

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country football

Sea Lake – 24 March 2004

Members

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Witness

Ms B. Cummings, President, Mallee Netball Association (sworn).

The CHAIR — Under the powers conferred on this committee by the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act, this committee is empowered to take all evidence at these hearings on oath or affirmation. I wish to advise all present at these hearings that all evidence taken by this committee, including submissions, under the provisions of the Constitution Act is granted immunity from judicial review. I also wish to advise witnesses that any comments made by witnesses outside the committee's hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege.

This is an all-party parliamentary committee, including members from the Liberal and National parties and an Independent member.

Welcome, Ms Cummings. For the purposes of the transcript, please provide your full name and address, and if you are representing an organisation, the name of that organisation and your position in it.

Ms CUMMINGS — My full name is Beverley Margaret Cummings and my address is 16 Monash Ave, Underbool. I am president of the Mallee Netball Association.

The CHAIR — I invite you to make some brief opening comments and then committee members will ask questions.

Ms CUMMINGS — Distinguished committee members, other speakers and the general public: I as president of the Mallee Netball Association sit before you this morning to raise relationships that the netball association has with football. Netball competitions run on the same day as football. The association has six matches, five competition. We have an unofficial junior C, two 17 and under grades, and three senior grades. My first and I feel major point is that if football ceased so would netball, and vice versa. Some in the netball association feel that there is a maybe in there, but I feel that in its present form netball would cease if football did. The main reason for this would be the distance that parents would have to travel for just one child. Netball may survive to a local town competition, but not to the league standard. Also the relationships that football and netball have to one another would also contribute to that cessation.

Now for the other relationships. A family day out: with parents working and kids at school, Saturday is the main day when a family is in its unit. They all leave together and they all go home together. On the flip side of the family day out is that I personally do not have a family and I find that Saturday is an opportunity to see who else is out there that has no family.

The majority of netballers are usually wives, mums and girlfriends of football players. They usually play to support the town or there are the few that just play for the enjoyment of it. A majority of senior netballers play to ensure that a club survives so that their kids can play either football or netball. Netball and football both have the benefit for kids to increase fitness. It allows them to develop the social interaction techniques and how to play in a team sport. This benefit, however, is not limited only to kids. It also applies to the senior players. Many of the clubs are in rural towns. If there were no netball and football then it is not as if the kids could go down to the mall, the arcade or to the cinema to fill in a few hours.

Town pride comes in many forms, such as in the supporters that support it each week, but it is especially noticed at finals. Even when there are no football sides in the finals, the town still comes out and supports the netballers. Also, for some people there is no connection to either football or netball, but they still roll up to help the club, from being at the gate to helping behind the scenes, timekeeping, umpiring or just for a day out.

Both football and netball would not survive without a ladies auxiliary. Some might say that a bar helps, but more people need to eat. Participants are usually parents, players and non-members. They bake food, which is a donation, and they also donate their time. All money that is made is usually put back into the club for extensions or works or equipment.

With regard to revenue to towns, football and netball at home not only help the club but also businesses in the town, mostly takeaway places and pubs and hotels. This is not restricted only to home games. With away matches in some places there can be as many as four or five pubs stops on the way home.

With regard to locality, we live in an area that has to push to have the facilities for both football and netball, which share with summer sports. We do not have the luxury of the number of facilities for other sports. We do not have a

soccer or a hockey league. Also, there is no chance of a weekday competition to the scale of the leagues. The only other winter sport is usually golf.

Like footballers, netballers need to pay. There is a gate entry of \$8 and food, petrol, car maintenance, uniforms, equipment, and maintenance to the clubs comes out of your membership. Netballers also need to be members of the Victorian Netball Association before they put a foot on a court, and this also applies to our umpires.

Like footballers, netballers also struggle for numbers. Some towns have excess, but at one stage or another we all have low numbers; that is part and parcel of a small town, where the young move to get work or go to uni and do not return. Also especially around Underbool, where I am from, new homes are being bought by retirees rather than families.

I was asked to suggest any recommendations that I feel the committee may need to think about. The main recommendation would be to ensure that a football association would remain, thus ensuring the chances of a netball one too, which is especially difficult in small rural communities where town populations are decreasing in their playing ability. I have no idea how that would be achieved realistically, but here are some ideas of hope. We could have a money tree at each club; a large profitable business company in each town to increase numbers of players of both sexes and all ages; and a reduction in the cost of petrol, food, sports equipment and insurance. I thank you for your time. Are there any questions?

