



**Impact of Events Cancelled in the Wimmera
Region due to COVID 19:
March 22nd to May 31st, 2020**



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Wimmera Development Association acknowledges the work of project manager Vernetta Taylor along with Melissa Morris of Women’s Health Grampians and Wayne Street of Street Ryan and Associates Pty. Ltd. for their assistance in compiling this report. We also acknowledge and thank the event organisers who provided the feedback which ultimately informed this document. Photos contributed by The Weekly Advertiser.



SNAPSHOT

A host of community, cultural, sporting, agricultural events and festivals contribute to the social fabric of the Wimmera. During the COVID 19 pandemic in 2020, all events during the normally vibrant autumn event season (from March 22nd to May 31st) have been cancelled or postponed. A total of 41 events were identified and assessed.



Events were spread throughout the region: 24 in Horsham Rural City, 6 in Northern Grampians, 6 in Yarriambiack, 3 in Hindmarsh and 2 in West Wimmera.



Cancellation/postponement has cost the region \$16.133 million in estimated direct event expenditure during Autumn 2020.



Cancellation/postponement affected 66,246 participants: Customers, spectators, competitors, organisers and volunteers, with 28,871 day trips and 37,375 overnight visitors staying 76,715 visit nights.



Events encompassed a range of interests: 14 community, 15 sport and recreation, 9 cultural and 3 agribusiness.

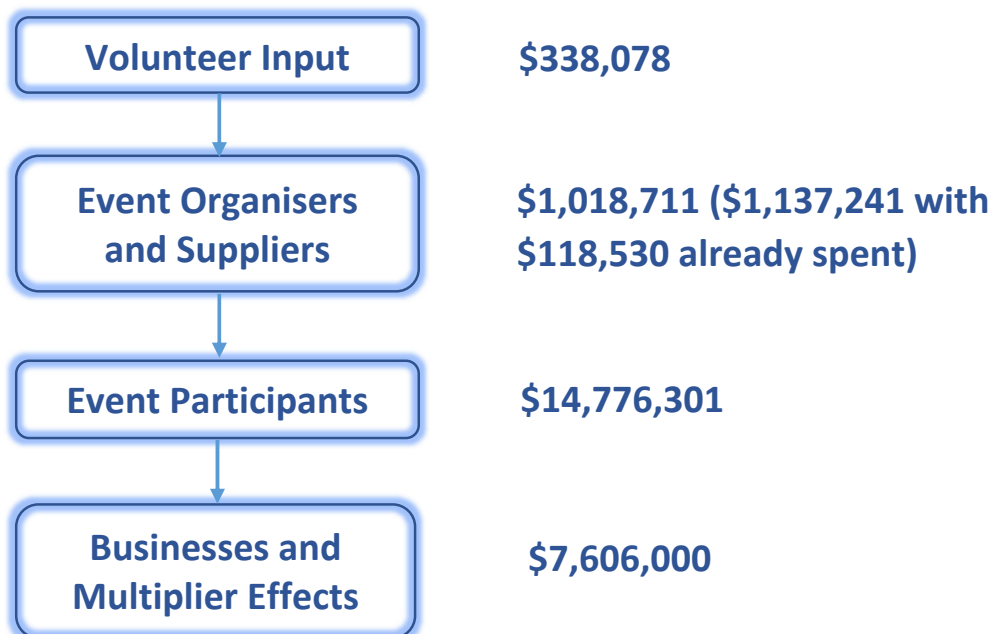


Lost indirect event expenditure in the Wimmera is estimated to be \$7.606 million.



Wimmera event managing organisations have lost \$1,291,045 in direct revenue and \$153,804 in surpluses.

Estimated Direct and Indirect Contribution



1. OVERVIEW OF SELECTED EVENTS

Victoria's Wimmera region (Rural City of Horsham and the Shires of Hindmarsh, Northern Grampians, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack) has some high profile tourism destinations, most notably the Grampians National Park and Mount Arapiles, and the City of Horsham is a recognised regional service centre. However, the remainder of the region is best described as an 'emerging' tourism region, with the advent of recent attractions like the Silo Art Trail. In this context, regular and annual events form a critical backbone to tourism across the region.

