I think they have accepted they are part of the -

Ms CALLEGARI - They are working on it, in that they try to offset onto us, where I don't believe that is the case.

Mr WILLIE - Is it because it is the general public and they get confused about the genuine homesharing, as you have both described, and then the investment?

Ms MAXWELL - Instead of all the other companies.

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

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Ms CALLEGARI - The majority of hosts that we talk to in the host community, that's what they are. There might be some who do investments but the majority are in-home or homesharers. They want to do the right thing for Tassie and they sort of feel they are being hurt or -

Mr WILLIE - Maligned.

Ms CALLEGARI - Yes, maligned. I guess that's the message I want to get across.

Mr WILLIE - I am interested in the food preparation. What sort of health regulations do you have to comply with to serve food as part of your bed and breakfast?

Ms MAXWELL - It is a very good question. I taught retail and hospitality only recently, towards the end of my hairdressing career, to some disadvantaged young ones. I had to go through all those particular skills myself and learn about food handling and safety aspects. Obviously producing that, it was no different. I did as much detail with it as I would presenting a dinner party of my own. It is in the kitchen, very well set out. It has everything required or needed. Literally on the day it was put there, prepared. So understanding food handling and safety aspects I'm very aware of that, so no different to what I would have. With that skill I already do that in my home anyhow.

Mr WILLIE - There are no health regulations that apply, because it's a commercial business?

Ms MAXWELL - I give them breakfast automatically. We supply breakfast for them, or continental breakfast and all of that is exactly the same. I do a platter, no different to that. Most places probably -

Mr APPLEBY - They are products that are not likely to cause any problems. Packages, cheeses, biscuits -

Ms MAXWELL - We use per person serves of butter and jams and stuff like that.

Mr APPLEBY - The only other thing based on the example Cathie used supplying a platter like that is definitely the exception.

Ms MAXWELL - It's not all the time. I did that as a nice New Year's Eve.

Mr APPLEBY - You've done it twice through the years.

Ms MAXWELL - Only because of the simple reason, it was quite interesting when they suggested they wanted Tasmanian local beers and so I said, 'Alright.' Then I had to research and I said do you want Moo Brew, then I had to do a bit more effort and work, but it was quite exciting. Their comments were really fantastic. In fact, we had other people stay who said they were friends of theirs and they were so impressed with not only our food, but the way things happen in Tassie.

Mr VALENTINE - The council is not putting any stricture on?

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Mr THOMAS - No, I mean you have someone around to your house for a barbecue and you have no additional health regulations. This is these people's own homes. If your brother and your cousin came around for a meal -

Mr ARMSTRONG - But people are paying for this. If someone comes to your home for a barbecue they don't pay.

Mr THOMAS - They might bring a bottle of wine.

Ms MAXWELL - They're not paying for the food, though. They don't pay for the food.

Mr APPLEBY - We provide accommodation and we provide a welcome platter, which we've already described, but we don't provide any other cooking for them. They are on their own resources.

Ms MAXWELL - They use my kitchen.

Mr APPLEBY - They buy their own food and cook their own food.

Ms MAXWELL - I don't prepare anything else for them. Only for the simple reason they couldn't get to a restaurant by the time they arrived.

Mr APPLEBY - Basically they had no idea when they were going to arrive.

Mr THOMAS - As I said earlier, I stayed at a place at Lindisfarne with a beautiful kitchen, but not a commercial kitchen, no extra regulation. I helped myself to a cup of tea this morning and so forth, again, no additional regulations. The idea that somebody who is sharing their own home, their own private property, should have to jump additional hurdles to supply a cup of tea or something -

CHAIR - We did hear from someone down the north-west coast, though, that had a similar situation where they have a home and they live in the bungalow. Other members might remember that the council checked the temperature of their milk.

Mr THOMAS - One thing I probably have done a bad job today explaining is I'm not sure if members have used Airbnb, but if you have there is what we call a double blind review system. Unlike - I won't name other platforms where I could go online now and say, 'The coffee at the nearby café is terrible or it is great.' I do not have to ever have been there, because I just might know the owner or dislike the owner or something, so I might have an agenda. You cannot do that on Airbnb. You cannot leave a review for a host or for a guest unless you have a closed financial transaction.

