

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country football

Lakes Entrance – 6 April 2004

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Mr T. Bourke.

The CHAIR — We have a session now that we call comments from the floor. I believe we have a member of the public who would like to talk to us. We will not take an oath or affirmation, but again the same applies — under the provisions of the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act your evidence will be granted immunity from judicial review, but any comments made outside the committee's hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. Could you make some comments, then afterwards we may ask you some questions?

Mr BOURKE — My name is Trevor Bourke. My address is 20 Newton Court, Nicholson.

The CHAIR — Thanks very much, Trevor. Fire away!

Mr BOURKE — I noticed a few comments as the boys were going through. Volunteers was the first one I picked up on. A couple of years ago applied for a grant to try and get elderly people from the community back involved with footy clubs. I applied for money to get them back as medical trainers — to dress up in the white gear, run on and do whatever they have to do. One thing that was lacking in a lot of clubs was being able to entice medical people. The way the situation is now you have to have them. I applied for the grant, and the answer came back, 'Not really suitable and probably not required'. I thought that getting these people who no longer attend to come back to that sport or any sport was the thing. But anyway, it was not considered. I thought that was a point to go through.

Then there are the physically disadvantaged. Is that a nice way to put it? People who are a bit overweight, like me, can still be involved. We can still wave goal umpires flags and that sort of thing. It was all knocked on the head a bit. That was just one area.

Facilities and infrastructure at grounds — I should just go back a bit. I umpire, and I am a club administrator. I am not supposed to be both because you cannot be an umpire and a club administrator. Two days before the season starts I resign from the club and I become an umpire, so you sort of get around it. You see a lot of the grounds that way. Some try to make facilities comfortable, but realistically they are really terrible. It has been brought up about the girls, the netballers — they just do not change at grounds any more. They have to come dressed up, and that is not right. Then after the games they go home, and they do not come back. They go home, have a shower and put their feet up and so they are gone for the day. I suppose the fellows are all right — they can have a couple of beers. But they do not stay around either. Most of the grounds are like that. Some are good, a lot better than others, but the infrastructure at the grounds is really poor across the whole area.

The other thing I did think of was in talking about the water. I do not know how far you can go with this — it would be nice to have a tap to every ground and whatever — but on wastewater, I see a lot of it go into the morass at Bairnsdale. It seems to me it has to be used somehow. It could go back to the grounds. I played golf here at Lakes Entrance this morning. The Lakes Entrance Golf Club is watered from the sewerage treatment plant — and it is lovely. I am sure that grounds of regional ground status could be watered that way as well.

The salary cap I thought was a good one. I wrote down here, 'It's like a black hole left by one political party to another — one government runs up a debt; the next government tries to get out of it'. Football clubs and administrators are no different. Good administrators mean a good club until bad administrators come along. I think that will just go up and down forever with football: you get good ones, you get bad ones, and you just hope you get good ones a lot more than you get bad ones.

Can I have three wishes, please?

Mr WALSH — Go for it. You are not the Premier, though; you are only the Treasurer.

Mr BOURKE — They are the ones who control the money, aren't they? On the zones, I spoke to a couple of Hawthorn players. They are not allowed to even train on any ground in East Gippsland because they did not consider it safe enough. They were told that if they stepped foot on a ground in East Gippsland, that would be the finish at AFL — they were just out. It was just not worth taking the risk. There has to be risk management or something there somehow. If they are told that they cannot train on a ground here, you will never get them here. So it gets back to the infrastructure again, to the ground playing surface as well as the facilities.

The CHAIR — Was that because of the water?

Mr BOURKE — No. It was just the roughness of the ground. It seems fine for guys here to run out on the ground and play footy. I suppose when you get to that level they just could not take the chance that they would roll an ankle or whatever. It is actually just the ground surface. I know that even in Bairnsdale at the moment they are spending money doing up the whole ground. They have allocated \$20 000 to actually re-do the whole ground. It is being done with volunteers and whatever, but \$20 000 — this is to resurface the whole ground: reseed it, resow it, rewater it. That was to fix all the sprinklers as well. But \$20 000 is it — and that is as much as you can ever get.

Dr NAPTHINE — You mentioned the salary cap. What is your view on the salary cap: good, bad, waste of time?

Mr BOURKE — I have young boys who played footy as well. One of my mates has three boys who have just left this area to go to Melbourne — to work, of course. They did not come back because although they are good enough to play in the Bairnsdale seconds, they are also getting \$150 a game to play in Melbourne. Obviously there is no salary cap. It is like anything else — the bigger the population the more chance you have of making money to pay players. So the smaller country towns are really going to be in hard for it.

It is very hard to police. I mean, even here there are still blokes who get paid by the supporters and whatever, and you do it. We had a lot of trouble. I was involved with Bairnsdale when we were voted out of the Latrobe Valley Football League because we could not field a reserves team. It was Latrobe Valley that actually voted Bairnsdale out and ever since they have been trying to get them back again. We could not field a reserves team in the end — for a lot of different reasons. Work commitments on Saturday mornings was one. If you are asking blokes to travel from here even to Traralgon or Leongatha, we were leaving at 6 o'clock or 7 o'clock in the morning to get the under-18s there on time. Kids these days have to work so they just could not go. So they would opt to play for the local teams, where they could get a couple of dollars to cover their expenses. When we did not have reserves in the Latrobe Valley Football League, it made things a helluva lot easier administration wise, for a start. We did not have to try to get players off the street. We were not covering their expenses to play, either.

I do not know about the salary cap. If you increase it, the stronger clubs will be able to pay it; the weaker clubs will never be able to. So you are going to create a big gap there somewhere. Then all you are going to be doing is trying to fix that as well. Whether you have a salary cap in Melbourne, for the metro clubs, — would that make the blokes come back to the country each week and play? Who knows? It is one of those things. All I can say realistically is that if every administrator was honest, like every politician, they would all pay just the salary cap, wouldn't they?

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Trevor.

Committee adjourned.