

Dr Tony Buti; Mr Dean Nalder; Mr Simon Millman; Mrs Lisa O'Malley; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr David Michael; Mr John McGrath; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Bill Marmion; Mr Peter Katsambanis; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Shane Love

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

*Seventeenth Report — “More Than Just a Game:
The Use of State Funds by the WA Football Commission” — Tabling*

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [10.27 am]: I present for tabling the seventeenth report of the Public Accounts Committee titled “More Than Just a Game: The Use of State Funds by the WA Football Commission”. I also present for tabling the submissions to the inquiry.

[See papers [3980](#) and [3981](#).]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Football, or Aussie Rules, has played a significant role in the lives of Western Australians for more than 130 years. As former Premier Dr Geoff Gallop remarked, “No sport has had such a critical impact on our social and cultural development as Australian Football.” Football is a game that develops tribal loyalties and arouses passions, but it is also more than just a game. As noted by Dr Neale Fong, a former chair of the West Australian Football Commission, the history of football in Western Australia is not only about footballers, clubs and supporters, it also involves relationships with networks of politicians, governments, businesses and personalities involved in the game.

The West Australian Football Commission, established in 1989, is the body charged with responsibility for the overall development and strategic direction of football in this state. The creation of the West Australian Football Commission is unique to WA. No other jurisdiction has a similar government-created body responsible for the management of football. The WAFC receives funding from several sources, including the two Western Australian-based AFL teams—the West Coast Eagles and the Fremantle Dockers. A considerable proportion of its funding also comes from the public purse, directly and indirectly. The catalyst for this inquiry was a series of stories in *The West Australian* reporting on concerns over salary expenditure in the organisation and unease across the football community with some of the commission’s activities. There was concern that public funds provided to the WAFC were not being used to best effect. These concerns led to the Public Accounts Committee resolving to inquire into the WAFC’s use of state funds. However, as the inquiry proceeded, other issues and criticisms of the WAFC were revealed and articulated.

As the premier audit risk committee of the WA Parliament, we could not ignore these revelations and thus have looked into them and made subsequent findings and recommendations. We have made 58 findings and 23 recommendations dealing with issues around the behaviour and responses by the WAFC during this inquiry, state funding of football, elite talent and grassroots football development, the composition and election of WAFC commissioners, and the transparency of the commission. The rationale, analysis and commentary behind our findings and recommendations are contained within our report.

The committee has worked collaboratively throughout the process of receiving and considering the evidence. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work and contributions of my fellow committee members: the deputy chair, the member for Bateman; the member for Mount Lawley; the member for Bicton; and the member for North West Central. Further, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank our secretariat, principal research officer Dr Alan Charlton, and research officer Dr Sam Hutchinson, for their excellent assistance and dedication throughout this inquiry.

Before continuing, I would like to note that although many witnesses to the inquiry had criticisms and concerns about the WAFC, there was also acknowledgement that the commission has done many things well. There was also broad recognition that the oversight role of the WAFC is necessary and important for the ongoing success of football in WA.

In the submissions and testimony from the WAFC and the West Coast Eagles CEO, Mr Trevor Nisbett, there was a mistaken view that the funding that the commission received from the state government was in effect football money. Any proper reading of the terms of the funding agreement between the WAFC, the AFL and the state shows that the funds received by the commission under the agreement are state moneys. The agreement guarantees the WAFC funding of around \$11 million per annum for the first 10 years, which accounts for around one-third of the annual budget for the commission. The state also took over a residual loan of \$5.6 million as part of the move to the new Perth Stadium, having paid down \$14.5 million in 2005. In addition to this substantial funding and support from the government to the WAFC, the state also provided \$23 million over the last five years to individuals, clubs, local governments, and associations connected to supporting grassroots football. We also note that the state provided \$10 million each to the West Coast Eagles and the Fremantle Dockers to assist them in building training and administration facilities.

The level of state funding provided directly and indirectly to the WAFC and to football in general in Western Australia means that the WAFC is not above scrutiny by government and Parliament. In our interactions with the WAFC, we at times observed a resistance to making information public and a restricted view of transparency. The WAFC sought to have the agreement withheld from public view. Although the WAFC argued this was required under the

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terms of the agreement, it was disappointing that at 2.46 pm on the day before the scheduled hearing with the WAFC, the committee's secretariat received a request from the commission to discuss —

'how the Committee will deal with the confidential nature of the WAFC Funding Agreement'.

This appeared to us to be mischievous timing by the WAFC. The WAFC did itself no favours in countering the view that it sought to restrict transparency when it withheld information requested by the committee about the AFL draftee skill history. Further, the attempt to hold inexperienced staff members responsible for failing to provide this information when requested does not reflect well on the leadership of the WAFC. The commission withheld requested information from the committee, and the leadership of the WAFC must accept responsibility for this. The information was provided, but only after prodding by the committee.