Wimmera Development Association (WDA) identified a wide range of events scheduled to be held during the initial period in which COVID 19 pandemic restrictions were enforced in Victoria, from March 22nd to May 31st across sport and recreation (tournaments or competitions), community (including general markets, swap meets, awards and commemorations, and charitable events), cultural (including art, theatre, music and celebrations of diversity) and agribusiness (including farmers markets and agricultural trade shows/events open to the general public). All these events were unable to proceed during the COVID 19 lockdown period.

Events were selected on the basis that they are of significant size and contribute to the region's tourist visitation. As a result, it did not include conferences, seminars and other predominantly business-oriented events.

WDA was able to undertake detailed interviews with event organisers or, in a few cases, to access event information (without direct interviews) for 41 significant events across the region, as summarised in Table 1. The overwhelming majority, 95.1%, of these events are 'not for profit', meaning they are either run by not for profit organisations or the proceeds from the event are directed to community causes or charities.

Table 1 Events Assessed across the March 22nd to May 31st Period

Local Government Area	Sport/ Recreation	Community	Cultural	Agribusiness	TOTAL
Horsham	9	8	5	2	24
Northern Grampians	2	3	0	1	6
Hindmarsh and West Wimmera	2	1	2	0	5
Yarriambiack	2	2	2	0	6
Total	15	14	9	3	41

The full list of events included in the assessment is:

- Blue Ribbon Raceway events
- Haven Market
- Jung Market
- Wimmera Burnouts
- Hopetoun Bowls Carnival
- Horsham Country Music Festival
- Horsham Swap Meet
- Goatfest
- Natimuk Farmers Market Plus
- Natimuk Show
- Relay for Life Horsham

- Black Cockatoo, Harrow
- Cultural Diversity Week
- Dirt Music Festival
- Brimpaen Endurance Ride
- Hoof and Harvest Festival
- Nhill Lions Community Market
- Wimmera River Parkrun
- Nhill Lake Parkrun
- Stawell SES Easter Market
- 2020 Wimmera Bands Group Music School
- Wine and Dine in the Stick Shed
- Yfest
- Horsham Motocross Round 1 and 2
- Easter Egg Hunt
- Monthly Shoot
- Stuart McGregor Stawell Gold Cup
- Victorian Senior State Motocross Titles
- Victorian Country Regional Association Croquet Championships
- Federation Foundation Combined Scholarships and Awards Presentation and 150 Year Alumni Celebration
- Grampians Grape Escape
- Great Western Rodeo
- Greater Western Swimming Carnival
- Harrow Sound and Light Show
- Horsham Mothers' Day Classic
- Halls Gap Market
- Art Is Festival
- Jeparit Fishing Comp
- Horsham Town Hall Events
- ANZAC Day Commemorations
- Stawell Gift

2. IMPACT OF EVENT CANCELLATIONS

2.1 Planning, Management and Participation

The majority of identified events were due to be held in Horsham (56%) and they cover a wide spectrum of activities and interest groups in all the event categories and smaller towns in the Rural City such as Natimuk, Brimpaen and Jung as well as Horsham itself. The Rural City of Horsham events were expected to attract 49% of all participants. Events in Northern Grampians Shire were fewer in number (17% of all events) but tended to be larger, such as the Stawell Gift, Grampians Grape Escape and Halls Gap Market, with 42% of all anticipated participants.

The Shires of Yarriambiack, Hindmarsh and West Wimmera all host relatively smaller events, but in these smaller local economies all events which attract outside visitors are very significant. Although, arguably, with the exception of Yarriambiack's YFest and Jeparit's annual fishing competition, most of the major events in these Shires are held outside the March to May period. Table 2 summarises the number of events assessed by WDA and the expected number of participants, organisers and officials.

