

2007 Regional Masters Games – March 15, 2007

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond): Recently, my wife Sally and I had the pleasure of attending the opening ceremony of the 2007 Regional Masters Games, another hugely successful event in my electorate at Murray Bridge. This year's event, hosted by Murray Bridge for the first time, attracted 815 athletes from around the country, a record for any town holding the games for the first time. Almost three-quarters of the athletes came from outside the district, attracted in part by Murray Bridge's central location, its excellent facilities and its reputation for hosting top-class major events.

As members probably already know, Murray Bridge has also been the scene of several other major events in recent months, including the Australian International Pedal Prix, the Autofest (a national motor event), and last weekend's Rotary Murraylands Cultural Festival, featuring some 36 items over the two-day program. One of Australia's best known Olympians, Her Excellency the Governor, Marjorie Jackson-Nelson, officially opened the four-day event at a dinner on the Thursday evening. Rural City of Murray Bridge Mayor, Allan Arbon, paid tribute to games coordinator Jenny Phillips and the local army of volunteers, who were well organised by Ken Coventry and Neville Gotch. Mayor Arbon was pleased and proud that Murray Bridge has sufficient sporting facilities of the quality required to host such an event.

The hundreds of visitors to the region also benefited the local business and tourism community, with many local attractions backing up the games. Some of the most significant compliments came from competitors, many of whom are games regulars. One regular competitor is Robert Freak, who has participated in 25 games. Mr Freak described the 2007 event as having 'huge potential', which augurs well for future events in Murray Bridge. Another competitor is the remarkable 97 year old Margo Bates. Mrs Bates, who is almost blind, competes as a swimmer. Over the years, she has won 177 gold medals—and she won even more at the recent games, an achievement made even more extraordinary by the fact that she learnt to swim only some 10 years ago when she started competing in these games. Mrs Bates has competed in Australia and internationally. Following her visit to Murray Bridge, she said she was impressed with the hospitality of the local community and looked forward to returning.

As well as 240 local people competing and dozens of others participating as volunteers, the games are also providing an opportunity for local sporting clubs, teams and schoolchildren to take some part in the activities. As well as displaying strong community spirit, the success of these games can also be taken as a measure of the resilience of local people who find themselves facing the consequences of the worst drought in recorded history, and dealing with several resulting uncertainties that might profoundly affect their future. All the people involved with this event—from organisers and sponsors to volunteers and spectators—are to be commended for their part in presenting another successful major event in one of South Australia's most important regional centres.