The committee heard repeated claims that in a meeting of WAFL and WAFC talent managers, WAFC executive manager, Mr Simon Moore-Crouch, referred to our inquiry as a "dog and pony show". Mr Moore-Crouch refuted the claims and, due to apparent concerns about reprisals, whether or not they were warranted, we received no further corroborating evidence about those statements and could not make a definitive finding on the matter.

More troubling was the behaviour of the WAFC commissioner, Mr Grant Dorrington. We found that he interfered in the inquiry process by seeking to persuade the Swan Districts Football Club from making a submission to the inquiry. This finding against Mr Dorrington could have resulted in the committee raising the matter of contempt of Parliament in the Legislative Assembly. However, in light of the fact that the club in the end did make a submission and that its CEO and president appeared before us, although not diminishing the seriousness of the actions taken by Mr Dorrington, we have decided not to raise the matter in the Assembly.

It was also concerning that Mr Nisbett, when given two opportunities by the committee at a public hearing, did not refute allegations that at a meeting organised by the WAFC and attended by WAFL representatives and others, he said, "If we do not work together, we could lose our government funding." The fact that Mr Nisbett was either unable or unwilling to refute this allegation is troubling. It does nothing to dispel the perception that the WAFC and other prominent players in the WA football ecosystem were overly concerned with seeking to restrict information being provided to the inquiry and that the views of the WAFC should be the only views presented to the committee.

Notwithstanding the serious concerns raised, we were pleased to receive 21 submissions from across a wide range of participants and organisations. We received formal submissions from eight WAFL clubs, although there was a hesitancy among some about making their submissions public. One club initially sought to keep its submission private, although later agreed to make it public. The only WAFL club not to make a submission was West Perth Football Club.

The process to elect the WAFC commissioners is overly complex and restrictive, and the WAFC board is not fully representative of all parts of the football community. Currently, the two WA-based AFL clubs hold 40 per cent of the votes for the appointment of commissioners, which combined with the existing commissioners who also vote, makes up a 60 per cent voting bloc in the determination of new commissioners. The WAFL clubs have 30 per cent of the votes, and the affiliates, which include the metropolitan and non-metropolitan regional football development councils, the Perth Football League, the Metro Football League, the WA Country Football League, the WA Women's Football League and the AFL Masters, share only 10 per cent of the vote. It should be noted that the affiliates have no say in the final secret ballot on endorsed candidates. In a nutshell, the two AFL clubs and the WAFC commissioners have too much power vis-a-vis the other stakeholders in determining the composition of the WAFC board. This needs to change to create a fairer voting system among the wider football family specifically to ensure that the affiliates have greater representation on the WAFC board.

We believe that the WAFC constitution should be amended so that commissioners cannot be members of the WAFC and the affiliates become members of the WAFC. In reforming the WAFC's board nomination and election processes, regard must be had to ensuring greater representation of the various stakeholders and the wider football community, including the need for greater representation of the various affiliates. Possible reforms include existing commissioners to have no role in appointing new commissioners; term limits on WAFC board appointments; and employees of the WAFC, the two AFL clubs, the WAFL clubs and the affiliates to be prohibited from being appointed as commissioners. On the issue of boards, we note that the West Coast Eagles and the Fremantle Dockers are the only clubs of the 18 in the AFL competition that do not have some member-elected board positions. This only exacerbates the insular nature of the current arrangement—that is, that two WAFC-owned AFL clubs, along with the commissioners, hold a controlling vote on the determination of new commissioners to the WAFC board. As I have already mentioned, this needs to change.

With regard to the operations of the WAFC, more than 50 per cent of commission employees work in grassroots areas, but the data and figures provided by the WAFC are unnecessarily opaque, which makes the connection

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between expenditure and activity difficult to ascertain. In other words, how much of the money spent by the WAFC is actually going to grassroots football? It is not clear or discernible exactly how much support grassroots football receives from the WAFC and its employees. This again raises questions about the transparency and accountability of the commission's activities. We believe that publicly acknowledging the number and financial cost of employees is something that the state, the stakeholders and the public should expect of an organisation that receives substantial public funding. It works out that state funding comprises about 37 per cent of the WAFC's revenue, if we include the funding agreement.

The WAFC has an important role to play in managing football across all levels. It is a challenging role that requires the balancing of resources and many demands. There have been positive developments in female football, all-abilities football and Indigenous participation. There has also been some good work done by the junior metropolitan and non-metropolitan regional development councils, but segments of junior and youth football in parts of the state are struggling to maintain viable competitions. In country football, which plays an important role in regional communities, there are many challenges. These require the WAFC to focus on providing appropriate support to growing the game and increasing the pool of talent and opportunities for young people in regional areas.

