

# CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

## RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into country football

Robinvale – 23 March 2004

#### Members

Mr M. P. Crutchfield

Mr R. G. Mitchell

Mr B. P. Hardman

Dr D. V. Naphthine

Mr C. Ingram

Mr P. L. Walsh

Mr J. M. McQuilten

Chair: Mr B. P. Hardman

Deputy Chair: Mr C. Ingram

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Murray

Research Officer: Dr V. Koops

#### Witness

Mr D. McClure, Robinvale and District Cricket 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.

I welcome Mr Daryl McClure. For the purposes of the transcript, Mr McClure, will you give your full name and address, whether you are representing an organisation before the committee tonight, and if so, the name of that organisation and your position within it?

**Mr McClure** — My full name is Daryl McClure. I represent the Robinvale and District Cricket Association, which also trades as the Robinvale-Euston Cricket Club. My address is Lot 77 Benghazi Road, Robinvale.

I have a submission that is available for each of you to have a look at. I will basically go through that. To give you a brief background on what we have been doing, the association was established 57 years ago. The number of teams has basically decreased over the past 15 years I have been up here as a teacher. We had about 10 sides; there were about 25 to 30 sides 25 years earlier, and a number of amalgamations have resulted in quite a drastic reduction.

Four years ago the number of sides was down to five. We amalgamated into the one senior club, which now operates in the Sunraysia Cricket Association. We have three grades and we have divisions 1, 2 and 3 and a women's super-8 team. We have an annual super-8 carnival each year prior to Christmas we have involvement of local community sides. The Robinvale and District Cricket Association still operates a junior competition, which involves four under-17 sides, an under-13 squad, and over 70 participants in the Milo Have-A-Go competition.

With our amalgamation we have been involved with a rather vast improvement of our social and playing facilities. We have turf wickets up here, which we have not had previously. We had a lot of support from the local community and from Cricket Victoria for that. So we have some very good facilities at the moment, but we have been shrinking gradually and we are having a bit of a problem with our current set-up, which we have to look at, so I have that under our concern section in terms of what we are looking at to do next season.

We have a number of first division cricketers, around about 10 of them, who are unable to commit themselves next year. It will put a lot of pressure on our three teams to be able to maintain our current set-up. We will be having a meeting on 21 April to discuss what we will be doing next year. We will be having senior cricket next year, but we have a couple of options that we will investigate. Obviously there are a couple of reasons that have contributed to that, but I do not want to go through all those and insult you guys; you can read them for yourselves.

In terms of the positive nature, we have good facilities up here for playing cricket and very good social facilities — probably the best we have ever had — and our junior numbers are looking good, so there are some positives out of that. Our administration and our financial base is looking quite sound. It cost us probably around about \$80 000 to \$100 000 all up to improve our facilities, which is an oval just beside the football oval and we have basically paid that all back. Without the huge cash flow of football clubs it has been a bit of a struggle, but over four years we have got there.

That is basically the report I was wanting to give you. The generation gap seems to make it very hard. We struggle with the guys who are between 25 and 35, that sort of age group. A few people come to town and our move to improve our standard of cricket by joining the Sunraysia Cricket Association has allowed us to pick up a couple of fairly elite players; but we do not have enough mid-range players. We look at our recruiting each year, but we cannot be giving players money. There is no money involved in club cricket, except for the coach, and that is basically travel money. That is basically it.

**Mr WALSH** — So you do not share facilities with the football clubs then?

**Mr McClure** — No, we have our own oval. It was just an open space, but we converted into a cricket oval and put in some pine panelling. It may be a facility that will be used by the junior competition in the future.

The oval is too small for a football oval, but it is probably the perfect size for an under-13 or under-15 junior match, which I think the juniors are looking at possibly some time in the future with the junior set-up up here.

**Mr WALSH** — One of our terms of reference was to look at the interaction between football clubs and other sporting bodies. Are your social facilities separate to the football club?

