

Board of Inquiry into the COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Program
Statement of Ram Bharadwaj

WITNESS STATEMENT OF RAM BHARADWAJ MANDYAM ANANDAMPULLAI

Name: Ram Bharadwaj Mandyam Anandampullai
Address: 66 Aurora Lane, Docklands, Victoria
Occupation: Hotel General Manager
Date: 17 August 2020

INTRODUCTION

- 1 This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Board of Inquiry into the COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Program (**Inquiry**).
- 2 This statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
- 3 I make this statement on behalf of Travelodge Hotel Melbourne Docklands (**Travelodge Docklands**), and I am authorised to do so.
- 4 I provide this statement in response to a Notice to Produce dated 10 August 2020 from the Inquiry.
- 5 Except where otherwise noted, I make this witness statement based on matters within my own knowledge (including based on my prior discussions with staff at Travelodge Docklands and TFE Hotels), and within the books and records of Travelodge Docklands that I reviewed for the purpose of preparing this statement.
- 6 This statement has been prepared with the assistance of lawyers in response to and in compliance with a notice to provide a statement. It is produced to the Inquiry on the basis that it will be tendered and received in evidence by the Inquiry pursuant to that notice and on the basis that the statement will be treated as evidence which is subject to section 80 of the *Inquiries Act 2014* (Vic).
- 7 As requested by the Inquiry, I have structured this witness statement as direct responses to the questions the Inquiry has asked that I answer.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED BY THE INQUIRY

Question 1: What is your title and role at Travelodge Hotel Melbourne Docklands?

- 8 I am the Hotel General Manager at Travelodge Docklands. I have held this role since 11 November 2019.
- 9 At a high level, my role is to manage the day-to-day operations of Travelodge Docklands. I work on-site at the hotel and have overall responsibility for the staff working at the hotel.

Question 2: What is your relevant employment background and work history?

- 10 Travelodge Docklands is part of the TFE Hotels group of hotels. I commenced my employment with TFE Hotels on 20 February 2018.

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- 11 Prior to my current position, I worked as the Hotel Manager for two other TFE Hotels properties—the Vibe Carlton Melbourne (which is no longer part of the TFE Hotels group of hotels) and the Adina Apartment Hotel Melbourne Northbank.
- 12 Prior to my employment with TFE Hotels, I worked on a casual basis with Accor from 2009. While employed by Accor I worked at various Accor hotels across Australia, predominantly in Queensland. My last position with Accor was as General Manager of an Accor hotel in Albany, Western Australia.
- 13 In 2007 I was awarded a Bachelor of Hotel Management from the M S Ramaiah College of Hotel Management at Bangalore University in India. In 2009, I completed a Masters in International Hospitality Management at the University of South Australia. While I was studying at the University of South Australia, I worked at the Naval, Military and Air Force Club of South Australia.

Question 3: To whom do you report?

- 14 I report to Stephen Moore, Area General Manager for TFE Hotels with responsibility for the Victorian, Tasmanian and South Australian regions. Mr Moore is responsible for the overall management of the portfolio hotels within these regions. Mr Moore has been my direct supervisor since I commenced my employment with TFE Hotels in Melbourne.
- 15 In addition to Mr Moore, I also have an indirect reporting line to the Director of Operations for TFE Hotels.

INVOLVEMENT OF TRAVELODGE HOTEL MELBOURNE DOCKLANDS IN THE HOTEL QUARANTINE PROGRAM

Question 4: To what extent, prior to the hotel quarantine program, had your hotel (or any entity in its corporate group) provided services to the Victorian government?

- 16 Since late last year when I became the Hotel General Manager of Travelodge Docklands, from time to time the hotel has provided accommodation services to various Victorian Government departments. I understand this arrangement had existed prior to my time as Hotel General Manager. I am aware that the Victorian Police have used these arrangements and there may be other government departments who have also done so. I am not specifically aware of all of the government departments that might have used accommodation services at Travelodge Docklands because the services are provided through a travel company, Corporate Travel Management, which I understand provides support to various Victorian Government departments.

Question 5: When and how did your hotel or its corporate group first become aware that there was to be a role for hotels in accommodating returned travellers in quarantine?

- 17 I was first contacted in my role as Hotel General Manager in relation to the hotel quarantine program on 27 March 2020 when the TFE Hotels' Director of Sales (Shahnaz Bakshay) contacted me and Stephen Moore in relation to the program. I understand from Ms Bakshay that TFE Hotels was first

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contacted by Kate Begley from the Department of Jobs, Precincts & Regions (**DJPR**) in relation to the program on about 27 March 2020. A copy of email correspondence between Ms Bakshay and Ms Begley relating to the initial outreach to TFE Hotels has been produced to the Inquiry (TRAV.0001.0001.0039).

