

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country football

Ballarat –27 April 2004

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Mrs J. Dash, president, Ballarat Netball Association (sworn).

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for giving up your time and juggling your commitments to help us today. Under the powers conferred on the committee by the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act the committee is empowered to take all evidence on oath or affirmation. I advise all present that all evidence taken by the committee, including submissions, is, under the provisions of the Constitution Act, granted immunity from judicial review. I also advise witnesses that any comments made by witnesses outside the committee's hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. For the purposes of the transcript, could you please provide your full name, address and the organisation you are representing.

Mrs DASH — My name is Jo-Anne Dash, and my address is 2489 Old Melbourne Road, Dunnstown. My title is president of the Ballarat Netball Association. I do not have screeds of paper and submissions here. I have just come back from holiday, and have been added to the list, and I thank Kristen for the opportunity to be here. Although what happens with country football does not directly affect us — because we are unaffiliated with any football — the more I thought about it through the week, the more I realised that we actually are more affiliated than we realise because most of the development that happens in the central highlands region, which is zoned by Netball Victoria — in fact 90 per cent of the development — comes from our association; so I think we are linked in many ways.

We run a central situation in Ballarat. We have four indoor courts and two outdoor courts. We have a facility worth well over \$1 million to replace. We have received \$50 000 over 20 years as a gift, and that is the only money we have ever received. The rest of the money we have raised — we have raised ourselves. It is a user-pays system. Our people who work to develop this netball association are volunteers, and we do not seem to attract anywhere near the money that some sports may be fortunate enough to attract. One of the reasons that happens is because we are too efficient. We come from a body — Netball Victoria — which is a very well structured body of sport. Situations that are facing other sports now with regard to insurances and those problems were recognised and dealt with at Netball Victoria some years ago, and when we attend cross-sport meetings about problems with umpires and so on we find that we do have in common the fact that we all share the same problems such as difficulties in finding and retaining volunteers, in getting people to do things they are not paid for. I am sure you will hear ad nauseam today that those sorts of problems are all quite common to any sporting organisation. I am being careful not to sound as if we are whingeing. I must say that our policy of existence is 'Sport for all', but we often think we should change that to call it, 'No-one's going to give us any money so we'll do it ourselves!'. We have proved that that can be done.

We have situations with female athletes where our team members, who represent the City of Ballarat at the state league level, travel to Melbourne, often at their own cost, and pay for things like the strapping of ankles, which cost a fortune. It is not done by the club. Football clubs do supply all that to their players, but netball clubs do not. The players are used to paying for things themselves, so our situation is quite different. We do the training, the education for most of the umpires in this area, and we are inundated from phone calls from country football-netball leagues for umpires from the central body, which is impossible to fulfil. We do as much as we can, we train, we try to educate, and we do provide umpires for finals so that the country netball-football finals are impartial, with qualified people umpiring, but we are feeling the strain. We are trying to put that back on to the leagues to say, 'You need to train umpires and coaches and develop players as we have'. We run netball for juniors and seniors; we run netball every day of the week in Ballarat. We have about 3500 registered members. We run netball for disabled groups, and all of this is done by volunteers. We have special coaching for people in specialist schools, which we visit or our volunteers visit. We have training programs for umpires, coaches and players, and we go from five-years-old to the players who are playing in the second top level in Victoria.

We have improved in our talent identification since the facilities have been built, and I remind you that we received a one-off grant of \$50 000 some 15 years ago from the City of Ballarat. Everything else has been done by ourselves, by borrowing money or by fundraising, by ourselves. We are very efficient, very hardworking; we attract not much because we are probably too efficient. We have gotten into the habit of doing it ourselves, and I think sometimes we could get more help with some things if we sought the need. We have recently resurfaced our two outdoor courts at some cost. No-one was going to pay for it and we needed the courts to be safer. Our risk management policy stated that the courts needed upgrading. We upgraded them; we are paying for it. So I suppose we sit in a different position in country sport to perhaps country netball-football, but because we are the centre and we provide the backup and the training, we are linked in some way, so we do certainly have some stake as a key stakeholder in this whole thing. I guess this is an opportunity for me to let you know what we do and perhaps to see

a balance of what can be done. There are certainly cultural differences between country football-netball and the netball culture, and that has been discussed at a forum in Ballarat between four different sports.

The umpiring situation is one of the other common things that we share. We all have problems getting umpires and keeping them and all the rest of it. At these cross-sport meetings, when the recommendations came up, at almost every juncture I had to say, 'Yes, we do that' and 'Yes, we do that' because our netball structure is very strong. The culture of netball does not include abusing umpires — I think a raised eyebrow is about as far as you can go in netball. We discovered that that was the culture, and that is important, and I think that needs to be included in what you are looking at. It is the culture of self-help and the culture of discipline, I suppose.

I have had quite a bit to do with country netball in that over the last two or three years I have spent a couple of years as a guest speaker at trophy nights and so forth. I was obviously invited as the token female because the women on the committee started saying that it was about time that they had a female speaker and so, doing the right thing, the blokes invited a female speaker. A couple of times my friend had the engine running ready to leave in a big hurry because I told them a few facts. At one country football association dinner the women were thrilled that the next year they were allowed to sit up near the men's committee rather than their table being at the back near the kitchen — so that was a big step forward. There were things like the trophies for the blokes who won best and fairest — every second one was huge and extremely expensive but the netballer's trophies were very small. So I made a few pertinent comments about the sort of thing, and I must admit that it was mostly taken with quite good humour, but hopefully it made people think a little bit more about whether if they are calling it equality they are actually doing it. The women involved with country football and netball need to stand up a little bit more, and I see us as a shining example of what can be done. That is it unless you have questions.