The committee was interested to understand participation figures, which the WAFC used as evidence that it is performing well. Although the figures appear impressive, at its inquiry hearing the WAFC admitted that general participation numbers are not particularly meaningful. Other witnesses also questioned participation numbers, saying that there was multiple counting of the same individuals. This is not an acceptable situation, particularly given that considerable state funds are involved in the sport. A more accurate and credible method of reporting participation rates must be developed.

In recent years, and particularly since the 2017 structural review of football—commissioned by the WAFC and also known as the “Boston report”—there has been a deteriorating relationship between the WAFC and the WAFL. Responsibility for talent development and competitions has moved to the WAFC from the WAFL clubs. This change, along with changes to the governance model for junior football, has resulted in a decreasing ownership of and connections between WAFL clubs and their geographical locations and communities. To assist the WAFL to reconnect with its communities, the WAFL colts competition should return to being controlled by the clubs rather than the WAFC, and the WAFL needs to be more fully involved in talent and junior development. The WAFC must ensure that the WAFL continues to be the premier state competition—history, traditions and the fabric of our communities demand as much.

In relation to talent development, a highly disproportionate number of school AFL draftees come from a small number of Public Schools Association schools. Although there may be many reasons for this, at the very least it raises questions of equity in relation to WAFC development programs and access to resources that should be addressed by the WAFC and government.

Further on the issue of AFL draftees, we believe consideration needs to be given to increasing the draft age. I would like to acknowledge the member for Bateman, who was very strong on this point. An older draft age would have many positives, including allowing young people the opportunity to pursue further education and training before entering the AFL system. Of course, the AFL draft age is an AFL responsibility, but we believe that the WAFC, the Minister for Sport and Recreation and the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries should work together to argue for a more appropriate older drafting age to promote to the AFL. We also believe that the WAFC and the department must do more to ensure greater player welfare and support, such as developing a rigorous mechanism to track and report on the development of draftees throughout their career, and gathering data on the number of players who drop out of football, especially the AFL, and the reasons for this.

The report makes a series of recommendations—23, in total—and 58 findings. The recommendations can be summarised as follows. The WAFC has done many things well, but there are many concerns and problems that need to be addressed, including a concerning level of distrust between the WAFC and many stakeholders, particularly the WAFL clubs. The WAFC must accept that it is the beneficiary of significant state funding, and therefore must be more open and transparent to scrutiny, from both government and Parliament. The WAFC board must be more representative of the whole football ecosystem, with membership from across the various components and affiliates that make up football in WA. The WAFC must be careful to ensure that its focus is on governance, and it should coordinate with member and affiliate clubs and leagues to devolve its service and delivery functions to the appropriate stakeholders. That is what it should be doing; it should be concentrating on governance. The minister and the department should work with the WAFC to ensure that there is greater clarity around the impact and effectiveness of the expenditure allocated to the WAFL and other parts of the football ecosystem, including the affiliates. The department and the WAFC must do more to ensure greater player welfare and support, and work towards lifting the AFL draft age. Finally, the minister and the department should monitor the WAFC's responses to all recommendations in this report that are directed towards the WAFC. If the minister and the department deem the WAFC's responses to be insufficient, they should reconsider the funding arrangements.

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I commend the report to the house.

MR D.C. NALDER (Bateman) [10.46 am]: Western Australia has a proud and strong history in football, and the West Australian Football Commission should be commended for the role it has played in the development of football in Western Australia. However, this report highlights some of the concerns of the people of Western Australia at the direction the commission has taken. Today I would like to focus on two particular areas, but before I start, I advise the house that the committee does not regard it to be its role to tell the West Australian Football Commission how to run football; it is more around governance and transparency and the fact that the football industry has become a great employer of young Western Australians. It is our belief that the commission has a duty of care for the young people who are developed for this great game.

I have had a large interaction with football for most of my life. I played the game for 19 years and it was only through many injuries that I was forced to retire, but I have been further involved in my children's football as assistant coach, runner, trainer, goal umpire—whatever it was. I have also been involved in football at a higher level, taking responsibility for ANZ Bank's sponsorship of both the West Australian Football Commission and the West Coast Eagles. I have seen a number of aspects of the game, and one thing that concerns me is the lack of transparency. We heard during the inquiry about the amount of funding that was going to various areas of football, such as the WAFL. When we started to look more closely at that, we found that it was difficult to get clarity. Specific amounts of cash were being handed over, but there was also a lot of in-kind funding. In other words, the funds were being expensed to the West Australian Football Commission on behalf of the WAFL. There was a lack of transparency around that. There needs to be greater clarity around how the West Australian Football Commission supports the respective bodies. In supporting the chair's comments, the affiliate clubs and all other involvement across women's football, junior football, the amateur league and country football leagues do not seem to have enough representation at the footy commission, and this was a real concern to the committee. We support greater transparency and a greater involvement with all aspects of football in Western Australia.