Question 6: When did your hotel enter into an agreement with the Victorian Government to provide services as part of the hotel quarantine program?

- 18 TFE Hotels entered into an agreement with the Victorian Government to provide services as part of the hotel quarantine program on 27 March 2020 (the **Services Agreement**).
- 19 I was not involved in the negotiation of the Services Agreement.

Question 7: When was the agreement formalised in writing?

- 20 The Services Agreement was formalised in writing on 28 March 2020. A copy of the Services Agreement has been produced to the Inquiry (TRAV.0001.0001.0076 and TRAV.0001.0001.0297).
- 21 I was not involved in the preparation of the Services Agreement.

Question 8: Prior to any agreement being reached with the Victorian government, was there any discussion or negotiation regarding -

- (a) **infection control,**
- (b) **personal protective equipment and**
- (c) **specialised training for hotel staff who would be involved in the hotel quarantine program?**
- 22 To my knowledge, there was no discussion or negotiation between Travelodge Docklands and the Victorian Government with respect to the matters noted above prior to the entry into the Services Agreement.
- 23 Subsequently, there were some limited discussions between Travelodge Docklands and the Victorian Government relating to these matters. An initial meeting between the Victorian Government and Travelodge Docklands relating to the hotel quarantine program occurred on 7 April 2020. The meeting occurred about 48 hours before Travelodge Docklands received its first guests under the hotel quarantine program.
- 24 The following people attended that meeting:
- (a) from TFE Hotels: Ram Bharadwaj, Haylee Royal (Assistant Hotel Manager, Travelodge Docklands), Arthur Rojas (Hotel General Manager, Travelodge Hotel Melbourne Southbank) and Dylan Bedford (Assistant Hotel Manager, Travelodge Hotel Melbourne Southbank);

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- (b) from the DJPR: Gönül Serbest (CEO of Global Victoria), Cathy Crooks, [REDACTED] and Vikas Khokher;
- (c) from Victoria Police: Ely Reynolds; and
- (d) representatives from:
 - (i) dnata;
 - (ii) Skybus; and
 - (iii) MSS Security.

- 25 A copy of the minutes of the meeting taken by Haylee Royal at TFE Hotels have been produced to the Inquiry (**Meeting Minutes**) (TRAV.0001.0001.0003).
- 26 The representatives from MSS Security were late to the meeting.
- 27 The representatives from Victoria Police and Skybus did not stay for the entire meeting.
- 28 During the meeting, there was a high level discussion of some of the details of the hotel quarantine program. Gönül Serbest, the CEO of Global Victoria chaired the meeting. I recall discussions relating to the topics that are listed in the Meeting Minutes. The discussion was relatively informal and many of the items were left open for further discussion or detail by the Victorian Government. We discussed the policies and procedures in place at Travelodge Docklands which were relevant to the hotel quarantine program. I also took the participants of the meeting on a site visit which included a tour of the guest rooms, the restaurant and the lobby.
- 29 There were no further meetings that I am aware of between Travelodge Docklands and the Victorian Government relating to the hotel quarantine program following the meeting held on 7 April 2020. However, as noted below, there were other lines of communication between the DHHS and DJPR, and the hotel, and items were regularly raised on an "as needed" basis.

Question 9: Was the agreement changed or varied over time? if so, give details.

- 30 To my knowledge, the Services Agreement between TFE Hotels and the Victorian Government did not change over time.

Question 10: Is the involvement of your hotel in the hotel quarantine program ongoing? If not, state the date of last involvement and the reason why your hotel is no longer involved.

- 31 Travelodge Docklands is no longer involved in the hotel quarantine program.
- 32 On 22 April 2020, Gönül Serbest telephoned me to let me know that the Victorian Government would not be extending the Services Agreement beyond the "Completion Date" of the Services Agreement, which was 27 April 2020, and that no further guests would be allocated to the hotel.
- 33 Ms Serbest did not give any reason for ending the Services Agreement.

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Question 11: When did the first guests arrive as part of the hotel quarantine program?

- 34 Travelodge Docklands accommodated guests from two flights returning to Melbourne. The first guests arrived at Travelodge Docklands on 10 April 2020 at about 4am. There were 267 guests in the first group of arrivals. Travelodge Docklands also took 55 guests from a second flight which arrived on 11 April 2020 at about 1:30pm. No further guests were received at Travelodge Docklands as part of the program.

Question 12: How many guests stayed at your hotel as part of the hotel quarantine program?

- 35 Travelodge Docklands accommodated a total of 322 guests, including children and toddlers.

Question 13: How many guests tested positive for COVID-19?

