

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country football

Warrnambool – 10 March 2004

Members

Mr M. P. Crutchfield

Mr B. P. Hardman

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Mr P. L. Walsh

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Executive Officer: Ms K. Murray

Research Officer: Dr V. Koops

Witnesses

Mr T. McAdam, Recreation Services Officer, Shire of Glenelg (affirmed); and

Mr P. Currie, Leisure Services Coordinator, Shire of Southern Grampians (affirmed).

The CHAIR — Welcome everybody. Under the powers conferred on this committee by the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act this committee is empowered to take all evidence at these hearings on oath or affirmation. I wish to advise all present at these hearings that all evidence taken by this committee, including submissions, is, under the provisions of the Constitution Act, granted immunity from judicial review. I also wish to advise witnesses that any comments made by witnesses outside the committee's hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. This is an all-party parliamentary committee.

Phil, would you be able to tell us your address and the capacity in which you are attending today, and whether you are represent an organisation?

Mr CURRIE — Certainly. I am the leisure services coordinator for the Southern Grampians Shire Council in Hamilton. The postal address is Locked Bag 685, Hamilton.

The CHAIR — Terry, could you give us the same information?

Mr McADAM — I am the recreation services officer for the Glenelg Shire Council, and our address is PO Box 152, Portland.

The CHAIR — And are you here in that capacity today?

Mr McADAM — That is right. It is my second week on the job.

The CHAIR — A baptism of fire. Your evidence today will be taken down and will become public evidence in due course. I do not know how you would like to do this. Could both of you give us a few minutes each, then afterwards we will ask some questions.

Mr CURRIE — I am here today not only in the capacity of a council officer, but I also have the benefit of being a local football coach in the area — our previous coach retired last year — and a footballer from the leagues that we are talking about in this area, so I am able to give you guys a bit of an all-round view as a local government level participant and also on an official coaching level.

You may or may not be aware that in this area we have the Western Border Football League, which I would class as the regional league from the area of the Southern Grampians Shire Council and the Glenelg Shire Council. It encompasses the Portland Football Club to the south and Hamilton footy club to the west, and it extends into Mount Gambier and Millicent in South Australia. Primarily in the Southern Grampians and Glenelg shires we have the South District Football League, and that is made up of little teams, such as Heathmere, Tyrendarra, Westerns, Sandford and Dartmoor, all in the Glenelg shire, and Branxholme, Coleraine and Cavendish in the Southern Grampians shire. The whole league is contained in the two shires.

The teams of the Mininera Football League, which is another minor league, are Penshurst, Dunkeld and Glenthompson from the Southern Grampians shire and Caramut, Lake Bolac, Wickliffe, Ararat United, Hawkesdale-Macarthur, Lismore, Derrinallum, Moyston-Willaura, SMW Rovers, Tatyoon and Woorndoo-Mortlake. The league is made up of teams from our shire area. With Terry's colleague, Dale King — who is out of the country at the moment — we thought it wise to do a joint submission, which I understand you have a copy of.

On 13 November 2003 we held a forum in Heywood and invited representatives from all leagues. As well as the umpires association there were local councillors, council officers and the Honourable Denis Napthine, and Kristen came down as well. We held a forum and discussion on the terms of reference. It is probably wise to say that representatives aired their opinions and grievances rather than addressed the terms of reference, which Dr Napthine might be able to attest to. From that we were able to develop a joint submission from both shires.

You may be familiar with our submission, so I will not go into all points on all the terms of reference, but if you do not mind I will go to the points in our recommendations on term of reference (f). I would like to push that home. On terms of reference (a) to (e) I would suggest that the issues we have outlined would be very similar to other ones that you would be receiving, the same types of issues that all sporting clubs face.