Coming back to junior development, I asked most people who came before the committee for their views on the drafting age. Just about everybody, the vast majority, was of the view that the drafting age should be lifted. It is not for me to say here what it should be, but I encourage the WA Football Commission and the state government—I forget the name of the agency at the moment—to work together to make representations to the AFL, because this is in the best interests of the development of real people. The concern comes from anecdotal evidence that as many as 50 per cent of our kids who have been drafted into the AFL system never play a game. The average duration for a player in the AFL system is just over 30 games. Again, that is anecdotal. I requested specific information and statistics from the WA footy commission and none was forthcoming. It did not have any. Yet, it has taken responsibility for talent development in Western Australia, specifically to feed into the AFL system, away from the West Australian Football League clubs. From my perspective, the WA Football Commission has taken on a duty of care for the development of young Western Australians to pursue a career in football. It is a massive industry in Australia now, and by the WA Football Commission taking on that responsibility and a duty of care for our young Western Australians entering this industry, it has a responsibility to understand the welfare of players and how they track through the system. If 50 per cent of young players drafted into the system never, ever play a game and then are lost to it because their dreams and aspirations have been lost, there is a responsibility on the football commission to understand that and make sure there are processes to support those young people. I am hearing anecdotally that they are being lost to the system—football, a great game—altogether because their aspirations have been dropped. They do not necessarily have connections with local clubs to come back to the system and feel that they belong.

I believe we should be looking at systems around the world. Other sporting industries around the world, particularly in the United States, are focused on the correct drafting age. In the US, people have to go through a college system. There are exceptions. In basketball, people such as Kobe Bryant and LeBron James came straight out of the schooling system into the professional industry, but they are exceptions. I am not saying that there cannot be exceptions and there are not ready-made AFL players who can go straight in from school, and I would not want to hold back their opportunities, but they are exceptions. We have to give young people the opportunity to develop. We should not necessarily put that pressure straight on them out of school of pushing them this way, when they may not be physically ready and may do two or three years of development and then find they never get a game and are pushed out of the system. Given that there is no international competition, the AFL is the peak level. I do not believe it would harm the professional game to have more mature people coming into the system and having a better development program for them to participate and have greater involvement in football for a longer time. It was fascinating to hear that the WA footy commission supported an older drafting age. One of the two AFL clubs we heard from supported an older drafting age. The WAFL clubs supported it.

Mr J.E. McGrath: What age did they support?

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Mr D.C. NALDER: I really did not get into the specifics because I did not believe it was incumbent on us to dictate what the age should be. I would rather that Western Australians encourage the football commission and the state government departments to work together to do the appropriate research work and make the appropriate representation to the AFL to reconsider how this is progressing and whether it is in our young footballers' best interests to be drafted straight out of school.

That is essentially where I am coming from with the two points I wanted to raise. I support the findings and recommendations in the report. I reiterate that I believe that the WA Football Commission has broadly done a fantastic job with development. We have a strong and proud football community in Western Australia and the commission should be commended for that; however, there are areas that it can vastly improve. I have been disappointed with the way that the WAFL has developed since the introduction of the AFL. Having been involved in the WAFL prior to the introduction of the West Coast Eagles and lived through the period after, I believe more could be done to support the premier competition in this state, and I would like to see that. I thank my colleagues on the committee for their work on this inquiry and I commend this report to the house.

MR S.A. MILLMAN (Mount Lawley) [10.55 am]: On a Sunday morning just after 8.00 am, you can cut across Hamer Park from North Street and head towards the Moyle Pavilion. The grandstand, in need of a refurbishment but loved by generations, stands on an incline surveying Inglewood Oval. The towering gum trees are behind you as you stride towards the smell of onions and sausages. You know that aroma will be mixed with Deep Heat and Tiger Balm when you arrive at the change rooms. There are families everywhere—brothers and mums, sisters and dads—kicking footies and playing tag, and locals are out walking their dogs and enjoying the spectacle. Because it is a spectacle. It is a community coming together—it is the Mount Lawley Inglewood Roos; it is the little Auskickers.

At the height of COVID this year, we missed nothing quite so much as being able to go to the footy, just like this on a Sunday morning. I remember heading down to Yokine Reserve, to Coolbinia oval 1, with the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Mick Murray, when we were doing a TV item on families being able to get back into training. Over at the Coolbinia Bombers, they were keen to start COVID-safe footy training. It was such an important milestone that it made the news that night. Footy is an incredible part of our community fabric. The local footy club is a place where people from all walks of life come together just to be in each other's company and enjoy a common love, a common passion and a common cause.

I want to speak to the tabling of this report, "More Than Just a Game: The Use of State Funds by the WA Football Commission". I am incredibly proud of the work that the Public Accounts Committee has done over the course of the fortieth Parliament. We have tackled issues involving vast sums of money—over \$1 billion spent on the Perth Children's Hospital or how \$28 billion of public sector spending can be improved through better contract management. It is true that the amount of money we looked at in this inquiry was not of the same magnitude, but this inquiry generated an incredible degree of public interest, which is a reflection of the place footy holds not only in our hearts, but also in our collective consciousness.