- 36 To my knowledge, one guest tested positive for COVID-19 while at the hotel. I was informed on 16 April 2020 that the person had tested positive for COVID-19 by a representative from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). A copy of that notification has been produced to the Inquiry (TRAV.0001.0001.0273). Hotel staff and security were then notified. The DHHS dealt directly with guests in relation to any health concerns. I am not aware of the procedures that were in place for testing and monitoring symptoms amongst the guests at the hotel.

Question 14: Were different arrangements in place at your hotel for guests who were positive for COVID-19 or displaying symptoms of COVID-19?

- 37 Yes. At the commencement of its participation in the hotel quarantine program, Travelodge Docklands allocated an entire floor as a "Red Zone" for accommodating any guests who might test positive for COVID-19. No other guests would be accommodated on this floor. As noted in paragraph 36 above, only one guest tested positive for COVID-19. That person and their traveling companion were moved to a room in the Red Zone after the diagnosis and remained there until they had completed the 14-day quarantine period. On the day of their departure, they were escorted by security to an ambulance which collected them from the loading bay. The elevator used by those guests to exit Travelodge Docklands was locked for 30 minutes before they left the building and was subsequently sanitised and then remained locked for a few hours afterwards.
- 38 The only other guest who was moved to the Red Zone was a person who had refused a test for COVID-19. I understand that this guest was transported by ambulance from Travelodge Docklands to the hospital between midnight and the early morning approximately 5 days into their stay. I am not aware of the reasons this guest was taken to hospital or what happened afterwards. This guest did not return to Travelodge Docklands.
- 39 Once the guests were relocated to the Red Zone, they were not allowed to leave their rooms under any circumstances.

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- 40 Travelodge Docklands required there to be no access to the Red Zone by hotel staff once there were guests staying on the floor. However, management of the hotel were permitted to access the floor to deliver food to these guests. This was usually done by me or my Assistant Hotel Manager, Haylee Royal.
- 41 When delivering food to the COVID-19 positive guests, Ms Royal and I were required by TFE Hotels policy to wear gloves, a mask and a hairnet. The food tray would be left outside the guest room. We would then knock on the door and leave before the guest (who had been instructed to wait some time before collecting the food) opened the door. There were no direct interactions between any hotel staff and the COVID-19 positive guests.
- 42 To my knowledge, the procedures put in place by Travelodge Docklands were followed by all hotel staff members. I am not aware of any instances where the procedures were not followed.
- 43 Travelodge Docklands received no guidance that I am aware of from the Victorian Government in relation to the "Red Zone", including in relation to the provision of meals or supplies to these guests.

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE HOTEL

Question 15: Please briefly describe the physical layout of your hotel and provide floor plans.

- 44 A copy of the floor plans of the hotel has been produced to the Inquiry (TRAV.0001.0002.0001).
- 45 Travelodge Docklands is a 291-room hotel. The hotel occupies all levels of the building. The lobby is located on the ground level. On level 4, there is a restaurant area which contains a kitchen and a space for eating. The guest rooms are located on levels 5 to 16. The guest room floors have a hallway down the middle of the floor. At one end of the hallway, the hallway turns into the lift well.
- 46 Because the lifts are not accessible from the main hallway, Travelodge Docklands required two security guards per floor: 1 for the lift well, and 1 by the fire exit in the middle of the hallway. Neither security guard had a clear view of the other. I recommended that the security guards be positioned in these places when Travelodge Docklands hosted a site visit by MSS Security. However, MSS Security ultimately made the decision to position them accordingly (in the same locations as I had proposed) and was responsible for the security detail at Travelodge Docklands.

Question 16: Which areas of your hotel were used as part of the hotel quarantine program? Please indicate these areas on the floor plans that you provide.

- 47 The whole of the hotel was used as part of the hotel quarantine program.

Question 17: How was each relevant area of your hotel used?

- 48 The ground level (page 1 of the floor plans) was used as the check in area and main security check point.



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- 49 Level 3 (page 2 of the floor plans) contained room 302 which was designated as the nurses' change room. This was a requirement of the DHHS.
- 50 Level 4 (page 3 of the floor plans) contained the restaurant which was used for a number of purposes including:
- (a) for catering purposes;
 - (b) for receiving groceries and guest deliveries; and
 - (c) as a work station for:
 - (i) the supervising nurse and two other nurses from the DHHS; and
 - (ii) the Authorised Officer.
- 51 The Authorised Officer was a representative from either the DHSS or the DJPR who had responsibility for overseeing activities at the hotel related to the quarantine program. The Authorised Officer changed regularly.
- 52 Level 4 also contained two conference rooms. One room was used by the security team and the other room was used by the nurses.
- 53 Level 5 contained guest rooms and as described above was used as the designated Red Zone for confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases.
- 54 Levels 6 – 13 contain the guest rooms. There are 32 rooms per floor. Page 4 of the floor plans is a representation of levels 5 – 13.