Mr VALENTINE - After the transaction is finished?

Mr THOMAS - I will have an email today, 'What do you think of the place at Lindisfarne.' And I have given ratings and stars and so forth and they will do the same for me. What that drives is the very best in human behaviour. I made my bed this morning because I want that great rating and I want other people to accept me as a guest. I can tell you if there was off milk at an Airbnb I stayed at - it has never happened - but that person would not get a kind review.

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I understand policy maker's preference to regulate, but sometimes this is self-regulating as well.

Ms MAXWELL - They're your customers and they regulate you.

Mr ARMSTRONG - You do reviews for motels too. There is nothing new in what you are doing.

Mr APPLEBY - The difference is one or two bad reviews for an Airbnb will kill your business. A hotel can survive a few bad reviews. There is a difference.

Mr THOMAS - You can leave a review about a hotel having never stayed there.

Mr WILLIE - Brent, does your platform provide advice for local health regulations, say if a host contacts you and says, 'I'm not sure about this,' does your platform provide that sort of advice?

Mr THOMAS - Yes, we have a responsible hosting section on our platform and we encourage people to make sure they tick all the right boxes and go through the right processes.

Mr WILLIE - My specific question is, do you provide advice for the local area, so Tasmania being different to Victoria or whatever?

Ms CALLEGARI - No.

Mr WILLIE - If somebody contacts you and says, 'I would like to serve this, do I have to comply with health regulations?'

Ms CALLEGARI - No, but we are encouraged to go to our own councils.

Mr THOMAS - To put yourself in our shoes, we are in 191 countries and those that we're not in are Iran, Syria and North Korea. Interestingly, again with your political background, our CEO went with former president Obama to Cuba. We were the first multinational allowed back into Cuba after the trade sanctions came about.

There were four, Iran, Syria, North Korea and Cuba. Now there are three. Cuba is back in. Within that, there is something like north of 80 000 cities and jurisdictions around the world. It would not be a scale business like ours. It would not be the sort of thing we could say, 'Hobart City Council says x and Glenorchy Council says y ', and do that 80 000 times.

We are a platform where hosts list, guests come and stay but we certainly encourage people to comply with all the local rules and regulations.

Mr VALENTINE - You go to a certain point. I wanted to talk to Merrydith. Well done on setting up such an interesting host club. I am sure you have lots of fun. I am curious as to what the fire department might be telling you in those sorts of circumstances. Are they telling you how to keep your guests safe, what to put in place?

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Mrs CALLEGARI - Yes. They have given their own handouts at our information sessions so our hosts are equipped with all the fire service handouts and stickers for their walls or windows or wherever. I have mine on the door where they would go out so they would know. Basically they come along and tell it like it is. I have heard about this new thing they want to do -

Mr VALENTINE - Smoke alarms -

Mrs CALLEGARI - No, we are all doing that.

Mr VALENTINE - No, the linking with the exit lights.

Mrs CALLEGARI - I have lighting that is on all night in the hallway for my guests. It is low-level lighting and stays on so they can see their way out.

This thing about so many meters of an open area is a real problem in Hobart. How many of us do not live within 100 meters or whatever it is, as the crow flies. That is going to be a big problem.

Mr VALENTINE - Sorry, I am not 100 per cent sure what you are saying there.

Mrs CALLEGARI - Bushfires.

Mr VALENTINE - You are talking about bushfire zones.

Mrs CALLEGARI - Yes. I live in Lenah Valley which is an inner city suburb really -

Mr VALENTINE - But some of it is close to the bush.

Mrs CALLEGARI - It is close to the bush. All of Lenah Valley is within that zone.

Mr VALENTINE - So they talked to you about fire management plans and those sorts of things.

Mrs CALLEGARI - They have talked about that, yes.

Mr APPLEBY - About the fire safety, we have not illuminated signs, we have exit signs and we have night lights as well. I contend that the difference in complexity of getting out of a hotel where it can be a rabbit warren and you need illuminated signs to get out, we have an entrance at the front, entrance at the back with signs and it is illuminated. It is dead easy to get in and out of there.