Before I get onto the substance of the report, I want to acknowledge some people. First, I would like to acknowledge the chair and deputy chair of the committee for the contributions they have made on the issues they have raised. They have done that clearly and articulately, and I do not need to traverse those issues. I would rather speak to the people I had in mind when I came to participate in this inquiry. People at the Coolbinia Bombers Junior Football Club, people at the Mount Lawley Inglewood Roos Junior Football Club and people of the two amateur footy clubs—the Mount Lawley Hawks and the Coolbinia Falcons. These are people who day after day, week after week volunteer their time to make sure the entire community gets the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of local footy. At the Mount Lawley Inglewood Roos Junior Football Club, I would love to acknowledge the president, Lisa Quartermain, who has been tireless in her advocacy and is a great part of our local community; secretary Tony Goddard; treasurer Judi Cramp; registrar Naomi Lockwood; vice president for youths Adam Howard; and vice president for modifieds Will Aves. I turn to the Mt Lawley footy club, the Hawks. Plenty of people who work in my office have a strong connection with Mt Lawley and have a long-running affinity with the Hawks. I want to acknowledge Paul Robinson, president; Stephen Marevic, vice president; Shane Coleman, secretary; Rob Marrocco, registrar; and Cameron Grant, treasurer. I have spoken about the Coolbinia Bombers, and I will come back to them, and in particular the outgoing president Rob Geersen, but can I congratulate the new president, Kyla Tilbury-Kegg for her election. She has big shoes to fill and I know she will do a great job at Coolbinia. I also acknowledge vice president Michael North; secretary Jodee Coleman; registrar Chloe Cushing; and treasurer Sam Delany.

I will speak about the amateur footy club in a second, because the member for Bicton and I were down at North Fremantle Oval for a very special day for the Coolbinia Amateur Football Club, so I will come back to that shortly. I want to acknowledge president Jay Bordas, vice president Luke Douglas and secretary Nik Wybrow. As I say, these are the people who contribute so much time, energy and effort into making sure that our local community footy clubs provide such a fantastic service for our aspiring sportspeople. These are the people I had in mind when we came to do this inquiry. If we are investing public money into the development of footy in our community, we

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have to make sure that that permeates all levels of our community. Those members of the community, and those hardworking footy mums and dads and coaches of the Auskick junior footy club teams who volunteer so much of their time need to enjoy some of the fruits of their labour and some of the benefits of the money that the government and the Parliament have voted to go towards the development of footy.

I come back to the point that it is about making footy as inclusive as possible. The chair has already spoken about the improvement in the participation rate in Indigenous footy and in women's footy. I want to talk about the improvement in the Integrated Football competition. It was great to be at the beautiful North Fremantle Oval with the member for Bicton for the Integrated Football grand final. This is the competition for players of mixed abilities. The local Coolbinia Falcons Integrated team is an incredibly successful team. Six times in the last six years the team has made the grand final and it was such a great pleasure to be at North Fremantle Oval to watch as the team contested its sixth grand final. It was such an incredible day and it spoke resoundingly to my mind of the way in which football brings people together. To put the icing on top, the Falcons won their sixth flag in a row, which is a testament to the great work that they have put in.

As other members have already said, there are criticisms in this report but they are intended as constructive criticisms. There is also praise and recognition in this report. The members of the Public Accounts Committee have tackled this issue with passion and diligence. It is fair to say that my fellow committee members are football tragics, yet this report is once again another unanimous report, having been authored by a committee that has the very best interests of footy at heart.

I want to thank some longstanding members of our community for the contributions that they have made to footy. I want to thank Betty and Hinze, who have been involved in the Mt Lawley–Inglewood Roos Junior Football Club, the Mount Lawley Football Club and the Inglewood Bowls Club. I want to thank Dean Turner at the East Perth Football Club, who had both me and the member for Swan Hills down at Leederville Oval a couple of weeks ago to talk about how the East Perth footy club could get more engaged in the community.

I want to finish by placing on the record my particular respect and admiration for the outgoing president of the Coolbinia Bombers, Rob Geersen. Members will see that Rob took the time and effort to put in a submission to this inquiry, such is his passion for footy. Rob Geersen is a dad whose sons play for the Coolbinia Bombers. He is an incredible advocate for the Starkick mixed-ability football team, and the Coolbinia Bombers Integrated team has set the standard. People from all over WA have come to Coolbinia to watch just how well the Coolbinia Bombers Starkick team goes.

After seeing the team play and train, and seeing the enthusiasm on the players' faces when I went down there with the Minister for Sport and Recreation post-COVID, I just knew that this is an incredible part of these young kids' lives. It is an incredible way that they can come together with their neighbours and their friends. I think about the contribution and the passionate energy that somebody like Rob Geersen brought to his role as president of the Coolbinia Bombers, whether it was working with the Starkick team or the coaches who volunteer their time; corraling sponsors at sundowners in order to get the monetary contributions to keep the club going; hassling the local councillors on the City of Stirling for an injection of cash for the change rooms; or hassling me for an injection of cash for the change rooms or for lights to allow the girls team to play. This report is authored for people like Rob Geersen.

