

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country football

Wangaratta – 15 April 2004

Members

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Witness

Mr K. Jasper, member for Murray Valley.

The CHAIR — We are up to the part of the day we call comments from the floor, so welcome again everybody to the hearing. 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. If you wish to speak, you should just make eye contact with Kristen or me, and we will acknowledge you and bring you up to the table to speak. When you get to the table, please state your name and address clearly before making your remarks, and if you would keep your comments brief, to 2 or 3 minutes and also to the point, it would be appreciated. The committee members will take note of your comments, but in general will not ask questions. It is a public hearing and the comments you make will be recorded and included in the transcript which will become a public document. You will receive a copy of the transcript in the same manner as our other presenters today in about a fortnight, and any obvious errors of fact or grammar may be corrected, but not any matters of substance. I was wondering, after reading through all that, if there was anybody who is interested in making a comment from the floor.

Mr JASPER — Ken Jasper, member for Murray Valley. I live at Nashs Road, Rutherglen. Mr Chair, parliamentary colleagues, I am delighted to join with the committee that is meeting here in Wangaratta, and I think coming up into north-eastern Victoria to receive the submissions is a great move.

What I wanted to comment on particularly was the fact that ever since I entered the Parliament many years ago, I have had a long association with country football and the football clubs within my electorate of Murray Valley. Over the years I have joined a lot of these clubs and ended up being a financial member of at least 12 clubs over about four leagues. You always get teams in the finals this way! But my concern particularly through the 1990s was the declining support and the problems for volunteers, which was mentioned by the first speaker here earlier, involved in these country footy clubs. The footy clubs, and now the netball clubs, are vital to these small communities. That is why I have been keen to support these clubs over a long period of time. We get people who have been involved in those clubs and they are now getting tired and feel they are not getting appropriate support, so in about 1999 I wrote to the chief executive of the AFL, Wayne Jackson, and said to him, 'There should be something done. You have sold Waverley Park. Let us put more money into country footy'. It took a while to get a response from him, particularly a detailed response, but basically he handballed the issue back to Ken Gannon at Football Victoria. After some months further correspondence, Gannon responded to me, a detailed response, indicating the sort of support it is providing to country footy.

It really did not go far enough as far I was concerned because it did not recognise the problems for the continued operation of these football-netball clubs and their critical importance to the small communities particularly in which they operate. Originally I was saying they should be looking at putting an initial amount of money into the football-netball clubs to support them, but the issue there is if you gave them funding they would perhaps use it in paying players and in other ways and not get to where it should be in supporting the operations of the club. You have really got to think laterally. That is what I think this inquiry should be looking at in coming up with lateral thinking on how we assist these country clubs to continue to operate and support the communities in which they are operating. Paying umpires would be a logical one, as I see it. You would be able to upgrade the umpires, give them better training, pay them more, and you would attract people into it. The lack of umpires was mentioned earlier. Providing funds for facilities and lighting was mentioned as a big issue. I know the clubs within my electorate want to upgrade lighting. The AFL or Football Victoria could, for instance, allocate the clubs 50 footballs at the beginning of the season, provide speakers from a panel of speakers to come up to these clubs and allow them to be able to run the night and raise funds for the operations of the football-netball club. So they are the sorts of things the AFL could do.

There are many other areas. I will just mention a few I wrote down here — the sorts of things that have been brought to my attention. The water re-use program was mentioned. The great success story was the 1990s, in 1995 in particular, where we had this water re-use program introduced from the Rutherglen-Wahgunyah sewerage scheme, and I was deeply involved in the representations on that. There are two farmers, and they are vigneron as well, who utilise the water from the sewerage farm, and it goes into Barkly Park, which was mentioned as one of the great successes as far as being green all year round. It goes to the golf club and to the high school, and they are paying no money at all. North East Water and the community have paid to put that in. Mention was made of North Wangaratta. I took up the comment made by you, John, that they looking to the federal government. I have been working on this for about 18 months, on the issue that water re-use is one that the government is promoting. It is an ideal program costing about \$20 000. We are seeking \$10 000. I think we will get it. We are working hard on it,

and I think that it will fit some program along those lines. North Wangaratta footy club has a dry oval, so they are playing in town here. Fred Baker and others mentioned the difficulties that they have.

I want to mention one other thing. The previous speaker mentioned multi-usage. I think Wangaratta is doing it very well. Wangaratta's Barr Reserve has a multitude of sports being played there already. Certainly soccer is not there, but I think that is a great example. We reckon we are the mecca for sport in north-eastern Victoria with the great variety of facilities we have. So I just wanted to make those general comments. From my point of view the inquiry is welcome. I welcome the minister making the announcement and the committee taking it on and travelling across country Victoria. It is a huge issue, a massive issue. It needs to come up with recommendations. I think the AFL and Football Victoria have a huge responsibility to put money out into country Victoria to assist these country clubs that are battling for survival. Volunteers are tired. They want assistance. If they get that, the same as if we get can the \$10 000 towards the water re-use, bringing water into the reserve at North Wangaratta, it will give them the encouragement. I mention those things in passing.

So far as I am concerned, I hope we get a great report and some support, not only from the government but from the AFL. Let us see the funding we need and that that we justly deserve coming into country Victoria.

Witness withdrew.