Mr VALENTINE - They are also on site are they?

Mr APPLEBY - We are on site as well and if there was a fire I am sure we would hear the alarms.

Mrs CALLEGARI - I have stayed in hotels. I am sure you have. How many of them have you read their thing on the back of the door? My husband reads it every single time.

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Mr APPLEBY - I do.

Mrs CALLEGARI - Most people do not read it so they would not have a clue where to go but my guests know. I tell them everything when they arrive.

Mr APPLEBY - It is the only way to do it.

Mrs MAXWELL - Merrydith, when the fire department handed out their brochures they were also in Chinese.

Mrs CALLEGARI - Yes they were, which was fantastic, so we had that as a benefit. That was really great. The minute you start getting reviews, it spreads.

Mr VALENTINE - Good reviews.

Mrs CALLEGARI - Yes, and it is quite amazing. Between Hong Kong and Singapore and other places.

Mr APPLEBY - We had one Asian guest who sent us an email asking if we had a rice cooker. Yes, we do.

Mr VALENTINE - Mind you, giving special treatment when they arrive might become 'oh, we want that please'. You might be making a rod for your own back.

Mrs MAXWELL - I am sure we have all stayed in places, whether it be a hotel or only a BnB, where we have queried what a bed was like. We went to the trouble and bought quality beds, we have good linen, and we use a laundry because after 46 years of hair dressing I was not washing anything else. I had done enough. We have a laundry and that is great. They do a wonderful job as well so I find that important to me because I can be doing other things than washing.

It is lovely when you see the look on people's faces when we take them through the house. They look at the back of the house and they go, 'the laundry, pantry, kitchen - this is as big as our house'.

Mr VALENTINE - With regard to regulation, traditional bed and breakfast as opposed to the Airbnb bed and breakfast, we have heard evidence that they have to jump a few hurdles to be able to trade because of the nature of their business - or did. Would you be comfortable in jumping those same hurdles?

Ms MAXWELL - Is that for bed and breakfast as in cooking breakfast?

Mr VALENTINE - Well, it is bed and breakfast provisions.

Ms MAXWELL - I don't cook breakfast.

Mrs CALLEGARI - We don't cook. It is up to them. It is self-catering.

Ms MAXWELL - We provide continental breakfast for them to make themselves.

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Mr APPLEBY - Bed and breakfast also tend to be multiple rooms, simultaneous.

Mr VALENTINE - If you have more than one family, is what you are saying.

Mr APPLEBY - Yes, so it is a different marketplace, I think.

Mr VALENTINE - That is interesting, thank you.

Ms RATTRAY - I know this is a little bit of detail but we did hear on the east coast that there was a host who had a minimum of two nights. They said that they just couldn't make enough money out of being the hosts for one night only. Is that something that you do as well?

Mr APPLEBY - Yes, we have a minimum of two nights. It is not really the cost. It is the effort involved. If you have a guest for one night you then have to clean, change the bedding and everything. That gets a bit onerous - okay, we are over 60 and we don't want to make a rod for our own back.

Mr THOMAS - To elaborate on that, it goes to a point I failed to make. One of the differences with Airbnb from some of the other sharing economy platforms is that the host is in charge. So somebody who might drive a share-car vehicle or do something else, the algorithm will tell them how much they are getting paid. They do not get a choice. The hosts in our case always choose how much money they are charging - they set their own price. If they want to make it very high or very low, that is up to them. They can also set their own boundaries including the one you asked about, like the number of nights. Some people will do one night but they might put an extra cleaning fee or something onto it to reimburse them for having to change sheets after one night or whatever it is.

It is a key difference in how we empower people because our hosts here do make their own decisions. We might tell Colin and Cathie, 'Hey, you have a three-bedroom home, you are near to Hobart, we think you might want to charge between X and Y for this part of the year when the Sydney to Hobart is on but, ultimately, they can say, 'We don't agree and we are going to make it higher or lower', that is ultimately up to them.

Mrs CALLEGARI - And the cleaning involved. I clean my apartment to within an inch of its life after every guest. I spray the mattress; I make sure it is spotlessly clean. You can't do that every single day. That is just ridiculous so I prefer a minimum of two nights.

