

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country football

Warrnambool – 10 March 2004

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Mr G. W. Linke, Secretary, Mininera and District Football Netball League (sworn).

The CHAIR — Glen, welcome. I know that you were here earlier, so I will not go through the preface. For the purpose of the transcript, would you give us your full address and tell us whether you are representing the district football league or are appearing as an individual today?

Mr LINKE — I am the administration secretary of the Mininera and District Football League. I reside at 81 Watten Street, Penshurst.

The CHAIR — If you would like to make comments for 5 or 10 minutes, then we will ask questions.

Mr LINKE — The Mininera and District Football League was originally formed in 1922. It consists of 10 teams, right from Ararat down to Lismore/Derrinallum and over to the west to Hawkesdale–Macarthur, so it covers a very big area. We have three grades of football: seniors, reserves and under 16s. We meet probably every month. The league is run by an executive, which consists of the president, an administration secretary, a clearance secretary, a tribunal secretary and a league recorder who does the scores on a Saturday evening. We try and spread the work out because we are all voluntary workers and it certainly works quite well. Two delegates from each club represent their club at the league meetings. I should say that the members of the executive of the league are independent of the clubs; they do not have affiliation with the clubs at all.

We are financially sound, with a small cash reserve. Our main income is the finals. We have a final five. All clubs participate in getting a final. We feel that is the best way to do it. Including our best and fairest count, every club gets a chance to run the final, which certainly is a financial bonanza for the club that runs it. That probably is the main running of the league, at this stage at any rate.

Dr NAPHTHINE — Glen, from my knowledge your league probably best represents the change that is happening in country football. You have had the situation this year where Ararat United is now in recess, and just about every team in your league is a combined team. For example, Dunkeld-Glenthompson, Hawkesdale-McArthur, Wickliffe-Lake Bolac, and Woorndoo-Mortlake all used to be two separate teams. So your league probably represents in microcosm what we are seeing in country footy. Lismore-Derrinallum is the same. You are probably best placed to say why that has happened and what sort of things need to be done to stop further amalgamations and disbanding of teams. It is a very broad question, but could tell us why it has happened and what sort of things you think could be put in place perhaps to maintain it as it is or improve the situation?

Mr LINKE — With the teams amalgamating, the movement down to the urban areas has been the biggest problem. The young people are going down there to further their education. They get jobs and very rarely come back to play country football. That has been the biggest problem. I do not know whether I can say much more about that. I do not know how we can solve that problem.

Mr McQUILTEN — What about the size of farms? In the old days the farms were 1000 acres and now they are 5000 acres.

Mr LINKE — That is correct.

Mr McQUILTEN — Is that not having a major effect in certain areas?

Mr LINKE — Yes, in certain areas it has, for sure. Farms are getting bigger. When we had the soldier settlement going in the 1950s and 1960s there were a lot more players about the place to play country football, but now that is not the case.

Dr NAPHTHINE — Now you are in a different situation. We heard earlier evidence from the Southern Grampians shire with respect particularly to Glenthompson-Dunkeld, and it would apply to many of your combined teams, where the shire is saying, 'How long can we go on having two grounds that are only used four or five times a year? There needs to be some rationalisation'. You probably have a number of teams that play in two different places?

Mr LINKE — That is right.

Dr NAPHTHINE — Does the league think that perhaps if the state government believes there ought to be a continuation of strong country footy, perhaps it should assist those shires in maintaining facilities up to the proper standard in some of the smaller centres?

Mr LINKE — It has to come down to those amalgamated clubs running one ground. A typical example is the Wickliffe-Lake Bolac club. Four or five years ago they bit the bullet and said, 'We are going to run one ground', and ever since they have played all their games at Lake Bolac and they have gone on to great success. We all know of the premierships they have won. They certainly have been a very strong club since moving to the one venue. If you have two venues you have two electricity accounts, two grounds to try and maintain the surface of — and we all know that is a big issue these days.

The CHAIR — Do the Wickliffe people still feel included as part of that team?

Mr LINKE — I think they do. At the start there was a bit of resentment, for sure, amongst some people, but the information I have is that it is not a problem.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — What discernible difference, if any, do the AFL and the VCFL make to your league in terms of benefits accrued?

Mr LINKE — Very little.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — Do you see it either on a capital side or a program side?

Mr LINKE — The Auskick program is very strong in our league, but other than that as far as financial moneys, I see very little that comes through, which is a bit unfortunate. If you really go through the AFL and see the country footballers who are playing AFL football, it is quite surprising the number of players who are playing down there.

Mr MITCHELL — How do you go with the retention of players above the age of 16 — say 16 to 25?

Mr LINKE — You do get a certain drop out. A lot of the young ones get their drivers licences, get independent and go their own way, but I do not think it is a real big issue, but there is certainly a drop out. I am more concerned about some of these players who start playing football too early. By the time they get to 16 or 18 they are sick of football.

Mr MITCHELL — Had a gutful, yes?

Mr LINKE — Yes.

Mr MITCHELL — I see that some leagues have different rulings in the juniors, say the under-10s, where they take away the winning and losing-type outcomes and make the game a bit softer and more of a plaything rather than an actual competition?

Mr LINKE — Yes, that has been discussed in our league, but it has not gone down too well among some clubs.

Mr MITCHELL — Are the parents usually the ones who seem to be hard on that?

Mr LINKE — Yes, that is probably more the case. I know that in our under-16 competition you probably have the top five or six and the bottom five; there is a big difference, there is no doubt about it.

Dr NAPTHINE — Glen, it has been suggested to us before at the minor league level that there ought to be some flexibility, particularly with regard to reserves or even underage teams, in terms of whether there ought to be 16 on the ground and up to 10 on the interchange bench. If you have older players playing longer they can then participate, but not necessarily fully. There are people who have not got the time to train properly and people who play for social reasons. Also there is a concern that in some cases you have a number of kids come out of under-16s who then cannot get into the team, so they drop out. Perhaps we ought to have at the reserves level more flexibility in terms of how we play the game, perhaps even shorter quarters, to try and keep people involved and keep clubs alive. What would be the league's view on that sort of thing?

Mr LINKE — The VCFL rules cover that pretty well. You can play down to 14 a side and it still constitutes a game of football. Some clubs have used that last year; they have had to play down to 14 a side. The other side has to have the same number on the ground at that time.

Dr NAPTHINE — What about the interchange bench in those sorts of circumstances?

Mr LINKE — We have up to four on the interchange.

Dr NAPTHINE — Why do we not have unlimited numbers on the interchange in reserve so that any person who wants to play for Penshurst or for Lismore-Derrinallum does not get told on the Thursday night that they cannot even make the seconds at Lismore-Derrinallum? If they want to play, why can't they sit on the interchange bench and get a game?

Mr LINKE — That is a point. That is probably a possibility. Yes, for sure, but it has not been implemented at all in our league at this stage.

The CHAIR — Glen, thank you very much for giving us your time today and showing us aspects of where the real issues are. You will get a copy of the transcript. You can make corrections to fact or grammar, but not to matters of substance. Thank you.

Witness withdrew.