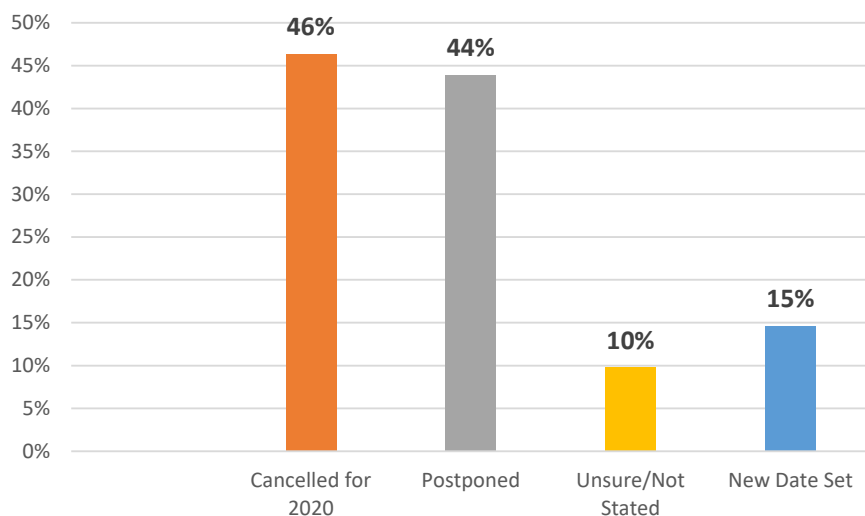
Event participants means, where relevant, paying or registered customers, competitors, audiences, spectators, and support groups (carers, friends and family, coaches, trainers, etc) accompanying 'active' participants. Volunteers and event organising personnel are also counted as event participants.

Table 2 Participants and Managers at Wimmera Autumn Events

Local Government Area	Number of Events	Event Participants	Participating Organisers and Officials
Horsham	23	30,831	557
Northern Grampians	7	28,505	395
Hindmarsh and West Wimmera	5	1,766	106
Yarriambiack	6	4,030	56
Total	41	65,132	1,114

Figure 1 indicates that 46% of the interviewed events have been cancelled entirely for the 2020 year; that is, they anticipate missing a whole year and hope to re-schedule the event for the same time slot in 2021. However, almost as many of the event organisers (44%) believe they will be able to conduct their event later in 2020 when COVID 19 isolation restrictions are eased. The remaining 10% of interviewed events, mostly recurring events such as Markets and Parkruns, intend to resume their events as soon as isolation and social distancing restrictions are eased or removed.

Despite the positive intentions, some event managers expressed concern that their events may not re-commence at all, following the effects of the pandemic, due to potential loss of volunteers, momentum or sponsors. Just over half of the interviewed events, 21 or 51%, have sponsors who provide financial support

Figure 1 Plans for Events Affected by COVID 19 Lockdown in Autumn 2020

2.2 Day and Overnight Visitation

Table 3 reveals that the selected events were on track to attract 66,246 participants (including, where relevant, customers, spectators, competitors, organisers and volunteers) generating:

- 28,871 daytrips and
- 37,375 overnight visitors, staying 76,715 visit nights.

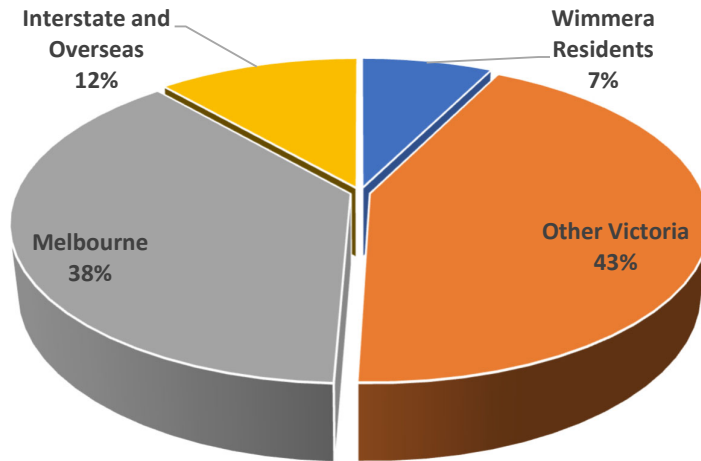
The Northern Grampians events were expected to attract both the greatest number of participants, and the greatest proportion of non-local, overnight visitors. Of the expected overnight visitors:

- 7.4% would have been Wimmera residents
- 43.2% would come from other parts of country Victoria
- 38.0% would have been from Melbourne Metropolitan area
- 11.4% would have been interstate or overseas visitors.