Mr ARMSTRONG - We have heard from different people saying that local councils should have the ability to limit the number of Airbnbs in certain areas like, for instance, Battery Point or wherever it may be or in their municipality. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr THOMAS - One of the great things about the Tasmanian model is that it is statewide and it provides Tasmanians with certainty regardless where they live. What you used to have was a situation where people living in 29 different councils may have had 29 different regimes. We support the statewide approach and that is the trend. South Australia went first, Tasmania went second, and New South Wales and Victoria are all serving statewide things. So we support the current model.

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Mr WILLIE - There is a new planning directive though, so Battery Point and Wapping, to a certain extent, are treated differently.

Ms MAXWELL - We went to the council three years ago and we were one of the very early ones. I know at that time our insurance guy said to us, 'We don't need surprises. We need to know that you are legal'. So we did all that paperwork and that was quite interesting because that was for another inquiry.

Mr THOMAS - That was prior to the new rules, Cathie, wasn't it?

Ms MAXWELL - Yes, it was. It was good because we got that paperwork out the other day and, yes, we are still legal which is good. But under this new system now we don't need to do what we are doing because it is actually our home.

Mr APPLEBY - And it is three bedrooms.

Mr ARMSTRONG - We are hearing from different organisations that people don't know how many Airbnbs are in Tasmania because there is no registration process. Councils raised the Battery Point issue - parking, et cetera - and they think there should be some more information.

Mrs MAXWELL - We live in Lord Street near the uni.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Like Queenstown, the parking.

Mr APPLEBY - Yes, terrible.

Mr THOMAS - There is registration for people who are sharing their non-primary places of residence, or if it is their primary home and it is five bedrooms or more. There is some. Your question really goes to transparency. You have made a point, Mr Armstrong, that councils may not have the data and they may not know how many they have. That is why we understand and support the Government's proposed draft bill which is going to provide a lot more information about that.

Mr WILLIE - On that, and you have taken it on notice, but are you able to provide the committee with data of the number of listings per government area?

Mr THOMAS - I can take it on notice. To be open, we don't collect data in that way. If, for example, you were to list your home, it is apparent to us where that home is but we do not automatically know without shape files and so forth, which local government area it is in.

CHAIR - But you have state-wide?

Mr THOMAS - Yes, we certainly have state-wide. The intent of the draft bill, the information will be passed over to Government and they will be able to decipher that.

Mr WILLIE - On that question on notice, you gave an undertaking earlier to provide the number of listings in Tasmania and the percentage that were whole properties, then the same things for greater Hobart. Are you able to also provide percentages for multi-listings?

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Mr THOMAS - Help me understand the question. Do you mean a person who is sharing more than one listing?

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Mr THOMAS - I think so. I will certainly take it on notice. To caveat that, there will be some double counting there as well. For example, a person who has a granny flat, one listing, but then they share their whole home as well and they share a room. That could be three or four listings for the one property. You may get a bit of an over-count but we might be able to provide you the sort of data you are talking about.

Mr WILLIE - You can put the caveats on the data if you like.

Mr THOMAS - Exactly.

Mr APPLEBY - Wouldn't that count as one physical address?

Mr THOMAS - I hope so.

Mr APPLEBY - That would eliminate the multiple listings for one property.

Mr ARMSTRONG - If I ring up or go to Airbnb and want to list my property on Airbnb, what information do you ask me?

Mr THOMAS - I have to step through the process and some detail to remind myself, Mr Armstrong, but we ask you to provide a range of different things: photographs; an outline of what it is you are sharing - is it a room, is it a whole home, is it a shared room?

Mr ARMSTRONG - If you ask for that information, you should be able to give all of that to us.

Mr THOMAS - All those things are available on the platform, the photos and so forth.

CHAIR - You only don't provide the address until someone pays, is that right?

Mr THOMAS - That is right.

Mr APPLEBY - Or their proof of ID, I hope.

Mrs CALLEGARI - That is on the platform. You go to the plus sign as if you want to put a listing on and it will take you all the way through it. You can have a look on my phone if you would like.