Question 18: What were the restrictions and requirements (if any) on people entering and leaving each of those areas?

- 55 As described more fully in paragraphs 93 to 95 below, from earlier this year TFE Hotels rolled out pandemic-specific policies, procedures and training that applied to Travelodge Docklands' management and staff. Consistent with those measures, hotel staff were only permitted to go to the guest floors to deliver food or fresh linen to guests or to collect used linen. Hotel staff were required to wear gloves, masks and hairnets when delivering food or linen to guests or collecting used linen. Linen was changed by the guests themselves. The used linen would be placed by the guests in a red disposable bag outside the guests' rooms for collection by hotel staff.
- 56 Hotel staff were not permitted to enter the conference rooms used by the nurses or the security team.
- 57 I did not have any control over the movements of the nurses, security guards or other representatives of the DHHS or DJRP, including in relation to their access to the guest floors.
- 58 There were separate areas for coffee facilities. The nurses used a coffee machine in the restaurant. The security team used a coffee machine in the conference room.
- 59 The restrictions in relation to the Red Zone are as described above in paragraph 40.

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COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING

Question 19: What lines of communication were in place between your hotel and government departments?

- 60 Travelodge Docklands had contact with the Victorian Government in person, over the telephone and via email.
- 61 Aside from the meeting described in paragraph 23 above, the Victorian Government contacted Travelodge Docklands on an "as needed" basis only. However, as the Hotel General Manager of Travelodge Docklands, I regularly spoke to the Authorised Officer and nurses on site each day in relation to any issues that had arisen at the hotel. The nurses were responsible for all health and medical safety issues relating to the guests. I primarily spoke to the nurses when they were relaying complaints they had received from guests relating to matters over which I was responsible (mostly relating to food and catering). The Authorised Officer was a person on-site each day appointed by the DHHS to generally oversee the activities related to the hotel quarantine program and to act as a trouble shooter when issues arose. The person acting as the Authorised Officer changed every day or so.

Question 20: What information did you receive about the persons being quarantined at your hotel?

- 62 As noted in paragraphs 34 and 35 above, Travelodge Docklands accommodated two groups of passengers on two different flights.
- 63 With regard to the first flight:
- (a) we were first informed that we would be receiving passengers from the flight after the flight had already departed Chile for Australia (TRAV.0001.0001.0059 and TRAV.0001.0001.0061);
 - (b) we did not receive any information about the incoming guests before the guests arrived including names, ages, or dietary restrictions and requirements; and
 - (c) we were not told that the guests had received no food on the flight and they would therefore require food urgently upon arrival.
- 64 Given the lack of information that was provided prior to the guests arriving, Travelodge Docklands was required to manually register the guests upon check-in. This took about 4 hours to complete. The hotel was also underprepared for the guests because we did not have sufficient notice to ensure the hotel had appropriate food to cater for dietary restrictions and requirements, and for infants. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that the flight arrived on Good Friday and the hotel therefore had difficulties sourcing the required food over the holiday weekend.
- 65 With regard to the second flight, we received a flight manifest including the names and some details for the guests about 12 hours prior to the guests arriving. This allowed the hotel to plan room allocations before check-in and to make some preparations to cater for specific requirements.

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Question 21: How did you receive that information?

- 66 For the first flight, the hotel collected information directly from the guests at check-in.
- 67 For the second flight, the flight manifest was provided in advance by the DHHS by email. We obtained further information directly from the guests at check-in. A copy of this email has been produced to the Inquiry (TRAV.0001.0002.0013).

Question 22: What reports were you required to make to government departments about the persons being quarantined at your hotel?

- 68 After check-in, we provided the DJPR with a final list of guests who were staying in each of the rooms. Otherwise, we were not required to make reports to government departments about the persons quarantined at the hotel. However, we kept the nurses and the Authorised Officer informed of various complaints and issues that arose (primarily with respect to food-related matters).

DIRECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Question 23: Who was/is your contact(s) at the Department of Health and Human Services?

- 69 Travelodge Docklands did not have a contact at the DHHS. However, the DHHS provided the on-site Authorised Officer who attended the hotel each day. As noted above, this person changed over the two weeks and I did not have continuous contact with the same person.

Question 24: What directions and requests have been given to you by Department of Health and Human Services in relation to the quarantine program, and specifically by whom in the Department of Health and Human Services were those directions and/or requests made?

- 70 The Victorian Government gave certain directions in relation to the quarantine program. I do not specifically recall whether it was the DHHS or the DJPR that gave the directions but the primary directions we received were as follows:
- (a) Travelodge Docklands was instructed that guests would not be permitted to order their own food to be delivered to the hotel (e.g. UberEats or Deliveroo delivery services).
 - (b) Travelodge Docklands was instructed that the hotel could not provide guests with alcohol.
 - (c) Travelodge Docklands was instructed that the guests were wholly confined to their rooms.
- 71 The DHHS and DJPR did not provide any other formal directions to Travelodge Docklands in relation to the quarantine program (although during day-to-day discussions with the nurses and Authorised Officer, requests would be made of me and the hotel staff). Travelodge Docklands sourced advice in relation to preventing the spread of COVID-19 from the publicly available DHHS website. This information was additional to the COVID-19-related policies and protocols already in place at the hotel (which I described more fully at paragraphs 94 and 95 below).

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- 72 Representatives from the DHHS, including the nurses present on-site, only contacted hotel staff on an "as needed" basis, such as to convey complaints about the food provided or if a guest's television had broken.
- 73 I understand that all medical advice was provided by the supervising nurse. Where that advice required further action, it was directed to the Authorised Officer for the day. Hotel staff were not included in this process.

Question 25: Did the directions and requests given to you by Department of Health and Human Services change over time? If so, please provide details.

- 74 Some of the advice provided by the Victorian Government changed during Travelodge Docklands' participation in the program. I do not specifically recall whether it was the DHHS or the DJPR that made the changes but they included the following:
- (a) Initially, the hotel was instructed that guests would not be permitted to order their own food to be delivered to the hotel (e.g. UberEats or Deliveroo delivery services). This instruction was changed on 12 April 2020 and guests were permitted to do so if they had specific dietary requirements that Travelodge Docklands could not cater for (TRAV.0001.0002.0016).
 - (b) The initial instruction provided with respect to alcohol was that the hotel could not provide alcohol to guests, but this also changed.
 - (c) The guests were initially confined to their rooms for the entire day, but the hotel was eventually instructed that guests were permitted outside their room for walks or exercise. However, the hotel was not involved in the supervision of this process.

Question 26: Who was/is your contact(s) at Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions?

- 75 [REDACTED] Operations Coordinator.

Question 27: What directions and requests were given to you by the Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions, in relation to the hotel quarantine program, and specifically by whom in the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions were those directions and/or requests made?

- 76 All directions given by the DJPR in relation the hotel quarantine program were given by [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
- 77 As described at paragraphs 70 and 71 above, I do not specifically recall which of the DHHS or DJPR provided particular directions and requests to the hotel but they are set out in those paragraphs.

Question 28: Did the directions and requests given to you by the Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions changed over time? If so, please provide details.

- 78 Yes. The directions and requests changed over time as described in paragraph 74 above.

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Question 29: Were directions, information or requests given to you by any other government department or agency? If so, please provide details.

79 To the best of my knowledge, Travelodge Docklands received directions, information or requests from either the DHHS or the DJPR during the hotel quarantine program. To my knowledge, no other government departments or agencies provided directions, information or requests to the hotel.

INVOLVEMENT OF HOTEL STAFF

Question 30: Who of your staff have been involved in the quarantine program?

80 Travelodge Docklands normally employs 25 – 30 people. At the present time, we are closed for general business due to Melbourne's Stage 4 COVID-19 Lockdown and are therefore operating with a skeleton staff of only 8 employees.

81 Almost every hotel staff member at Travelodge Docklands was involved in the hotel quarantine program in some way. Therefore, in total about 25 – 30 staff were involved on either a full-time, part-time or casual basis. In one case, a staff member raised concerns that they felt uncomfortable working at Travelodge Docklands as part of the quarantine program. For this reason, the person was not required to work. I required that staff members communicate ahead of their shifts if they were feeling unwell and if so, they were not permitted to work. One staff member that did feel unwell during the hotel quarantine program was tested for COVID-19 and confirmed negative.

82 Travelodge Docklands outsources housekeeping and cleaning to a third party company, Global Hospitality Solutions (**GHS**). GHS was engaged during the period of the hotel quarantine program to clean the lobby and public bathrooms, and to refill hand sanitisers placed throughout the hotel, twice a day. As described more fully in paragraph 88 below, GHS also assisted hotel staff with replacing the guests' linen. GHS did not clean guest rooms while they were occupied during the period of the hotel quarantine. After the guests left, GHS conducted a deep clean of the guests' rooms. A copy of correspondence regarding this clean by GHS has been produced to the Inquiry (TRAV.0001.0001.0050 and TRAV.0001.0001.0311). Separately, IKON Services Australia was contracted by the Victorian Government to conduct a deep clean of the rooms occupied by the guest who was diagnosed with COVID-19 and their traveling companion. A copy of correspondence confirming this clean by IKON Services Australia has been produced to the Inquiry (TRAV.0001.0001.0022).

Question 31: What were the roles and responsibilities of staff involved in the quarantine program?

83 During the period in which Travelodge Docklands participated in the hotel quarantine program, I was the Hotel General Manager and Haylee Royal was my Assistant Hotel Manager. Together we coordinated the operations of the hotel during the program. I had overall responsibility for the management of the program at Travelodge Docklands from the perspective of the hotel. Either Ms

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- Royal or I (and usually both of us) were at the hotel during business hours each day during the hotel quarantine program, except on a small number of occasions when I asked a manager from another TFE Hotels property to step in to allow Ms Royal and I to take a day off.
- 84 Most staff members conducted their normal duties but under unusual circumstances. For example, our guest check-in staff were responsible for checking in the hotel quarantine guests, but the check-in occurred in a manner that accounted for the heightened health risk associated with guests returning from overseas. During check-in, social distancing measures and PPE (masks and gloves) were required to be used by the staff. Hotel staff sighted each guest's passport, took information regarding dietary requirements and issued room keys. Guests were required to stand 1.5m from the reception counter, as indicated by red crosses on the floor.
- 85 We had a dedicated catering team whose tasks included:
- (a) fielding phone calls including complaints from guests;
 - (b) packing food and cross-checking dietary requirements; and
 - (c) delivering food to guests (other than those known to be positive)
- 86 The catering requirements were a significant challenge for the hotel. Travelodge Docklands is a limited service hotel meaning it offers guests a buffet breakfast but otherwise does not provide room service or meals. Hotel staff were therefore required to provide a much more extensive catering service than ordinarily would be the case. For this reason, the process was slower than guests might have expected. There were almost constant complaints from guests about the food including in relation to the limited options available to guests. Given the difficulties, part way through the hotel's participation in the hotel quarantine program I decided to outsource catering to a third-party provider. A copy of the catering agreement has been produced to the Inquiry (TRAV.0001.0001.0289). This assisted in the process, but complaints did continue after this time.
- 87 Hotel staff that delivered food to guests, other than in the Red Zone, were required to place the food on the floor outside the guest room, knock on the door and then leave the area. Guests were asked to wait 30 seconds before opening their door so that the hotel staff had enough time to leave the area and avoid contact with the guests. Hotel staff were required to wear gloves and masks when delivering food to guest floors.
- 88 As mentioned in paragraph 82, Travelodge Docklands engaged outsourced housekeeping and cleaning services on a limited basis during the quarantine program. The limited housekeeping services were provided by staff from both the hotel and GHS and involved only a non-contact change of linen on the fifth and tenth days of the guests' stay. The process involved the staff leaving clean linen outside each guest room door for the guests to change their own towels and bedsheets. Guests double-bagged their used linen in a dissolvable bag and left it outside their room for collection. Staff then double-bagged the used linen again, before sending the used linen to an external laundry provider. Other than assisting with the replacement of guests' linen, GHS did not enter any of the guest room floors during the hotel quarantine program. GHS cleaned the guests' rooms three days after the guests had left.

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Question 32: As far as you are aware, have any hotel staff involved in the quarantine program tested positive for COVID-19?

- 89 As far as I am aware, no staff from Travelodge Docklands have tested positive for COVID-19. As mentioned in paragraph 81, I am aware that one staff member tested negative for COVID-19 during the hotel quarantine program.

Question 33: To your knowledge, were any hotel staff rostered to work at quarantine hotels also working at other locations?

- 90 The only hotel staff who were rostered to work at Travelodge Docklands and other locations during the hotel quarantine program were the supervisors referred to in paragraph 83 above who relieved Ms Royal and me on a small number of occasions. Those supervisors ordinarily worked at hotels not involved in the hotel quarantine program.

TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

Question 34: What (if any) training was provided to your staff by any government department regarding COVID-19 and how to work in a safe manner?

- 91 No training was provided by the Victorian Government to either me or the staff of Travelodge Docklands regarding COVID-19.
- 92 Earlier in the year TFE Hotels rolled out extensive policies, procedures and training specific to the pandemic that provided detailed guidance and information on managing and working in the hotel in a safe manner. Travelodge Docklands' management and staff were therefore aware of important safety protocols.

Question 35: What (if any) training was provided to your staff by your organisation regarding COVID-19 and how to work in a safe manner?

- 93 As noted in paragraph 92 above, earlier this year TFE Hotels rolled out extensive policies and procedures relating to the pandemic. TFE Hotels also provided all staff including hotel staff at Travelodge Docklands with comprehensive training in relation to, among other things:
- (a) self-isolation housekeeping procedures;
 - (b) sanitisation of high-touch surfaces;
 - (c) use of personal protective equipment;
 - (d) isolation protocols; and
 - (e) signage.