Table 3 Daytrip and Overnight Visits for the Wimmera Events

	Day Visits		Overnight Visits		Visit Nights			Total
			Wimmera Residents	Other Country Victoria	Melbourne	Interstate and Overseas		
Horsham	22,101	9,287	1,420	17,167	3,551	3,123	25,261	
Northern Grampians	4,005	24,895	3,040	13,830	23,810	4,820	45,500	
Hindmarsh and West Wimmera	971	901	266	606	135	242	1,249	
Yarriambiack	1,794	2,292	972	1,497	1,650	586	4,705	
Total	28,871	37,375	5,698	33,100	29,146	8,770	76,715	

Overall, Wimmera residents were expected to constitute 32.1% of all participants in the assessed events and 97.7% of the daytrip visitors and 7.4% of overnight visitors (as shown in Figure 2). The other 67.9% of participants (and 92.6% of overnight visitors) would have been non-residents of the Wimmera, and it is this group which would have contributed the greatest net-economic benefit to the region.

Figure 2 Visit Nights by Residential Location of Event Participants

2.3 Organising Bodies and Volunteers

Until the 1970's, the organisation and delivery of community, cultural, sport and recreation events across Australia was largely the domain of the voluntary sector. However, with the ever-increasing commercialisation of many (but not all) tiers of these sectors, the need for professionalism, and the greater social acceptance of events as legitimate business activities, have appeared to change the nature of voluntary input. In reality these changes have occurred in the upper echelons of sport, community and culture where administrators, technical staff, event managers and other professionals are employed in order to keep up with competitive factors and commercial demands. In the Wimmera, a region widely recognised for its traditions of self-reliant, caring, and committed communities, there remains a strong level of volunteerism and many of the region's events would simply not be tenable without the contribution of volunteers.

On average, 27.2 event managers or organisers (volunteers 96% and paid 4%) were involved in staging each event. The paid staff contributed 4,995 hours in labour, project management and administrative input, while the volunteers contributed 15,872 hours.

Estimating the equivalent financial contribution of voluntary workers generally results in a conservative value being placed on volunteer labour, a consequence of several factors:

- In many cases the output of a voluntary worker is not equal to a paid worker (although it is generally true that output even among paid workers is seldom 'equal').
- It is difficult to achieve perceived or real accountability among workers who are not paid.
- Voluntary positions are not necessarily filled by either the best available people, or even people with the skills to effectively undertake the work. If someone is offering their time freely it is difficult to complain about the standard. From the volunteer worker's point of view, the job is often taken as part of a commitment to the event/organisation or pressure from other community members to contribute, and it cannot be expected to be the highest priority at all times.

With these limiting factors understood, an hourly contribution of \$22.17 has been calculated for 2020. Therefore, the equivalent labour contribution by 1,069 Wimmera event volunteers is \$338,078.

The value derived from volunteering is more than an economic one. Wimmera event volunteers, particularly for the regularly recurring events such as ParkRuns and monthly markets, achieve important social benefits. The events give their volunteers (especially those in older age groups) much needed social interaction, self-esteem and stimulus.

2.4 Economic Contribution

Respondent event managers in total had budgeted for expenditure of \$1.137 million in delivering their respective events¹ and only a relatively small percentage of this amount had actually been spent (\$118,530 or 12%) when the events were cancelled, excluding the staff time of regular employees who had been working on the pre-event planning and promotion.

A total of 15 event organisers, or 37%, had issued pre-purchase tickets or registrations for events which were subsequently cancelled, but in only 7 of these cases had the organising body actually received income from the ticket sales, while a third party was holding the funds for 7 events, and the remaining event (although requiring bookings) was free to attend. In the majority of cases, pre-purchased tickets will be refunded in full (12 events).

Expected direct expenditure by participants in the events is estimated to be \$14,776,301, of which \$3,040,899 would have been expenditure by day visitors (mostly residents of the Wimmera region), \$10,716,427 by visitors staying in commercial accommodation and \$1,018,976 by visitors staying in private accommodation (including family and friends) as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Projected Expenditure by Day and Overnight Event Participants