Ms ARMITAGE - Is all that, like you are saying, they have a process they have to go through here in Tasmania to do it. You asked whether that process has been complied with.

Mr THOMAS - We ask hosts to ensure they are complying with all the local rules and regulations. At the moment, under the new draft bill as I understand it, there will be some

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additional obligations where a host will have to certify whether they have a permit, whether they don't need a permit and so forth, to more align our platform and others with the regulatory regime.

Mr ARMSTRONG - If they need a permit, will you ask for a copy of that permit?

Mr THOMAS - I don't know whether we have got to that level of detail yet. That is one option. I think that is cumbersome. Another option would be they provide a permit number for example. There are a few different models around.

CHAIR - Let us have a 10 minute break. We may have a few more questions.

Short suspension.

CHAIR - Welcome back.

Mrs CALLEGARI - Our place is listed for emergency housing needs in Tasmania. We are free of charge on the emergency housing in the Airbnb platform and there are quite a lot of other hosts.

Mr VALENTINE - Sorry, just explain exactly what that means.

Mrs CALLEGARI - The Airbnb platform asks hosts who care to list their home for emergency housing in the event of a catastrophe like a bushfire or whatever. It is your own choice and we are listed and many other hosts that I speak to are listed as well. It is available in Tasmania in case of emergency.

Mr VALENTINE - For a period of time, does it say?

Mrs CALLEGARI - You wouldn't want to be doing it forever.

Mr VALENTINE - No, as in a week, two weeks.

Mrs CALLEGARI - No one has ever asked me so I guess it would depend on the situation.

Mr VALENTINE - No, I was wondering whether in listing it that it says a minimum or something like that.

Mrs CALLEGARI - I don't know that it does, does it, Brent?

Mr VALENTINE - We are talking about the emergency housing.

Mrs CALLEGARI - It doesn't ask you for how long you would offer your home, does it? I cannot remember it saying how long but I think it would be your choice. It is emergency housing so you would hope that they would be able to -

Mr THOMAS - Typically what happens is we partner with emergency departments and they have a triage model because not everybody is going to be suitable for Merrydith's home so there is often a whole triage.

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CHAIR - They might not want to move out.

Mrs CALLEGARI - No, they might not.

Mr THOMAS - I want to answer questions but I have a couple of other commitments coming up. Do you think we will be finished by midday?

CHAIR - Yes, midday. My question is in regard to the registration that has been mentioned. I have seen from your submission that you are not happy with it. But I was wondering from the hosts' perspectives, would you be happy with perhaps a one-off registration fee? I know that has been mooted with some councils, a one-off fee to be listed so that the councils, whether it be state government or whether it be the councils - probably the state in order to have one list.

Mr THOMAS - Our position is we do support the current model which includes some registration but just not for people's primary homes.

CHAIR - My question was even the primary home so that the authorities are aware of what is available for rent, whether it be a primary home or separate accommodation.

Mr APPLEBY - Two comments, we did register under the prior planning agreement and, secondly, I have a long-term rental as well - I don't have to register that. I just go out and advertise it and it gets filled and we sign up an agreement. No level of government gets involved.

CHAIR - The Accommodation Association mentioned to us Bondi and Byron Bay and were simply saying that, particularly Byron, with the lack of long-term rentals and residences that the viability of the school all of a sudden came under threat because there were so many short stays there. Issues like that in a small community could become a problem. All of a sudden you have fewer locals. That way they would have an awareness of what is happening.

I understand what you are saying with the long-term rentals but long-term rental is still like a local living there as opposed to a transient person.

Mrs CALLEGARI - I would be happy for there to be a register and I would be happy to put my name on a register.

CHAIR - I was thinking a one-off fee, not an annual.

Mrs CALLEGARI - I don't understand why I would have to pay a fee on short term in my own home, especially as long term aren't made to pay that fee either. The other thing is that councils tend to be very political and I know Hobart City Council has had some issues. In fact I wrote to the Premier about it. If it was up to me I would take it out of the hands of councils because I think it should be a statewide thing and it should be a statewide registration, yes. But I don't see why I should have to pay a fee.

CHAIR - There is always a cost to administration.