We need to make sure that we are diligent and hardworking as a Parliament. We need to make sure that when government money is spent, it is put to the best possible purpose. I urge everyone to read the report, consider the recommendations, consider the spirit in which those recommendations are framed, consider the spirit of constructive criticism, and recognise that we have had some great achievements in footy in WA, but there is always a chance to improve.

I finish by saying that I am really proud of this report. I am really proud of the work that the Public Accounts Committee has done. I am really proud of footy in Western Australia. We have a bright future and we have a glorious past. I commend the report to the house.

MRS L.M. O'MALLEY (Bicton) [11.04 am]: I begin by echoing the words of my colleague the member for Mount Lawley about how fabulous it was to be at the Integrated Football grand final a few weeks ago at North Fremantle Football Club, the home of the mighty Maggies. I will definitely acknowledge the work of the Perth Football League and president Sam Birmingham for their work with Integrated Football.

Football most certainly is more than just a game. At the elite level, it is also big business and at the grassroots level, particularly in the regions, it is at the heart of community. For many here in our great state and right across the other Aussie Rules states of Australia, the seasons of late autumn through winter to early spring are synonymous with football and in many Western Australian households are known collectively as footy season. Player, fan, supporter, coach, official or footy mum like me, the average West Aussie has some connection to the game. It is unsurprising that this inquiry has generated a lot of media and public attention.

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I would like to thank the committee chair, Tony Buti, for his exceptional leadership and my committee colleagues and our secretariat for their work on this report and throughout our time as the Public Accounts Committee of the fortieth Parliament. It is a great privilege to serve on this committee and I acknowledge the committee's collegiate approach to this report, as with all the others tabled before it.

I begin by referring to what our inquiry was not about, as noted in the executive summary as follows —

In choosing to inquire into the use of State funds by the WAFC, this Committee did not set out to determine the 'best way' to run football, and certainly did not look into how it is or should be played or umpired. We were interested to see that there were clearly defined and sensibly managed ways to share the considerable resources available to the WAFC across the whole spectrum of football activity.

Guardianship of football in Western Australia is entrusted to the West Australian Football Commission, which was established in 1989 as the body charged with the responsibility for the overall development and strategic direction of football. The creation of the WAFC is unique to WA. It is a government-created body that receives funding from several sources, with a considerable portion coming from the public purse directly and indirectly.

The purpose of our inquiry was clear in our terms of reference. We wanted to know how effectively state funds are being used to develop football across all levels; whether the WAFC is meeting its obligations under the funding agreement with the state; and the effectiveness and transparency of monitoring and reporting functions included in the state's funding agreement with the WAFC. Our findings and, most importantly, our recommendations are contained within our report for all to see, so I will not spend my time restating many of those, apart from noting the reference in the chair's foreword in which he said —

... while many witnesses to the inquiry had criticisms and concerns with the WAFC, there was also acknowledgement that the Commission has done many things well. There was also a broad recognition that the oversight role of the WAFC is necessary and important to the ongoing success of football in WA.

I will instead focus on the first of the three points in our terms of reference—that is, how effectively state funds have been used to develop football across all levels, and particularly in the areas of grassroots football and female participation. This is expanded on in chapter 3, where it is noted —

There is an uneasy balance between WAFC's elite talent management and grassroots development

Grassroots or community football is the level at which the vast majority of participation in the sport occurs and includes junior, country, metro amateur, masters and women's football. Within the ecosystem of football in WA and in reference to the commission, these are termed affiliates, and although they collectively account for the most individuals who play the game, affiliates are not directly represented on the commission board.

I turn to resources. The WA state football funding agreement requires the West Australian Football Commission to devote its resources to developing all levels of WA football, specifically grassroots footy. The Public Accounts Committee has been unable to form a view on the effectiveness of the delivery on this commitment due to a combination of factors around deficiencies in transparency and reporting. We were, therefore, left to make our own determination through the process of submissions and witness statements. Although progress is pleasing in a number of areas—namely, increasing participation of female and all-ability players—there is still a question of whether this objective is being met. Finding 25 states —

It is not clear or discernible exactly how much support 'grassroots' football receives from the WAFC and its employees.

To this I add my sincere appreciation to all the volunteers across all areas of community football, without whom these competitions simply could not exist. I acknowledge a few of the junior football clubs in my electorate of Melville—the Attadale Bombers, Palmyra Junior Football Club, East Fremantle Junior Football Club and the senior competition of the Melville Rams. I hope I did not miss any.