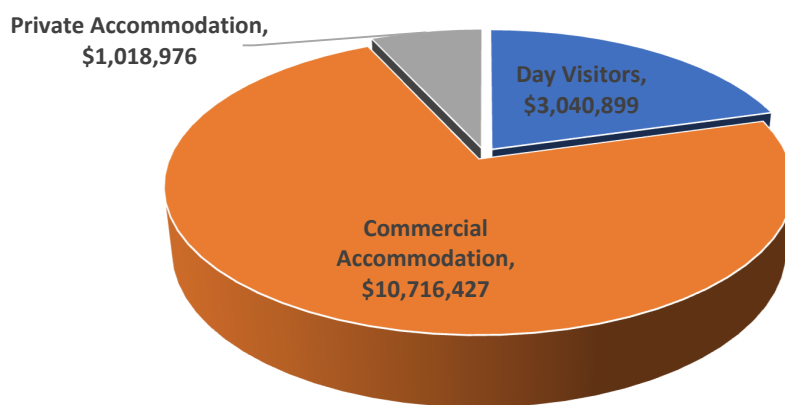


Table 4 shows that the cancellation or postponement of the assessed events is estimated to have cost the region a total of \$23.739 million in economic contribution during the March to May 2020 period:

- Direct economic contribution of \$16.133 million from lost expenditure by more than 66,000 day and overnight visitors/participants and unspent budgets of event organisers (encompassing contractors, promotions, business services, venue providers, etc)
- Indirect economic contribution of \$7.606 million from lost flow-on expenditure to regional businesses, particularly in the food and beverages (such as food-vans, caterers, cafés, restaurants and supermarkets), travel and accommodation, community services and other retail sectors.

¹ Note that a small number of interviewed event managers were unable or unwilling to provide details of their expected expenditure.

Note that the projections of economic contribution presented throughout this document have been derived from many assumptions about events which could have occurred in 2020 using interviews with event managing organisations and industry data. Wimmera Development Association, and its staff and contractors, accept neither responsibility for the accuracy of these estimates, nor for the consequences of any action taken by any organisation or individual as a result of the use, or application, of any estimates in this report.

Table 4 Projected Economic Contribution of Cancelled Wimmera Events, March-May 2020

	Travel and Accommodation	Food and Beverages	Other Shopping	Fees (education, conference, venues)	Entertainment and Other (including insurance, promotions, contractors)	Total
Horsham	\$2,870,396	\$1,862,182	\$901,706	\$287,370	\$719,641	\$6,641,295
Northern Grampians	\$4,295,559	\$2,126,556	\$820,501	\$70,071	\$1,000,484	\$8,313,172
Hindmarsh and West Wimmera	\$106,712	\$75,548	\$30,811	\$2,692	\$53,443	\$269,206
Yarriambiack	\$343,112	\$196,039	\$76,275	\$6,203	\$68,240	\$689,868
Volunteer Input						\$338,078
Less Pre-event expenditure incurred						\$118,530
Total Direct	\$7,615,778	\$4,260,325	\$1,829,294	\$366,336	\$1,841,809	\$16,133,090
Indirect	\$3,152,251	\$3,109,043	\$410,363	\$342,145	\$592,199	\$7,606,000
TOTAL	\$10,768,029	\$7,369,368	\$2,239,657	\$708,482	\$2,434,007	\$23,739,091

Beyond the economic contribution, the majority of the cancelled Wimmera events are important for the health and wellbeing of residents as well as visitors. All the events provide physical and/or mental health benefits to participating residents, who are among the largest participant groups for some of the events.

Sponsorships support 22 of the 41 assessed events and sponsorships range from in-kind contributions (such as advertising space or media time, retail items for participant gift bags, scholarships, support services) and modest community grants, through to 'event enabling' sponsorships from major corporates and government agencies. For all those events which are to be rescheduled, all sponsorships are expected to be retained.

3. QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

3.1 Communication Strategies During the COVID 19 Pandemic

Emails and text messages were reportedly the most frequent forms of communicating with event organisers, committees, volunteers and other stakeholders during the early stages of the pandemic, when isolation and physical distancing restrictions were strict, as shown in Table 5. The use of online video conferencing was on the increase when WDA interviews were conducted and, by the end of May, the use of zoom, skype, and teams for virtual meetings was probably higher than the 8.1% recorded in interviews. A significant percentage of events (16.2%) reported no meaningful contact with organising teams once the decision to cancel had been made.

Some organising committees reported that there is unlikely to be any further in-house communications until face to face meetings can be reconvened and the committees can begin planning for a new date, either a postponement to later in 2020 or a fresh start in 2021.