Mr THOMAS - It depends what the objective of registration is right but if it so that there is a disclosure of information so every council and the state Government knows where all the Airbnbs are, I think you are going to find that is going to happen through the current draft bill.

PUBLIC

If it is about transparency of data, I think they are solving for that anyway. If it is about something else then the concern would be do you have to pay money or ask permission to use their own home.

Mr VALENTINE - It is the situation where, if you have everyone registered, and it might be a minor fee, that at least you are getting whole data that you can deal with and that the local government areas might be able to use to look at the situation that exists in their area.

For instance, somewhere like Hobart might have a problem - Battery Point certainly had a problem - and the question is should local government be able to have that information so they can then, I suppose, have some input into where short stay accommodation exists because of the impact that it might be having somewhere on the east coast there might be a dearth of accommodation in some of these more remote areas where Airbnb or short stay accommodation is more welcome and they want to increase it in certain areas.

The local government would be the best placed to be able to do that. That was the concept that was being floated. With that concept in mind, would you see that local government might be involved? Not in terms of setting a regulation like a statewide regulation.

Mr THOMAS - I think the councils are going to get that information through the current process.

Mrs CALLEGARI - But anecdotally there have been instances where hosts have tried to register with the council and have been refused even though they are legally able to do so.

Mr VALENTINE - Sorry, which councils are we talking about now?

Mrs CALLEGARI - Hobart.

Mr VALENTINE - So they have approached the Hobart City Council?

Mrs CALLEGARI - Anecdotally I have been given this information that they have approached the council to do their secondary category - just the registration not the DA or whatever -

Mr VALENTINE - To get a permit not a DA?

Ms CALLEGARI - Yes, and they've been refused and then later on when they've gone to - what do you call it - the committee that -

Mr VALENTINE - The Planning Committee?

Ms CALLEGARI - The appeals -

Mr VALENTINE - The Planning Appeals Tribunal.

Ms CALLEGARI - When they've gone there they've been able to because obviously they are legal.

PUBLIC

Mr APPLEBY - When we registered under the prior scheme we had to go back to them twice. They asked for additional information and then came back with a, 'Yes, but.'

Mr VALENTINE - What sort of information?

Mr APPLEBY - They wanted a map of the suburb, a map of the plot of the property itself, each building on the property, size is given, and also we had to mark out our parking spots for the visitors.

Mr THOMAS - Philosophically we say you should not need a lawyer and an accountant to share your own home. One of the great beauties about the current scheme is that it doesn't allow 29 different councils to take 29 different approaches. It is a uniform model and we would hate to go back to an environment where council X is supportive but council Y is not and you get this mismatch.

Mr VALENTINE - I don't think the scenario was that the regulation would be different. It is just -

Mr THOMAS - You're talking transparency of data, aren't you?

Mr VALENTINE - The idea of having a registration is simply so that we get complete data.

Mr THOMAS - You are going to get that through the new law, I think, that is what I'm trying to say.

Mr VALENTINE - I don't know what the new law is because I haven't seen it, but I've been told a little bit by my colleague here, but we don't necessarily get the privilege of that. Sometimes we do if it goes out for public consultation.

Mr THOMAS - I think it was out - we got our submission in on 31 October.

Mr VALENTINE - That is fine and we will get the results of that no doubt when we deal with it. I was just interested in your attitude to that concept of local government being able to look at where they see these things placed as opposed to what standards they have to meet. That would be a statewide standard.

Mrs CALLEGARI - I support the current model, but I would register if I had to as long as it wasn't too onerous and a one-off thing. Most hosts that I speak with would probably feel the same but, as I have just said, I would prefer it to be a non-political -

Mr VALENTINE - You wouldn't want it to cost you hundreds of dollars.

Mr APPLEBY - No.

Mrs CALLEGARI - No, it wouldn't be worthwhile.

Mr APPLEBY - Because she has already paid that.

PUBLIC

Mrs CALLEGARI - I'm not earning that much money from what I do. It is enough to empower me a little, but we are not going to slay giants here.

Ms MAXWELL - The other thing, too, is we only open probably four or five months a year so when you see a 'whole of house' we're not there all year, because in the quieter months or when it is cooler realistically I cannot see the rationale of having my heat pumps running.

