

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country football

Shepparton – 14 April 2004

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Witnesses

Cr N. Repacholi, mayor; and
Cr M. Riley, councillor, Shire of Campaspe.

Cr REPACHOLI — We are representing some views from the Shire of Campaspe tonight. I am Neil Repacholi, mayor of the Shire of Campaspe. This is Marion Riley, the southern ward councillor for the Shire of Campaspe. I also happen to be vice-president of the Tongala Football Club, and the scores are an obvious reflection of salary cap control, but we had a great day. I think we took something like \$18 000 in takings at that game. It costs us \$42 000 a year for our player salaries. It costs about \$120 000 a year to run the footy club and our fortunes on the ladder go up and down with the milk price.

But from the Shire of Campaspe's point of view, we have a few suggestions which might help you move forward. I would suggest we all know the problems of country football. A number of our football clubs operate on what we refer to as DSE committee of management reserves. The funding for capital works programs on those reserves has dried up, so we would suggest if there was some funding put in that hole it would help football clubs like Mount Pleasant and Rushworth upgrade water supplies. Rushworth currently pays about \$8000 a year to Goulburn Valley Water for treated water supply to water its oval. It is not in Goulburn Valley Water's interests to supply a raw water supply because it would receive less for that water, but it would lower the cost to the footy club to about \$2000. The infrastructure of many of those Crown reserve football clubs are old and unattractive, so we are suggesting if you really look at that program it might help a lot of country football clubs.

The AFL has copped a bit of a whack tonight, but one of the things it does well is that the under-12 side from Tongala gets taken down to the Melbourne Cricket Ground to play little league for the Brisbane Bears, or something like that. It is an absolute highlight for the kids in our area. They love it. The issue of people who go on to Murray Bushrangers and the funding that is received when they become AFL players is well made, and I think perhaps that funding should be reversed. We carry the players for seven or eight years, do the training, all on a volunteer basis, and receive none of the rewards. I think the way around salary caps — and it has been used by a lot of clubs — is that you have an employer associated with the football club and they employ the footballer. That is how it is done.

The VCFL obviously needs some support in being more strategic. If you look at its rules and regulations book, pages 108 to 110, you will see that it has rules and regulations that contradict each other when it comes to the clearance of football players. You have one which says they can go to a club for a higher payment of money, and that is quite okay, and they say, on the other hand, that the loss of player to a lower level football club in the same competition is not to be supported. So they obviously need some help in sorting out their strategies. They have not done it very well.

The other thing that has happened from a shire perspective is the number of small youth, sport and recreation grants — that is, the up to \$50 000 grants — have been reduced from five to three. We think even if you had small youth, sport and recreation grants of up to \$15 000 and not limited to three applications, you would be able to do things like resurface netball courts, replace the scoreboard, do up the coaches boxes — general maintenance on some of the buildings. I think that is about the length of our submission and thank you very much for the opportunity to make this submission tonight. Cr Riley would obviously like to say something.

Cr RILEY — Whilst Neil has talked about Rushworth and the anomalies associated with water availability and the costs associated to upkeep the facility, not only for football but for cricket, Mount Pleasant Football Club at Toolleen only has a bore which was replaced last year. Twelve months previously it had to play at another ground because it could not water the ground, so there is an anomaly there. It is a very strong, well-supported club, but I have to say that within my ward of Waranga I have five football clubs, none of which would survive without volunteers. There is an enormous contribution from volunteers across that area. In relation to the terms of reference, the role that Australian football plays in building community identity, social interaction and pride in rural towns, the contribution of volunteers in those five communities says just that — exactly that.

The other thing I wish to refer to is that Neil and other people tonight have said — and I concur — that there is an expectation that there needs to be an upgrade in facilities in ageing infrastructure, as Neil has mentioned tonight. Clubs cannot afford to do this. They have to rely on grants, but you increase the capacity to have more involvement, not only in football, but in other activities as well during dusk and night-time hours for junior football. I know that is played very strongly at Girgarre, and they have a good following in that. As Neil has also said, and I have made a note here, with the sport and recreation grants, the Crown land reserves improvement program was set aside 12 months ago, and that has had a big impact on those Crown lands reserves that relied upon that to apply for funding to upgrade whatever they needed to upgrade in all ways. That is all I have to say.

Mr WALSH — Do you have any football grounds that the shire maintains?

Cr REPACHOLI — Yes, more than half of the football grounds are on land owned by the shire. For instance, a DSE reserve is Victoria Park in Echuca. It has a grandstand and a few other things on it. It is maintained by council because we cannot get a committee of management as we have operating in other country towns.

The other issue I forgot to raise was that we impose our own set of regulations and rules on our recreation reserve, so when you do a risk assessment on a reserve you have to do one for the Goulburn Valley Football League and its legal liabilities and you have to do one for the shire at the same time, and of course they did not match up. Thankfully, Eric got on to our risk management team and sorted it out so they are now filling out the same form. They are some of the problems we have, but certainly if there was more support for volunteers at the secretarial level it would be greatly appreciated.

Mr WALSH — Of those football grounds that you maintain what percentage does the football club pay compared to the total cost of maintaining it?

Mr REPACHOLI — For instance, it costs about \$50 000 to run the Kyabram recreation reserve. The football club contributes \$4000 plus the cost of electricity.

Mr WALSH — And that is typical?

Mr REPACHOLI — No. For instance, if you play football at Tongala or Rochester you receive \$20 000 from the shire, and you mow and look after several ovals and all the buildings on the reserve. So if you are on a council-operated reserve — we have only three of those — you get looked after; but because we have four rural councils they are gradually getting tightened and the rec. reserves in small rural communities are getting more expensive. But we certainly do not spend money on assets that are not owned by us, and that is the Crown land reserves.

Ms RILEY — The other anomaly that needs to be mentioned is with water. Some rec. reserves that have the luxury of a water right are paying \$35 a megalitre when they might use 1, 2 or 3 megalitres in a season when another club has to pay for town water supply that is \$10 000 a year, which is a big difference in water costs.

Witnesses withdrew.