Dr NAPHTHINE — Is your main competition on Saturday afternoon? Do many of your players also play in the various — —

Mrs DASH — That is what I mean by links. The strongest competition in the region in terms of the quality of play is played on Thursday night at our indoor centre. Quite a few of those girls will then filter out on weekends and play in all of the country leagues in this region. I would suggest that the players either go back home or follow the boyfriend from club to club. For whatever reason they go with friends. So out of those 2000 seniors, quite a big percentage would be involved with clubs in those areas. That is what I mean by the link because they come to us with problems and issues and we try to work with them.

Dr NAPHTHINE — Do your clubs recruit their own players and play as a club, or are they — like in a lot of junior basketball — allocated to teams on the basis of beefing up the competition?

Mrs DASH — No, there are four major clubs in our association — major as in more than 10 teams — who operate junior and senior teams so there is a direct pathway through. People coming in can contact the association, and the association has a leaflet saying, 'These are the four major clubs: you choose' and any one of them is recommended by the association because we work very closely together. Everyone's clubs facilities are at the Ballarat Netball Association. When it comes to talent identification, the clubs and the association work very well together. We run talent identification for the kids in the country areas as well so that we open it up for players. Any player in the region is able to try out for the region and the zone. There is a whole structure for talent identification. The advantage to being in town is that when you train you are inside, and our clubs have those advantages, whereas some children out in the country areas may be training out in the cold with not very good lighting, so they do not develop as well simply because of the physical facts. You can obviously train more often and better inside.

Dr NAPHTHINE — Traditionally do your clubs pay umpires, coaches and players?

Mrs DASH — No. That is the culture — —

Dr NAPHTHINE — None to the trifecta?

Mrs DASH — The association gives out-of-pocket expenses to umpires, and that covers travel — so you are talking about \$8 a game, \$12 for a premier league game. That is where our strength is. People obviously do not come out at 10 o'clock on Thursday night in the middle of winter to umpire for \$8 out-of-pocket expenses.

Dr NAPTHINE — So you do not have a situation where, for example, Brown Hill — and I do not know any of the teams — —

Mrs DASH — That is one of our clubs, yes.

Dr NAPTHINE — Brown Hill has not won a premiership for four or five years, and the girls are saying, 'Before I retire I want to win a premiership, so let's all rally round and raise a bit of money and we will get Eloise Southby and we will pay her \$500 a game — —

Mrs DASH — That is more than she is getting for the Australian team!

Dr NAPTHINE — We will get Sharelle McMahon to play in the centre and we will pay her a few dollars and we will win the premiership this year. You do not get a bit of that in the competition?

Mrs DASH — No, it does not happen in netball yet. There are paid netball coaches. It always amuses me because if you have a good qualification you get lots of phone calls. Many times I have said, 'How much are you paying the senior footy coach? Right. Not quite the same is it? Thanks. See you later'. Not that I am interested in doing it anyway, but I am amused by people saying that they will send a little bit of money our way — so \$500 for the season and that is taking three teams. When you ask what the senior footy coach is getting, it is considerably more. So it is not there, but there is certainly money coming into netball. Not in our association. I do not know why. It will happen, I suppose.

Dr NAPTHINE — Why do you think that is? Do you think it is just cultural?

Mrs DASH — Yes, I think it is cultural.

Dr NAPTHINE — The expectation that you play your top footballers even at a district level and at the second highest state level you expect to pay the player.

Mrs DASH — Yes. It is cultural. Liz Taverner, who has just retired, has been one of the world's best defenders for some time. She played with Melbourne Phoenix and she represented Australia for 10 years or more. Sharelle McMahon sat down one night at training and worked out how much money they got — they are known as professional netballers. The money they got for that year equated to 5 cents for a training session, 10 cents a game — and those are the facts. Everyone laughed and now we are saying to our players, 'I will give you 20 cents if you play', but that is a joke. I do not know what will happen. Those girls have to have a full-time career to be able to survive. The money is \$20 000 even for players who come down to Melbourne from Sydney for the national league. People in netball circles were shocked until someone said, 'She still has to work full time'. So they have to work full time and have a career and then dedicate themselves to training four times a week, travelling interstate playing for the national league and then using their holidays to represent Australia on the world stage. Several netballers have lost their jobs because they have used their holidays — and that is the history of it.

As I am saying this I am wondering why on earth we are doing it, but that is the culture. I would love to see those top players get more recompense or make life easier for them so that they could work part time and dedicate themselves to their sport. We are the best in the world at it; the money that goes to netball is nothing like the money that goes to swimming or football. Football is Australian, but we are on the world stage. There are lots of questions about money. However, if at the top level money comes into it, it will filter down and then you will have the situation of someone offering a Brown Hill player \$50 a match to play for it. Then there is the moral thing of saying, 'You can't blame someone because they have money'. Yes, with loyalty you can blame someone and eventually that might happen. It is very sad to see, if it does happen. I am probably old-fashioned, but we do not like the: 'And who are you playing with this year?'. The idea of the highest bidder — I do not know that that is a healthy thing, and I do not know what it has done for country football either. We see premierships being won by teams that have paid players, and then they run away the next year and the team is struggling because they got rid of their locals and are putting ads in the paper that they have nine players and all that sort of thing. One wonders whether the money was used wisely in the first place. I do not want that to happen to netball.

The CHAIR — We have a lot of questions for you, but I know you must go. Thank you very much for your submission. It is enlightening and I am sure you could tell us a lot more about the cultural shifts, and how we could help the cultural shifts in football meet the heights of where netball is at the moment, which is what we probably need to do to survive.

Mrs DASH — Yes, we were a surprise inclusion, and I am just glad to have the opportunity to let you know what is happening out there.

Witness withdrew.