CHAIR - You're not making any money.

Mr APPLEBY - Not with 12-foot high ceilings, no.

Mr VALENTINE - You might be hightailing it out to Queensland or something.

Ms MAXWELL - That is the way we look at it. We're just about to open ready for this season.

CHAIR - Do you have a heritage house? I just thought with the 12-foot high ceiling?

Mr APPLEBY - No. We're in the heritage precinct, but it is not a heritage house.

CHAIR - You don't have float glass?

Mr APPLEBY - No, it's a 1950s build. It's old enough to have 12-foot high ceilings, which is horrendous to heat in winter.

Mr WILLIE - If we could move to another topic.

CHAIR - If no one else is on this same topic, that is fine.

Mr WILLIE - We've heard evidence from the Australian Accommodation Association and they were talking about a pointed consumption tax. I had a look through your submission and you actually administer taxes across the globe. Is that something that you would consider in Tasmania or across jurisdictions in Australia?

Mr THOMAS - To take tax the fundamental point is our hosts keep most of the money not the organisation. It is a community-based model and I don't think you are interested necessarily in me stepping you through all of the different taxes that are available. In terms of those taxes that we do collect in 500 plus places around the world that is something that we do. That and a consumption tax are not proposed here and not the Government's position. If they were we would be very happy to have a look at them.

Mr WILLIE - You are open to considering other taxation measures?

Mr THOMAS - As a principle we would be open to considering proposals. They would have to, though, apply to all accommodation providers equally and not single our community out in a way that -

Mrs MAXWELL - Those taxes are not liked by our guests.

PUBLIC

Mr WILLIE - Bed tax.

Mrs MAXWELL - We stayed in Rome and we had the situation where we had to pay \$2 each.

Mrs CALLEGARI - But everybody has to pay that even in hotels in Rome, in the whole of Italy. When you are booking on the platform you see the cost per night and then you go to book and it comes up with an extra \$300 American, it is a bit daunting to people. Yesterday I had someone ring me and say, 'What is going on? I am trying to book an apartment in Canada and every time I try to book, it puts an extra \$300 on and that is only for two nights stay'. That is because of bed taxes.

Mr APPLEBY - We just booked a hotel in Majorca and that was \$2686 for three couples for four nights. By the time it went through it was \$2800 something, so it was over 200 Euros of extra cost.

Mrs CALLEGARI - Sometimes that is the difference between a guest coming and a guest not coming. They want to come, but certain people on the platform expect it not to be that sort of price, so if they are coming they are coming with Airbnb and if they are not coming because it is too expensive, they may not come.

Mr WILLIE - That would depend on the rate wouldn't it?

Mrs CALLEGARI - Yes, it depends on the rate, but if you have \$300 put on top of two nights when my rate for two nights isn't that much.

Mr THOMAS - If I can say, the Accommodation Association of Australia, Richard Munroe who I think you heard evidence from, he has to some extent become a personal friend of mine. We get on very well, but his organisation has an anti-Airbnb agenda. They regularly propose measures that would hurt our community because they want to prop up the bottom lines of their members. I encourage the committee to see anything that they advocate through the lens of that competitive prism.

CHAIR - He had a \$1 million fine didn't he?

Mr WILLIE - Yes, he did have a million dollar fine proposal.

Mr THOMAS - That is the equivalent of the cost of two homes in Hobart. It saw 726 weeks of the average weekly wage.

Mr WILLIE - You might be able to clarify for me but there is a point of consumption tax operating in Byron Bay isn't there?

Mr THOMAS - No, not that I am aware of. The mayor there, Simon Richardson, is a Green. They are continuing to propose all sorts of different things. They have some stuff on the table at the moment. I am not across the detail. We have talked with mayor Richardson in the past about some options but I would have to take on notice any specific. I am not aware of a consumption tax in Byron.

PUBLIC

Mr WILLIE - You might take that on notice.

Mr THOMAS - Yes, sure. Happy to.

Mr ARMSTRONG - On taxation. I am interested, if you have a property where you have your own residence on part of it and then you have a business in the front of it, you pay land tax on that part of that property.