**Mr McCLURE** — Yes, completely separate.

**Mr CRUTCHFIELD** — That is a shame.

**Mr McCLURE** — Yes, it is a shame. The footy club never really encouraged us to put a pitch in. We would have preferred to put it in the middle of the football oval, but they were opposed to that. They did allow us to put a portable pitch in there for a few years. It was probably for four years that it was a metal-frame jobs with cement sheeting in it. We used that, but over that time the council looked after the footy oval in the off season, so they gained benefit out of that, but they wanted something that could be removed each year. They play on the ovals up in Mildura, and the clay wickets are not too friendly for the footballers at times in the footy season, so they were not very supportive of that move, but that was our preferred option.

**Mr CRUTCHFIELD** — Do other footy clubs and cricket clubs have a similar arrangement to yours? Separate?

**Mr WALSH** — Does the council maintain your ground as well?

**Mr McCLURE** — It maintains both ovals. We approached council about it, but the football club gave us huge opposition. Five years ago we would have had to move it. We had social rooms drop in our lap from the local bowling club that folded, because there is one straight over the river at Euston, so that was fairly fortunate. The council helped us with that, but in terms of the politics of utilising the football facilities it was not really an option to go to turf wickets. They were quite happy for us to put in cement wickets and take them out each year, or the idea of the steel frame was that it could be removed each season and replanted so that it was not a problem for the footballers.

**Mr CRUTCHFIELD** — What about other clubs? Is that the same arrangement? In other areas there are linkages; you have sporting clubs with football and cricket. Is Robinvale atypical? What happens in Mildura? Are they together in combined clubrooms?

**Mr McCLURE** — Yes, they are all combined. Some of the social rooms are separate, but the grounds are completely multipurpose in that respect, and the same up at Red Cliff as well. Some of the local grounds are hardened, particularly those down at Manangatang; they are both utilised by the same footy and cricket clubs.

**Dr NAPHTHINE** — You say that players are stopping playing cricket early in Robinvale to go to tennis or golf. Is that because of the travelling — that is, having to go 100 kilometres up to Mildura every second weekend?

**Mr McCLURE** — No, I think it is just a traditional thing in Robinvale. Before our move up to Mildura everything was local, except for a trip down to Manangatang, which was aligned with us and that was one trip away every year. It seems that there is a gap of players of a similar age, and their peers go to play golf and tennis. I come from down near Horsham and they play cricket much longer there — into their 40s! Yet up here up to 32 and 33 they do other things besides cricket. The tennis tends to be the most popular, and golf to a lesser extent. I suppose there are many options on the river as well. I have found that players are not playing for as long.

**Mr INGRAM** — Do you think it is potentially a climatic thing? Obviously it is a fair bit warmer here than it is in a lot of other areas in the state. It could be a bit oppressive for people to stand out in the sun all day.

**Mr McCLURE** — There is no doubt about that, and the social facilities of the cricket association up until four years ago were not up to scratch. They were playing under a pergola up here in Robinvale. You would go down to the pub and it was just like a boys club. There were no comfortable facilities for families, and I do not think that was a help either. Down at Manangatang they had good facilities, but, yes, the heat is a factor. It does not help people playing unless it is cooler.

**Dr NAPTHINE** — These people who cannot commit to next year, are they young people who are going off to tertiary education or work or what?

**Mr McCLURE** — A good 50 per cent are, yes. There are a couple of older guys there, but mainly it is a good half of those guys who are going to tertiary education or are just wanting a break. We have experienced three years in first division in the new set-up, and some of the guys need a spell. They have been there the whole way through. They are only young guys of 21 or 22. A couple of keystone guys in that mob are travelling off and, yes, that is enough to make a fair few of them go. Up to 10 guys are not able to commit themselves. In real terms there are probably about 6 or 7 guys there who will not play next year, but there are a few with question marks who are happy to play on an occasional basis.

But yes, it does not help getting a first division side out there, so it is something we are going to have to deal with at a public meeting, look at our options and pick the right options for the players we have. We really did suffer at the end of this season, and after Christmas last year. Guys were struggling to get out of the park. The commitment was not there. Guys were away every second week. The weight was being carried by too few. We were getting sides out there, but they were not enjoying it.

We are looking at the possibility of going back to having two teams instead of most likely three. We do not want to do that, but we have struggled so much to get the guys to commit themselves. We would rather have one less team than struggle with three teams like we have for three years. It sounds like a backward step, but, yes, it is a big struggle.