I would like to add to just a couple of points there. The first is that leagues may have to be tailored to the type of player who is playing. I would just like to expand on a little bit. Your premier leagues or your regional leagues —

for example, the Western Border Football League — I do not believe have any major difficulties with maintaining player numbers. Cash flows do not seem to be a huge issue with these teams. That is the type of football that people play because they are there to play footy: they are there to play at the highest level that they can. Whereas when you go down to more your minor leagues or your bush leagues — for example, the South West District Football Netball League — you really notice that the reasons why people play out there are more to do with the reasons outlined in the other terms of reference: your social interaction point. For a lot of people it is the only time that they come together. A lot of these little football teams do not have anything else but a recreation reserve in that area, not even a general store. Tyrendarra and Heathmere are prime examples of that. There is not any local store. There might be a church there and a recreation reserve — and in Heathmere's case, a speedway — and that is pretty much it.

It takes approximately 150 participants to provide two games of footy and three games of netball in an afternoon. The sheer nature of AFL footy and the requirement to have at least 18 per team, I believe, is probably the biggest hurdle. AFL can be modified only to a degree in the sense of having less numbers on the ground. Netball is able to sustain participation because, I suppose, of the requirement of less players per team. If clubs know that they do not have the players, they can substitute a team out of their competition.

In respect to the administration of clubs, certainly over the last decade the increase of requirements on the GST, law, risk management and all those types of things have been a real strain on the volunteerism that is a strength of country football. I know that now Sport and Recreation Victoria does have a country action grant scheme which is designed for those types of those requirements, I suppose — or it can be tailored for that sort of requirement — but it does require the peak body to take the first step and maybe generate a template for all the clubs, to streamline their reporting requirements and, I suppose, keep them informed. It is quite simple to provide an information session for club administrators. There are instances where they continue on in the same roles for many, many years, but there are also many instances where the change of the executive happens quite regularly, particularly in junior sport, with the window of opportunity for the kids' parents. You might have them for one or two years before the kids become too old for junior sport, and they head off, and of course the family, including the parents, head off as well.

In closing, on the disrespect to the leagues, I believe they have to really determine the mode of participation. It is a very tough area on the executives of leagues. They have played their football and have been there and expect that it is still a little bit similar to what it was when they played: everyone wants to play their 20 games per year; football is the no. 1 priority. Unfortunately, with the way that the work force make-up has changed, the availability of time to train, the hours that everyone has to work and the commitment that they can give, it does not quite fit into the traditional sense of the game. I suppose, to use the words, 'the dead wood' in the executives may have to be really looked at because they are still playing their football through their administrative role, whereas it needs to be looked at in a broader sense with these modern-day influences taken into consideration. Would you like to add anything to that, Terry?

Mr McADAM — I do not think I could do any better, Phil. I think you have covered all the points very well.

Dr NAPHTHINE — Between the two of you, you represent shires that are responsible for a large number of grounds. What would you say with respect to government assistance for you maintaining and upgrading those facilities and what action would you like to take in terms of perhaps increasing government assistance? You can always tell us you want less government assistance.

Mr CURRIE — I suppose our main source of government assistance for our recreation reserve upgrades is through the Sport and Recreation Victoria minor facilities assistance grants scheme. That has been quite good, and they are very open to the upgrade of facilities. A lot of our recreation reserves and swimming pools come around at a time. They are all starting to age to a level where they need that capital input to bring them up to standard.

I suppose the main area of cost for a council or the Department of Sustainability and Environment is the periodical maintenance and upkeep of the grounds. Having clubs in that area undertaking those roles certainly does ease the load on councils. Having the recreation reserve being utilised all year round I believe is more beneficial to council than having it sitting there stagnant for six or seven months a year until the cricketers play or something like that. It may be the case that we need to find more and broader uses for our recreation reserves. Certainly some assistance

in filling the void of clubs, especially football and netball clubs that have folded or amalgamated, would be most beneficial.

I suppose on the other point there, we have a case in our minor league. Dunkeld Football Club rescinded for two years and it has now amalgamated with the Glenthompson Football Club. What happens now is that they play half their home games at each of their former grounds. Instead of playing eight home ground games a year, we are playing four home games at each of the two recreation reserves, and with risk management requirements council is being asked to fund improvements to the netball courts, football ovals and things for half as much use. So it is a real balancing act, in the sense that some participation is better than none at our recreation reserves, but there will be a time when council has to draw a bit of a hard line and say, 'It is either one or the other. We cannot afford to keep subsidising both'.