A witness - Not on your principle residence.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Yes, you do. If you let me finish. I have been in the situation so I know what I am talking about. I owned a shop and a residence at the back of it. I paid land tax on the front part of that property because it is a business, and I did not pay part on the principle part on the back because it was my residence. How do you go with Airbnb?

Mr APPLEBY - If I may answer that. We had a letter from the Treasury Department inquiring about the use to which we were putting our property and we went through and explained what we were doing and they were quite happy with it and no land tax is applicable.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Because it is being raised through this committee at different times.

Mr APPLEBY - As I said, the Treasury Department investigated us and we supplied the information they requested while my wife was in hospital and they said as long as you are using it as an Airbnb and it is your primary residence, you do not need to pay land tax.

Mr ARMSTRONG - I am not picking on your property, but other properties are the same because it is a business being run. I had to pay tax on the part of that property that -

Mr THOMAS - There is definitely a discussion about - you definitely pay income tax.

There is a conversation about capital gains tax as well. At the moment you have this crazy situation where I could move to Singapore for six years and I still get to keep my primary place of residence and come back and don't trigger a capital gains tax event. If I put one room on Airbnb for one night that triggers a capital gains tax event. We have written to then federal Treasurer, Mr Morrison, before he became PM and said this is crazy and there is some tax advice and we are trying to advocate for some changes about that at a federal level.

Ms MAXWELL - I bought my house in May 1984 and it was still at that stage no capital gains. It came in September 1984, which is really good in that sense it was a clever time to do so, not even knowing that I had done that.

Mr ARMSTRONG - This is where I am coming back to the even playing field where businesses are paying -

Mr APPLEBY - It sounds to me as a shop is treated differently to accommodation.

Mr ARMSTRONG - It is just because it is a business. The way you are saying it sounds like -

PUBLIC

Mr THOMAS - I would plead ignorance and say I don't understand the land tax laws in Tasmania so I'm not sure.

Mrs CALLEGARI - They've certainly been doing some fishing, though, because a lot of people have been getting those letters and every time they have gone to them they have been told if it is your principal place of residence you won't be paying it.

Mr ARMSTRONG - It was my principal place of residence, but the other part of it was a business like the Airbnb.

Mr THOMAS - One thing I would like to mention just the pipeline of new hotel rooms that coming on is going to affect supply, 2309 new rooms, I think, the Tourism Accommodation Association estimates, with 16 hotels in the pipeline in Hobart. I made some comments a moment ago about a different organisation, Steve Old and the Tourism and Hospitality Association here are very pragmatic. We don't agree about everything, but we have been able to establish and enjoy a constructive dialogue there. That is a credit to that organisation's CEO, the chairman, and their members and that has been really good. We take the view that for our community to grow nobody has to shrink and we can both grow together.

Mr Willie, some of the data that will come back to you about whole homes, we will do our best on that. Again, we will caveat it as that information is to some extent meaningless without knowing how many nights those places were booked. Again, like my whole home 14 nights a year or something, is very different to someone that is like 330 nights a year. Just a heads up we will get you what we can and we will also make some comments around the different subcategories that will exist within that.

Mr WILLIE - You will still provide, you will not limit it by having a threshold for the number of nights, though, will you?

Mr THOMAS - No, but we might provide both, though.

Mr VALENTINE - Anything that clarifies.

Mr THOMAS - We will give you a whole number and a much smaller percentage of that would be the stuff that we would say -

Mr WILLIE - The reason I am asking is if you are refuting other evidence that the committee has heard we need to see the evidence and you need to produce it.

Mr VALENTINE - It needs to be as fine grained as you can get it.

Mr THOMAS - That's a fair point. I completely understand I just wanted to manage expectations and be transparent. Yes, is the answer to your question and just understand that I will try to explain it when we provide it.

Mr APPLEBY - Just one comment, going back to food safety we offer breakfast for our guests, but that is packaged stuff, we offer UHT milk in containers, which is safe, cereals, bread and all the rest is commercially bought like jams and stuff like that. It is about as safe as we can make it.

PUBLIC

Mrs CALLEGARI - Same.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for coming in we really appreciate you taking the time to come and meet with the committee. It has been excellent.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW