

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country football

Wangaratta – 15 April 2004

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Mr F. Baker, secretary, Ovens and King Football League (sworn).

The CHAIR — Welcome to everybody here today, and a special welcome to Ken Jasper, the member for Murray Valley. Thank you very much for your attendance. I have to read a statement before we begin. 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, is, under the provisions of the Constitution Act, granted immunity from judicial review. I also wish to advise that any comments made by witnesses outside the committee's hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. We are an all-party parliamentary committee, including an Independent, hearing evidence today on the inquiry into country football. We welcome our first witness to the chair. For the purpose of the transcript, would you provide your full name and address and also, if you are representing an organisation, the name of the organisation and your position within it.

Mr BAKER — Frederick Clyde Baker, secretary of the Ovens and King Football League. My address is 1 Market Street, Moyhu.

The CHAIR — Would you give us a brief presentation and afterwards we might have some question for you as well?

Mr BAKER — I thought I would talk on administration and volunteers for clubs, which seems to be becoming a major concern with a lot of smaller clubs. Going back, say, 15 years ago, clubs would need a couple of gatekeepers, one or two ladies to serve hot dogs and pies, a trainer, a goal umpire and a coach; a total of 10 people was probably all that was needed to run a match. In the present day with the inclusion of third 18s and netball, gatekeepers have to be there from 9.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m., so extras are needed to roster on. The canteen now sells hot chips, hamburgers, drinks, lollies, afternoon teas, you name it, and all clubs now have to have liquor licences, so qualified personnel are required to be in charge. Volunteers in charge of the above must have done a food handling course for the canteen and a responsible serving of alcohol course to enable them to operate. While these are probably necessary, clubs have to have committee members or volunteers to take the necessary steps to be qualified. Most people believe if they have got the certificates, therefore they are in charge, and if anything happens they could get sued, or whatever, so you can understand that people are not real keen to rush into those sorts of jobs.

As you can see from the above, to run a home game successfully now you would need at least 20 committee members or volunteers to be able roster them on and off; otherwise they do not see any football at all. If you go to the football for six Saturdays and do not see any football, you get browned off and say, 'I might go and do something else'. So if they are rostered on for a couple of hours stint at a time, at least they see some football and do not get disheartened and stay away. Executive members of clubs — that is, secretaries, presidents and treasurers — are positions that are extremely hard to find as most clubs in our league would handle between \$75 000 and \$100 000 per year, so if you are running a business that turns over that amount of money you need fairly smart operators, and it is a job to find them in a volunteer position. Our league recently sent out a questionnaire to all nine clubs re setting up a three to five-year business plan for the league and clubs. One of the questions was, 'What do you consider as a major threat to your clubs?'. Out of the four returns so far, all listed 'finding committee and volunteers' as their major concern. I would say that when the other five come in, they will all have the same, because it is just so hard to get volunteers.

In conclusion, trying to find an answer to the problem when you consider that the average coach in the league receives about \$8000 for coaching and most players get some match payments in the firsts and seconds, with the better players receiving \$100 per match or more, it seems a bit unfair that the committee and volunteers receive nothing for their efforts, so you can understand why they are not prepared to put the effort in. Some clubs do shout their committees to an end-of-season function or take them to a club or something, but not a lot do that. Added to that problem, the VCFL in its wisdom — and it probably will work out — embarked on a new program so all players in Victoria are registered with the VCFL. It started last year and they are still trying to get that program up and running properly, but it has put a lot of extra work on club secretaries and league secretaries. The ideal situation with it is that everybody is on the Internet, whereas a lot of club secretaries are probably a bit like me and not very computer literate, so we are having a struggle to handle it all. But I suppose given time we can do anything, but it just makes it a bit hard. With volunteers it is different to paid work. With a paid worker you can tell him what to do and hopefully he will do it, but with a volunteer you can only ask him to do it. Herein lies the question: if you think you might have six people coming to help you on Saturday, but only four turn up, you cannot go crook at the other two. You just hope they come next time.

I put at the bottom here just as a suggestion — and we all know a lot of AFL footballers start their football in country Victoria — I would like to see the AFL make tickets to the grand final available to country clubs for the volunteers as a reward for their efforts. I am not suggesting that every country club take all their committee down, but they could apply for a maximum of three or four tickets for a grand final; not all league clubs would take it up, but the ones that did would reward their volunteers with something that they could work for. That is about all I have.

Mr WALSH — The issue of volunteers is a common theme that has come out of a lot of our hearings. If you were Premier for a day, what would you do to fix it? One of the things we have to do as a committee is to make recommendations to the government that will hopefully improve the lot of country football. We have had a lot of people tell us what the problems are, but how do we actually fix some of them?

Mr BAKER — That is a problem. Numbers are probably the best way. As I said, if you can go to the football and just work for 2 hours and then watch the football, that is good; but if you go to the football and work all day and do not see the football, you cannot blame the volunteers for not being keen to do it. Other than that I do not have the answer.

Mr INGRAM — One of the issues you mentioned that has come up in a lot of the presentations is about the compulsory registration of players through the VCFL. My understanding of why that has to be done every year is that under the new insurance scheme the club has to register every one of its players every year, otherwise if they were left on there the club would have to come up with more money to cover players. So how do we get around that? It has been raised as an additional task on clubs. Is it a necessary task or is there a way of getting around that so we still get the outcome of all players being insured but the club is not doing as much work or is it more simple?

Mr BAKER — No. The only thing I could think of, and it will happen when it gets up and running, is to have a facility to print out each team's players. If we could do that we could either give it to the clubs and they could just run down and put a line through or a cross beside the ones that are not playing any more or the ones that are being cleared away, and it would be a lot easier. Some of my clubs would have 90 to 100 registrations, and they supposedly have to run around and get them all to sign before they play. With the second 18s there are a lot of players they do not see until the first match, and then they have no hope.

Mr INGRAM — So you think it needs simplifying. You do not think it should just go away; they should just simplify the process?

Mr BAKER — Yes, just simplify.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Fred. You will get a copy of the transcript and you may correct any matters of fact or grammar but not matters of substance, and then you can return it to the committee. Thanks very much for your time.

Witness withdrew.