Mr McADAM — Further on that, I was at a meeting with the Sandford Football Club yesterday. It is a very small town immediately adjacent to Merino, and its footy club folded in about 1982. But Merino has a lot of young kids at that particular town, and Sandford recognises that that could be a future recruiting ground, and so they want to start playing some games at the Merino oval. A lot of things need to be done at that oval to bring it up to scratch, and the Sandford club is very enthusiastic about doing them, but they would have to provide all the works and funding themselves. They would have to throw their hat into the ring of the council's minor works funds and compete against a lot of other different sports. It is not particularly football focused, so if they miss out on funding due to some other recreational or sporting body having a more competitive bid, they will have to throw that bid away for another year or so and have a crack at it in 12 months time. If there was any specific funding for struggling clubs like this that want to get the town back on track and give Merino some hope for these young kids going to school, any directed assistance targeted at these small towns that are struggling could be very beneficial.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — In the spectrum, if you like, from 1 to 10 — or from good to bad — as a player and council officer, what is the perception of the benefits that grassroots footy gets from the AFL, particularly out in your areas and not so much in big metropolitan areas like Geelong and Warrnambool? An issue has been raised that the AFL could provide some resources at a grassroots level, whether that be on the capital side or the program side.

Mr CURRIE — I would have to agree with that request of the AFL maybe taking more of a lead role in those provisions and maybe in the program, but possibly also in the administrative areas of football. At present, well certainly in a more minor league, AFL input is quite minimal. Its Auskick program at the grassroots of junior football is there, and it is well utilised throughout our shires. On any given Saturday you are having over 100 kids attending Auskick, but there seems to be a bit of a void between Auskick up to the point where they get to the age of 16. If the young men aspire to a football career, then they might be given the opportunity, but it is very much a case of them having to be in the right place or make themselves available to take the opportunity to go on to the more elite levels of football. Then there is the more social-minded player or just the guy who gives 100 per cent a week but will never be an AFL star. The support the AFL gives those types of people and clubs is quite minimal. I have noticed that across many years of playing for either Western Border or leagues out in the bush. There does not seem to be a heck of a lot of on-the-ground support for those clubs. It seems to be more a case of directives from the VCFL saying 'You must have this' in respect of such things as the co-location of netball courts on your reserve, or having your goal padding at 2 metres high, those types of things. It just does not turn up and say, 'Here you go! Here is all the stuff for you to do'. A directive comes that says, 'This must be done, otherwise you are in jeopardy of losing your home games', or something like that.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — I have one other question, Phil. With the leagues, in Geelong there is an amalgamation of the administration of two leagues, but the third league does not want to amalgamate. I noted your subtle comments that perhaps administrators have been there for two decades and do not want to move on and embrace changes in their leagues and in football. Do you see any benefits in an amalgamation of the administration, and is it possible in your area? It may not be possible because of the tyranny of distance, but do you see any benefits for the leagues in terms of amalgamating their administrations?

Mr CURRIE — I do not know whether the amalgamation is the answer or even just a sharing of the information in the form of workshops with the league administrators who have had more exposure to the modern-day style of running operations and the qualified sports administrators, but there would certainly be merit in the administration amalgamating in the sense that you might get a more strategic approach to the way that football is administered throughout the south-west of Victoria. I cannot see the two leagues in operation at the

moment — that is, the South West Football League and the Western Border Football League — being able to do that, simply due to the different styles of football. But certainly if they were to embrace it and say, ‘Yes, these are our minor leagues and we might uncover a gem of a player in this area and bring them on up and invite them to play at a higher level’, I think there would be some merits in that streamlining and the amalgamation of administrative roles.

The CHAIR — Phil and Terry, thank you very much to you and your shires for all the work you have done in bringing together your submission. It has been well thought out, and it is going to help us. You will receive a copy of the transcript in about a fortnight. You can correct any obvious errors of fact and grammar, but not matters of substance.

Dr NAPTHINE — You are most welcome to stay and listen and join in the comments from the floor later on too.

Witnesses withdrew.