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94 The following policies and procedures were put in place by TFE Hotels earlier in the year that are relevant:

- (a) Mandatory Self Isolation Guest Communication (TRAV.0001.0001.0113);
- (b) Government Enforced Self Isolation Check in Process (TRAV.0001.0001.0161);
- (c) Self Isolation Housekeeping Process (TRAV.0001.0001.0108 and TRAV.0001.0001.0125);
- (d) Public Area Loading (TRAV.0001.0001.0142);
- (e) Government Enforced Self-Isolation – maintenance jobs (TRAV.0001.0001.0111);
- (f) International FIT self isolation (TRAV.0001.0001.0131);
- (g) F&B In Room Dining Process – Unwell or Isolated Guest (TRAV.0001.0001.0144);
- (h) Clean Shaven Policy – Use of N95 and KN95 Respirators (TRAV.0001.0001.0164);
- (i) Sanitisation of multiple use items (TRAV.0001.0001.0133);
- (j) Government Mandated Self Isolating Guest dietary checklist (TRAV.0001.0001.0154);
- (k) Fitness for work declarations (TRAV.0001.0001.0119); and
- (l) Travelodge Hotel Daily COVID Checklist (TRAV.0001.0001.0136).

95 Since 23 January 2020, TFE Hotels has provided staff with a daily COVID-19 briefing by email or internal SharePoint site. Since then, TFE Hotels has been constantly updating staff with information relating to the various policies and procedures relevant to hotel operations during a pandemic.

Question 36: What onsite supervision was in place for your staff at your hotel, in relation to the hotel quarantine program?

96 Staff of Travelodge Docklands were supervised on-site by Haylee Royal or myself during the hotel quarantine program (except for a brief period when we were relieved by a manager from another hotel). I was available at all times during the hotel quarantine program to staff of the hotel even when I was not on-site.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

Question 37: What PPE (if any) was provided by your organisation for hotel staff to use?

97 Travelodge Docklands provided hotel staff with gloves, masks (N95 and surgical), hairnets and sanitiser.

Question 38: What PPE (if any) was provided to hotel staff by any government department?

98 No PPE was provided to hotel staff by the Victorian Government.

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Question 39: Were hotel staff at any time required to provide their own PPE?

99 Travelodge Docklands provided hotel staff with PPE. Staff of the hotel were never required to provide their own PPE.

Question 40: What directions (if any) did your organisation give to your staff about when to use PPE?

100 Travelodge Docklands required staff to wear gloves and masks during guest check-in processes. Travelodge Docklands also required hotel staff to wear gloves, masks and hairnets when delivering food to guests.

Question 41: What training (if any) was given to hotel staff regarding the correct use of PPE? Who provided that training?

101 TFE Hotels provided its staff with training in relation to the use of PPE as part of the training programs referenced at paragraphs 93 and 94 above.

Question 42: Did your organisation at any time experience a shortage of PPE? If so, how was that shortage managed?

102 Travelodge Docklands did not experience a shortage of PPE during its participation in the hotel quarantine program.

Question 43: Was your organisation ever asked to provide PPE to anyone other than hotel staff? If so, please provide details?

103 No.

COMPLAINTS AND CONCERNS

Question 44: Who was responsible for identifying and addressing health and safety risks to hotel staff arising from the quarantine program?

104 I was responsible as the Hotel General Manager of Travelodge Docklands for identifying and addressing health and safety risks to hotel staff arising from the quarantine program.


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Question 45: What risks were identified and when were they identified? What was done (if anything) to mitigate those risks? In your opinion, were those measures adequate and effective?

- 105 I identified the following risks to the health and safety of staff at the outset of the hotel quarantine program:
- (a) high touch surfaces;
 - (b) social distancing; and
 - (c) use of PPE.
- 106 TFE Hotels provided training in relation to each of the above risks and issued operational guidelines to clarify the approach to be taken by staff.
- 107 I consider the measures that were put in place were adequate and effective in protecting hotel staff from health and safety risks during the hotel quarantine program.

Question 46: Who was responsible for identifying and acting on complaints or concerns regarding work conditions for hotel staff in relation to the quarantine program?

- 108 I was responsible as the Hotel General Manager of Travelodge Docklands for identifying and acting on complaints or concerns regarding work conditions for hotel staff in relation to the quarantine program. However, I did not receive any specific complaints or concerns regarding the work conditions for hotel staff. As noted in paragraph 81 above, where a staff member told me they were not comfortable working at the hotel during the hotel quarantine program, they were not rostered to work.