**Dr NAPTHINE** — I come from Hamilton and then Portland, and because it is summer and there are a myriad of other things to do, people tend to be more committed to footy, whether it be player payments or whatever, or cultural things. Also in winter there are not as many alternatives. It seems to me that cricket in country Victoria has been reluctant to be more flexible. You play over two Saturdays, and if you cannot play one Saturday then you cannot play both Saturdays, and there is this idea that you cannot swap half your team.

Can the cricket associations perhaps have a hard look at how they run the game to make it more appropriate in a 2004 environment, to keep people playing and involved? Perhaps at division 1 level you still play it absolutely according to Hoyle, but in other divisions you could just play to enjoy it?

**Mr McCLURE** — I appreciate those comments, and that is what our association will do: it will make a decision that best suits our players.

We have a set-up at the moment in the senior competition where they want you to have four sides. There is no way we can do that. We have three in Sunraysia Cricket Association. It is very strict. They have a mixture of one-day and two-day games, which is great and which suits our club a little bit, but there is no way they will let you have two sides in the competition. The rules are very strict. The rules have lifted our standard of cricket, there is no doubt about that, because what we were used to was bush and all sorts of flexibility — playing in coloured shirts and one-day competitions before Christmas and two-day competitions after Christmas and all those sorts of things you are talking about. Flexibility is a key. We are seriously looking at the Ree-Connect competition because there is much more flexibility with that and we think we will continue our cricket doing that. That is one of our options.

The times when players are able to commit themselves have changed. We really have to be flexible and pick the correct option for our players here. We hope the other associations become more flexible and allow cricket to continue. If we do not become more flexible, with the lifestyles and the many options that young people have these days, we will not be able to continue an activity like cricket for very long.

**The CHAIR** — Do you have any suggestions on the way that cricket, football and netball clubs could improve their relationships, whether it be through directly sharing or even just generally working together?

**Mr McCLURE** — That is a good question. I think the main thing is just to be open with each other. There are a lot of things you hear on the grapevine, and if administrators are straight down the line and work with each other, I think good communication between cricket and football clubs is a key. Traditionally they have not had a great relationship. Having separate facilities up here has probably helped our relationship a bit. They have been supportive of us financially in allowing us to do raffles on their home gates and the Robinvale Football and Euston Football Club over the river have been the same. I think we have worked together pretty well, but are there any always ways we can improve. I think administrators have to be not so much smarter but good communicators. So

many times situations develop that could have been short-circuited with a bit of smart and discreet behaviour and just being open with each other.

**The CHAIR** — Is there much sharing of people involved both at player level and at committee level between cricket and football?

**Mr McCLURE** — With the football club over the river there is, not so much with the Robinvale Football Club administratively. There are a few players who play for both clubs but not a huge number — there would be probably around about 8 out of 30 players that do both. There is quite a distinction between the footballers and the cricketers. When I mention eight players, they are probably mainly the over 18s. There are probably a good number of younger ones — 16, 15 and 17-year-olds — who will play the occasional senior game.

The one thing that concerns our club the most is the training nights. After Christmas the footballers just train whenever and are we have our sets times. In the past we have been flexible and changed our training night to an alternative night, but that can be a source of friction that has come up. Although there are not huge numbers of players involved in playing both football and cricket, we need to work a bit more on being mindful of the times when both teams are operating.

**Dr NAPHTHINE** — Just so the committee can get an idea of the size of your club, what is your financial turnover?

**Mr McCLURE** — Probably \$40 000 would be typical. With our fundraising over the last three or four years it would have been up around \$60 000 or \$70 000 just to cover our infrastructure development, but \$40 000 would cover it. That is basically all going into maintaining facilities, paying rates, insurance, equipment and so on. There are no player payments out of that. There is a bit of fuel subsidy — probably \$1000 of that — for the coach and a couple of players. That is what we would be looking at.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much for giving us your time this late at night. You will receive a copy of the transcript in a couple of weeks and you will be able to correct any matters of fact or grammar but not matters of substance.

**Committee adjourned.**