Female participation in football has, not surprisingly, increased in recent years, as have efforts to support it. Total participation has increased to 109 647, which is up nearly 4 000 per cent over the decade, from an admittedly very low base. Similarly, club-based numbers were up by 1 349 per cent to 7 725. One impediment to further improvement was the inadequate state of changing facilities across WA, where at least two-thirds of grounds had no suitable arrangements for female players. I also note that there is a great deal of pressure on the grounds, ovals and greenfield spaces, with limited availability. That means that sometimes female games are played at the end of the day, the start of the day or in the evening, when other resources, such as access to the canteen, may not be available.

Finding 29 states —

The growth in women's football is creating pressures on the availability of resourcing to support this growth.

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I have seen firsthand the growth of female participation in football in my local clubs of Palmyra, where my daughter plays, and East Fremantle Junior Football Club. There is an intention to include a women's team at the Melville Rams in 2021 and, just across the river, at North Fremantle—the Mighty Maggies. East Fremantle Women's Football Club has had phenomenal success. The benefits that female participation brings to our community clubs, from volunteers to club culture, is a good thing and needs greater support in not only infrastructure but also willingness to encourage and include women at all levels of football, from the footy field to the boardroom. Recommendation 5 states —

The DLGSC should work with the WAFC to develop mechanisms to track, monitor, and report on how the appropriate resources are being secured to support the continued growth in all aspects of women's involvement in football.

As stated in finding 35 —

There is a broad social benefit to focusing resources on junior football, regional football, women's football, Indigenous football, and all-abilities football at the grassroots level.

I sincerely hope that this recommendation, along with all the others contained within this report, are adopted, for the betterment of not only the game, but also our society more broadly. After all, football is very much more than just a game. I commend this report to the house.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [11.13 am] — by leave: I would like to congratulate the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, the member for Armadale; and all the committee members for their report. In the brief opportunity that I have had to look at it, I have seen that it is pretty comprehensive. I think it covers some of the angles that I have concerns about. Like the members for Armadale and Bateman and the other members of the committee, I love football. I have been involved in football for many years, whether it be at the Katanning Wanderers—my local club in Katanning—South Fremantle, or the many country matches I have attended over the last few years, from Narrogin right through to Esperance. It was great, especially in this difficult year, to see the grand final attended by so many people. In a lot of ways they have not had events to go to. It is great to see the passion for football, and I certainly love country football.

I read many of the submissions to the committee, including those from the likes of Darrell Panizza, who has experience at Claremont and Albany, and John Shadbolt from the WA Country Football League. It was really important to get that country perspective. Darrell Panizza has been at the grassroots, played at Claremont at senior level, has gone back to Albany, and has been involved at the academy with the Great Southern Storm. He knows the whole system and how it works. I really enjoyed reading about his interaction with the committee.

I am encouraged to see the greater involvement of the West Australian Football Commission in country football over the last few years. I congratulate Tom Bottrell and his team. I believe they are working harder and getting out into the regions more. I know that our country football leagues and our participants really appreciate seeing someone from the West Australian Football Commission during the year or at the grand final. It gives them some encouragement.

Our colts carnival at Lake Grace has been going for over 100 years. It is the oldest colts carnival in Australia and I think we have finally managed to get it back on the radar. People such as Royce Taylor, John O'Neil, Kim Parsons and many of those in the administration of the Ongerup Football Association and its teams do great work to encourage players from all around our regions. The high quality standard is incredible. In the last couple of years, the grand finals between the Great Southern Storm and Lower South West were as good as any colts football match in Perth, as far as I am concerned. I think we need to link our aspirational country kids to those opportunities. I take on board the comments of the member for Bateman about the aspirations of our kids who are looking to get drafted and the pathways for doing that.

I am encouraged by recommendation 13—that is, that the colts go back to the WAFL clubs. I have been lucky enough to experience that with one of my sons, who played colts for South Fremantle. South Fremantle is a fantastic club. It is called the family club. The members for Armadale and Bateman and the Minister for Transport are also South Fremantle fans. Be that as it may, that club takes football players from the age of 12, puts them into a fantastic environment and takes them right through. I was very disappointed to see the Boston report, which the West Australian Football Commission spent \$350 000 on. It recommended taking kids away from WAFL clubs to create a talent academy. I think that was the wrong way to go. I am really encouraged to see the recommendation to take it back to our WAFL clubs.

Recommendation 7 is about increasing participation in country football. As I have said, that is very important to my constituents and to the country leagues in general that stretch from Narrogin to Esperance. I was encouraged by recommendation 18 because it refers to governance around the board nomination and election process. The weightings of the board are incorrect. The report states that 350 000 participants from 460 clubs play football, but the board seems to be confined to certain elements that do not particularly represent that amount of participation, so I am certainly encouraged by that recommendation. We need to go back to basics and get our governance right.