Ongoing communications can be quite complex when an event is multifaceted. For example, Warracknabeal's YFest involves a series of individual but linked activities and mini-events. The YFest organisers report that the series of contributing events includes the YFest Easter Parade, a busking festival, Warracknabeal race meeting, golf tournament, art show and vintage machinery rally. Most of these contributing events are run by individual groups but they come together as part of the Y Fest Promotions Committee. Due to initial restrictions the Easter Parade was to be cancelled, but as COVID restrictions became tighter all the events were cancelled except the Warracknabeal race meeting which went ahead with no spectators. With six events occur under the Y Fest banner, the communication and cancellation processes were drawn out and difficult.

Table 5 Communications Strategies During COVID 19 Pandemic

Communication Method	Number of Organising Group	%
Emails and/or text messaging	9	24.3%
Phone calls	6	16.2%
No meaningful contact since cancellation decision	6	16.2%
Social media posts and chat groups	4	10.8%
Awaiting advice from state or regional peak body	4	10.8%
Online zoom, skype or teams meetings	3	8.1%
Replaced physical event with a virtual event	2	5.4%
Face to face meetings with social distancing*	1	2.7%
Facetime meeting	1	2.7%
Mailouts	1	2.7%
Total	37	100.0%

* only possible during pre-full lockdown period

3.2 Other Qualitative Details of Specific Events

A large volume of qualitative feedback was provided during WDA's interviews to help explain the raw facts. A selection of this feedback, in the form of verbatim quotes is provided below.

- “Horsham Motor Sports Club had 10 events scheduled at Blue Ribbon Raceway for the 2019/2020 Speedway racing season. One of those (a major event) was 'rained out' in February 2020 and now 6 have been 'COVID 19' cancelled. Like all organisations and businesses, there are fixed costs that have to be paid; some have been incurred already, some will need to be renewed at 'annual cycle' dates and monthly bank loan payments will continue”.
- “We are a youth motorsport and automotive mentoring club. Social connections are vital for the mental health of the marginalised and isolated youth who participate in our programs. We also support Wimmera Against Cancer in Kids and give charity passenger rides to families and youth at all of our events. We voluntarily cancelled our motorkhana (precision driving event) in March 2020 and have had to postpone the burnouts due to Covid-19 restrictions. We would normally run 5 events a year, 6 in-person meetings, plus attendance at Youth Advisory Council meetings and Airport (motorsport venue) working bees, youth automotive workshop sessions and car show displays in other communities. Our events are family friendly and generally bring entire families along, providing social interaction and leadership opportunities for non-competing attendees. Although we have not lost out financially, there has been a significant social cost for the youth, particularly those who do not have a car (of their own or a club car) to work on during the restrictions”.
- “We would have had an event income (through ticket and food sales) of approximately \$4,500, and after expenses a surplus of \$3,750. However, we cancelled the event on March 18. Anticipate that there would have been an additional volunteer 150 hours in the lead up to and the hosting of the event on April 11th. We had already received 10 short films and would have obtained another 4 films for the event.
- “The Easter Natimuk Farmers Market is the biggest market for the year. There are 80-90 stall holders. Most of the income for the organising body is from stallholder fees which are generally collected market to market. There are minimal expenses in the running of the event, such as advertising and food purchases for the sausage sizzle and pancake stall the A&P Society run. However, the biggest impact is, of course, the total sales by stallholders throughout the market. The June Market will most likely be cancelled as well. Market income helps cross subsidise running of the Natimuk Show”.
- “This was the first time the Endurance Ride event would have been held in Brimpaen. Endurance rides are held regularly elsewhere in the State so having the ride had 2 aims:
 - A new place to ride for existing endurance rides
 - Promoting the sport and attracting new members from this part of the state.