Question 47: What complaints and concerns (if any) were raised? In relation to any complaints and concerns:

- (a) what were the details including dates;
 - (b) how was the complaint or concern dealt with; and
 - (c) what was the outcome?
- 109 As a general comment, the guests at the hotel during the hotel quarantine program could be hostile and very difficult to deal with. Guests complained almost constantly to nurses and hotel staff about a range of issues ranging from the fact that they were in hotel quarantine, the limited extent to which they were permitted to be outside the rooms, the food selection and portion sizes and the quality of the food. On most occasions, the guests' complaints related to matters that were outside the control of the hotel.
- 110 Travelodge Docklands received guests' complaints:
- (a) by telephone call to reception;



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- (b) by email to a dedicated email address set up by Travelodge Docklands for food-related complaints; and
 - (c) from nurses and Authorised Officers who had received complaints from guests.
- 111 On a small number of occasions, food items with a short or expired use-by date were served to guests. This issue was resolved swiftly by hotel staff including by contacting guests to inform them of the issue and ensure that no guests had consumed the food after the relevant use-by date.
- 112 Emails containing some of the complaints have been produced to the Inquiry (for example, TRAV.0001.0001.0313 and TRAV.0001.0001.0336).

Question 48: Did you or your organisation identify or receive notice of poor or unacceptable conduct by any person in connection with the hotel quarantine program? [Without limiting the generality of this question, it includes hotel staff, contracted cleaning, catering and security personnel, authorised officers and government departmental personnel]

- 113 As mentioned in paragraph 109 above, the guests of the hotel were hostile and very difficult to deal with. Some guests were abusive towards hotel staff, nurses and the Authorised Officers. On more than one occasion, I noticed that guests' behaviour was upsetting the nurses and Authorised Officers.
- 114 Otherwise, I was not aware of any poor or unacceptable conduct by any person at Travelodge Docklands working in connection with the hotel quarantine program.

Question 49: If so:

- (a) **what were the details including when notifications were made;**
 - (b) **how were those issues dealt with; and**
 - (c) **what was the outcome?**
- 115 The DJPR was notified of some of the instances where a quarantined guest had been abusive towards hotel staff. I am unaware of any steps taken by the DJPR as a result of that notification. I am not aware of any steps taken with respect to the other matters noted above.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Question 50: If you wish to include any additional information in your witness statement, please set it out below.

- 116 At the time that I first became aware that there was an opportunity for Travelodge Docklands to be involved in the hotel quarantine program, I was pleased because I believed that it was a way in which the hotel could provide assistance in the pandemic as a good corporate citizen to the Victorian Government and Australians returning home. I was also personally proud to be involved. However, there was a lack of appropriate support from the Victorian Government for the hotel that made the experience difficult and unpleasant.


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- 117 At the outset, the DHHS and the DJPR appeared to be relatively disorganised (especially at the time of the arrival of the first flight of passengers for the hotel). This added enormously to the pressure the hotel was under. It also increased the hostility from the guests because they were required to check-in manually with the hotel which took a significant amount of time, and the hotel was then unable to meet various dietary requirements and restrictions for those guests for a number of days. Some of the guests remained hostile from this time right throughout their stay at the hotel.
- 118 I was also surprised that the DHHS and the DJPR did not provide COVID-19-related training and PPE to the hotel and its staff. Thankfully, TFE Hotels had rolled out various pandemic-related policies and training programs commencing around the end of January 2020 for staff at Travelodge Docklands, and the hotel staff had been required to complete those programs.
- 119 There was also a significant safety issue that caused me concern. During the program, I was made aware that on-site nurses from the DHHS were disposing of their PPE in the regular garbage bins at Travelodge Docklands. I knew from discussions I had with our external cleaning company Suez that such material needed to be deposited in a clinical waste bin (which the DHHS had not provided to the hotel). I notified the DHHS of this issue but they did not provide clinical bins to the hotel for about three days during which time we did not have a clinical waste bin on-site for proper disposal of these items.
- 120 Overall, I did not observe any unprofessional conduct by any hotel staff, nurses, security staff or other personnel involved in the hotel quarantine program at Travelodge Docklands. However, I did notice instances of unhelpful and combative communication by the nurses and the Authorised Officers on-site at the hotel. The nurses in particular could be difficult to deal with and did not work in a collaborative manner with me and other hotel staff. I was also disappointed that the Authorised Officer appeared unable or unwilling to deal effectively with guests who were behaving poorly towards hotel staff.

Date:

Signed by **Ram Bharadwaj** in the presence of:



Signature of witness



Signature of **Ram Bharadwaj**

Niraj Karki (Duty Manager) Travelodge Docklands

Name of witness (print)