

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country football

Seymour – 14 April 2004

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Witness

Mr P. Liepins.

Mr LIEPINS — My name is Peter Andrew Liepins. I am a resident of Seymour at 104 Redbank Road. I have been involved in country football at many different levels, from community radio commentary to writing in the press, and as a player and official, and as past secretary of this football club.

A number of issues that people have talked about today come back to money. They always come back to salary caps, to paying players and things like that. But what also has to be understood by a lot of people is that a football club — especially in a major league such as the Goulburn Valley or in a slightly lesser league such as Central Goulburn, which Jim was talking about before — has to bring in between \$80 000 and \$100 000 even before it considers paying a player. That is money that has to be made through sponsorship, membership and profit over the bar, merely to pay for medical expenses, insurance, affiliation with leagues et cetera, including the umpires' payment, which was talked about by David. It is an interesting anomaly that the football clubs do not employ the umpires but they are paying their WorkCover. That is quite a unique sort of situation, as was pointed out.

People are working longer hours, as we all know, and that includes people who take the field as players, which leaves less time in the week to do a lot of the volunteer work that is required in community areas. Hundreds of volunteer hours a week are required at the Seymour Football Club alone to put the club on the field, and that is not just for match day — that is for training nights and committee meetings during the week. We have trainers; club officials; umpires; runners; people who help with the media, the canteen, the netball, the bar and the barbecue; and the person who marks the lines to the person who sweeps the final bit of rubbish out the door on a Sunday morning after a function here on Saturday night.

Seymour Football Club, like football clubs in a lot of other towns, provides the best representative sport for young people of a town such as this to play in. We provide the best level of football in the area for youngsters in Seymour to aspire to. If they are exceptional, they may well go on, like David Mundy, who was drafted from our club through the Bushrangers to the Fremantle Dockers. Our club also provides the best level of netball available for the girls, so it is not just a one-way street. The same thing takes place in most towns. Our club also provides a starting point for junior clubs and junior leagues, as Colin spoke to us about today. There are 150 or so children in this town — boys and quite a few girls — who are on the ground playing junior football because there is a senior club and a senior body to aspire to somewhere down the track. A lot of other junior sporting bodies fall in a hole in towns such as this because there is nowhere for the kids to go on to, and they have no choice but to leave the town or district.

Another important point that has been made today, which has been glossed over to a certain extent, is that a lot of the decision making that takes place in terms of what we have to do in country football is taken at a Melbourne level. It is Melbourne-centric decision making, and that will always alienate country people. I have spent the last three years down in Gippsland living in Morwell, where David comes from as well, and I looked on with interest at the progress of the West Gippsland-La Trobe Football League and the changes and restructures it experienced and the constant problems and recommendations it had. Everybody was coming up with a different plan, from the local radio station to the back page of the *La Trobe Valley Express*. At the end of the day, the VCFL, for all the money it is being paid, has no teeth to make any decisions. All the money is being spent at the bureaucratic level in Melbourne to administer country football, but there are no teeth to make decisions in the first place.

People in the Latrobe Valley area still laugh at the inadequacies of the major league that they have in that area. It is little wonder that a lot of people head towards the minor leagues for more enjoyment, because they do not have to travel as far.

Travelling is also an issue, but not so much an issue for Seymour. We are used to it and have been for many years. It is nothing for us to go to Echuca, Mansfield or Rochester, which is an hour-and-a-half away, to play our games of football. It is something that we are used to, and something the people from those other towns are used to as well. It is part of the culture and part of the whole experience. It is a great thing at the end of the day.

Michael, you made a point earlier about putting in place audits and things like that so that clubs could monitor player payments and outgoing expenses. We virtually would have to have a situation where accountants ran our football clubs. Of course that would create a significant extra expense that clubs once again being funded or run by volunteers could ill afford. I am not having a go at you on that account, but it would be another expense and clubs could not bear that sort of cost. I do not know too many accountants who come particularly cheap, especially around tax time.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — It might help them out actually.

Mr LIEPINS — Issues need to be addressed. The power needs to go back to the country in terms of country football. We need to try and cut costs wherever possible, and remember that for many communities, small and large, football is the central and major focus in terms of giving the young people the best opportunity to play the best standard of representative sport for their town and community that can be provided.

The CHAIR — Thank you very, Peter. You will receive a copy of the transcript in about a fortnight. You will be able to correct errors of fact or grammar, but not matters of substance.

Committee adjourned.