- "The Horsham Relay for Life event is held annually as part of the Cancer Council of Victoria's annual Relay for Life event. The Horsham event is organized by a local committee with attendance by a Cancer Council of Victoria staff member. All funds raised go to the Cancer Council of Victoria to support their cancer research and help lines, funds are not distributed locally. The local group does not manage a budget as such. Local musicians donate their time for entertainment, the venue (Coughlin Park) is donated, food was donated for the event but returned. The local organizers are not financially out of pocket as a result of the event cancellation. The anticipated fundraising amount was \$83-85,000. At the scheduled time of the event approximately \$43,000 had already been banked. Fundraising will start again for 2021. Registrations will either be carried over for next year's event or refunded if groups / individuals request a refund. Again, the local group is not handling that; it is being coordinated by Cancer Council of Victoria. The event was cancelled on the day by Cancer Council of Victoria, the organising group were disappointed but also understand the decision, as do the sponsors and supporters".
- The group organising the event regularly run events elsewhere in the state and know that it costs approximately \$6,000 per event. The riders would have all stayed at the grounds of the Brimpaen Hall (with their horses and equipment), and it would have been a good fund raiser for the Brimpaen Hall Committee who would have been doing the catering for the event. Entry fees would have ranged from \$30-\$90 depending on length of ride. Event was cancelled before entry fees were collected. In this case with most people coming from outside of the area they also would have bought fuel, stopped for coffee within the region.
- This was the first time that the Hoof and Harvest Festival would have been held. There were plans to have comedians and musicians at the venue on a local horse-riding property. It was a primarily local community festival, to bring Beulah and district people together. Entry was by gold coin donation. Because the event was cancelled 2 weeks in advance, no pre-event costs were incurred. As a new festival it was a learning curve for the event organisers in terms of event planning, risk management, budget development, etc. The community received a small grant from Yarriambiack Shire which they will be able to keep so that the event can be held on a future date.
- Wine and Dine in the Stick Shed is in its second year and 200 tickets were sold. The event was sold out (in 10 minutes). The event supports local businesses and local /regional food suppliers (such as Great Western Bakery, Toscana Oil, Haven Organics, and several regional wineries). Holding the event in the Stick Shed leads to increased profile and visitation (with return tourism and income for the Stick Shed). All accommodation in the town of Murtoa is booked out for the event giving a strong flow on effect to those businesses. A number of well-known chefs come from regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne, adding to the event's profile. Profits go to supporting the activities of Murtoa Events to use in holding more events/support the local community.
- It is planned that YFest will go ahead in 2021, despite some concerns about the impact of losing this year's event on succession planning within the organising committee and the dampening effect of the one-year gap on planning efficiencies. Fortunately, the event was cancelled prior to the running of television promotions with WIN TV refunding the fees, so financial losses were minimised to some extent.

- Parkrun is part of an international program involving free, weekly, timed, walking, jogging, running, and volunteering events. It has been cancelled worldwide and will recommence once the COVID pandemic has subsided. As at May 29th, Parkrun international advised that “all parkrun events remain on hold due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, and although many countries are gradually releasing restrictions, we do not yet have any confirmed dates for reopening our events”. In Horsham and Nhill, Parkrun is organised entirely by volunteers. At the Horsham event there are 8 volunteer positions every week. Since its commencement in Horsham (about 20 months ago) there has been 1,300 individuals who have run on 7,303 occasions, covering a total of 36,515 kilometres along the 5 kilometres course, and 88 running clubs have been represented. There have been 159 volunteers help out across the 83 weekly events. In Nhill, the event has been running for over 2 years (109 weekly events), with 466 individuals running on 2,094 occasions along the 5 kilometres course around Nhill Swamp and Wildlife Reserve, with 57 running clubs represented, and a total of 68 volunteers.

March 28th was going to be a day featuring local police at the Horsham Parkrun, with the aim of creating community engagement. Members of the local police ‘critical incident response team and water police would have been attending.

- The Mothers’ Day Classic (MDC) was cancelled as a group event but was still able to proceed as a ‘smaller-scale virtual event’, with individuals walking, jogging or running on their own and still making a donation to the MDC. Registrations are collated by the overarching organising body and any registrations that had already been paid will carry over to the modified/virtual event format. The local organising group is looking forward to conducting the event again in 2021. Based on the last 2 years this event generates approximately \$10,000 in revenue through registrations, fundraising, and barbecue sales. All proceeds go to the Mothers’ Day Classic Foundation for breast cancer research.
- The Art Is Festival takes a full year of planning to deliver. There is a dedicated employee for the festival. The organisers are developing an alternative program which will encompass an on-line circus skills workshop, an on-line poetry event, creative voice workshop, and 2 on-line training courses in June. The organisers are hopeful that the complete event will proceed again in 2021 and they are grateful to have received a level of government funding. The event managers are keen to pass on the deposits that have been received for the event to contract artists, so they do not lose all their income, if they commit to participating in the festival in 2021.