Mr WALSH — Where do I get a cutting from the money tree?

Ms CUMMINGS — I said they were 'hope' ones!

Dr NAPHTHINE — In some parts of country Victoria we are seeing football teams struggling to get 22 players in seniors and reserves whereas often they are brimming with netballers. I was going to ask about numbers, and you said that some clubs are struggling and others are not. Can you give us a picture? We have just heard from your equivalent in football who said that most teams are struggling with numbers of footballers. How does it look for netballers in reality here?

Ms CUMMINGS — It is a seesaw; they go up and down. Because we have three senior grades, a majority really struggle to provide three senior grades. Some use junior grade, the junior players, to play in their seniors as well. We find senior grades are harder to field than juniors. Some clubs this year have got 40 players for one grade, as in our junior C. So our juniors have good numbers, but our seniors really struggle.

Dr NAPHTHINE — I have a semi-facetious question. Firstly, do you pay any of your players or any of your coaches; and secondly, do the netballers have resentment that player and coach payments are seen as the norm in football but not in netball?

Ms CUMMINGS — At a league level I do not know if other clubs pay their coaches or what they do, that is done on a club basis, but there are no actual laws in our league to say that they have to be paid, not paid or what rate it is. At a club basis we have not paid our coaches, but we have no coaches this year at Underbool for our five competition grades, so we need to start thinking of how to get coaches.

Dr NAPHTHINE — What about the other question. Do the netballers in the league have any animosity that netball players pay to play, whereas footballers, their male equivalents, seem to want to get paid to play?

Ms CUMMINGS — Yes. Some netballers are the wives or girlfriends of the paid players, so that is why they come and play netball, because their respective partners are coming and they are getting paid. As a club we would not survive if we had to pay our netballers. It is done more out of town pride and begging. But yes, there is a bit of animosity, especially when you find out how much some players are being paid. You think they are not worth that, but that is footy.

Mr INGRAM — You just said that with football there have been amalgamations, a couple of disbandments, and that some clubs have left the league, therefore there are obviously some challenges for the future of the league. Could you explain to the committee the impact that has? Obviously sometimes the lack of players in football may not transfer over to netball. What impact does it have if a club folds or merges? Does it follow that the netball club is forced to amalgamate as well? How does it all work?

Ms CUMMINGS — Usually when there is an amalgamation it is a joint decision and both netball and football go. Usually when the footballers struggle, the netballers are struggling. Sea Lake and Berri-Culgoa formed last year. Most of their netballers were 40-plus ladies, just playing to keep it going. So when they amalgamated Sea Lake had lots of numbers, and of their numbers, about 10 went. I have forgotten the question.

Mr INGRAM — What is the impact on the netballers? Usually if there is a decline in football in a town or an enforced amalgamation it is usually — —

Ms CUMMINGS — Yes.

Mr INGRAM — Just numbers in the town?

Ms CUMMINGS — Numbers, usually. Yes.

Dr NAPTHINE — What is your view of the facilities for netballers in terms of change rooms, showers, toilets and courts for netballers in the Mallee league?

Ms CUMMINGS — All courts in our league are wet weather. Whether they are Flexipave or tar-based, all are wet weather, which means that unless there is lightning, all games are played. Change rooms are all of a pretty good standard. If they have not been in the past just from the comments coming back through the clubs, they have usually changed. We have had ours updated last year. It has been revamped. They used to be a tin shed, but now it is clad. All clubs have decent change rooms and showers and decent courts.

Dr NAPTHINE — Finally, how are you going with finding other people who, like you, are also looking for other people?

Ms CUMMINGS — Not real good!

Dr NAPTHINE — Are they not recruiting the right sort of footballers?

Ms CUMMINGS — No, not at all; they all have girlfriends!

The CHAIR — Beverley, thank you very much for giving your time and coming all the way over today. It is appreciated and it helps give us a good, clear picture of what netball is like in this area. You will get a copy of the transcript. You can correct matters of fact or grammar, but not matters of substance. Thank you.

Witness withdrew.