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The other issue in some ways is transparency. I am a keen follower of football and the West Australian Football Commission. I note that in 2019, \$31.8 million in revenue was generated, which is sourced from many different areas, including state funding that makes up 37 per cent of the total, as mentioned by the chair. It would be great for the person on the street to have more clarity about where that funding comes from. The other thing to note is that the Australian Football League club arrangements revolve around profit and so on, so one never quite knows how much will come to the football commission in any given year. No doubt that makes it difficult as well for the football commission to pinpoint how much revenue it will have for the year, so that element could be improved for the wider public.

As I said, I really appreciated the input from those country elements into the report, especially the input from the likes of Darrell Panizza. What he said about the Great Northern Football League being ranked fourth highest for draftees around Australia and the Great Southern Football League being ranked fifth highest for draftees was really interesting. That just goes to show the quality of players being developed in the country. Unfortunately, when those players are drafted, the country team that has developed them receives very little, if anything, of the money that feeds through from the draft payments. That is a disappointment for a club that is very proud of the player that it has developed because it does not really get to see that money flowing back to it through some sort of royalty model. I would like to see more of that.

As I said, the other disappointment for me was when I saw the amount of money going to country football in Victoria, which I spoke with the minister about last year. I would love to see more of that money flowing into our country areas and also back into our West Australian Football League clubs to develop those country kids who feed into the system.

With that, I will wrap things up, but I would also like to wish Gavin Taylor, who was the CEO of the West Australian Football Commission, all the best in his new career. I understand that he is moving east. I believe that he has worked hard and done a good job over the last several years. I would like to wish him and his family all the best. I also congratulate the deputy chair and his committee on a very comprehensive report. Well done.

MR D.R. MICHAEL (Balcatta) [11.23 am] — by leave: I was originally not planning on talking on the seventeenth report of the Standing Committee on Public Administration titled “More than Just a Game: The Use of State Funds by the WA Football Commission”. Obviously, like all non-committee members, I have only had a little time to look at some of the recommendations this morning, but I thought I would have a say. Most of my sporting life during my private time has been involved in a cricket club, of which I am a life member, and playing cricket. I have also had a separate connection with football, but it is not a playing connection. My last game of football was played when I was in Year 12 for Servite College in the semi-final of the Quit Cup, which we obviously lost. But my family is a pretty proud football family and a proud supporter of the West Australian Football League in particular, thanks to Gerard Neesham—I will get onto Claremont Football Club in a second. My family were also proud members of the Fremantle Football Club. I will declare an interest; I am a current member of the Claremont Football Club and the Fremantle Dockers. As a Claremont supporter, I feel a bit uneasy wearing a red tie in here with so many South Fremantle Football Club supporters around me. I still have nightmares about the last few minutes of the game a few weeks ago, albeit that South Fremantle had a very unfair home ground advantage.

I was not allowed to get the 33.6 kilobits per second dial-up internet access at home until I graduated from year 12. The first thing I did in 1997, after I graduated from year 12, was to get on the internet and teach myself how to build websites using hypertext mark-up language coding. The first website I built was an unofficial Claremont Football Club website because, in 1997, Claremont was one of the only teams in the WAFL that did not have a website. I remember when, about a year later, Rob Malone, the CEO of Claremont footy club, rang me and said, “Hey, you’re a member and you run our unofficial website. Can you make it official please?” I ran the Claremont footy club website for over 10 years. There are some words that I wrote about the club’s history that have survived from that time and are on the current Claremont footy club website.

At the same time, while I was at university, word got around that I knew what I was doing with websites and I worked for the West Australian Football Commission. One morning a week, I would go into the WAFC in the old Freemasons Hall in Subiaco to update its website and the scores. That is where I got to know the former member for Wagin, Tuck Waldron, who was involved in country football at the time. I would walk up to Tuck’s office and he would hand me a printed-out version of the current website with his marked-up changes that he wanted to see made and some new scores from country football and I would go back and make the changes. So in my early 20s, I worked for the football commission and updated its website from time to time. In fact, I still have, as it was known then, the Westar Rules WAFL website on my computer that I built at home. It was never used because the football commission at the time did not want a separate WAFL website, which, thankfully, has been fixed nowadays.

My uncle Kim Michael played league football in the 1970s. He played 50-odd league games for Swan Districts Football Club and six for Claremont Football Club, which is how I ended up being a Claremont supporter and following in the footsteps of my dad. In my house there are some prized possessions including my uncle’s framed

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jumpers from Claremont and Swan Districts, my *Football Budget* collection from the 1950s up until current times, and a couple of boxes of WAFL memorabilia, which at some stage in my life I need to sort out, so I come from an area of caring about football.

I got myself involved in the Claremont footy club in the early 2000s. As well as managing the website, it made me the public address announcer for WAFL games. I would sit in the sponsors' area with the 1960s PA system. Sir Charles Court, the former member for Cottesloe, Colin Barnett, and a heap of Liberal Party members and a few Labor people such as Denis McInerney would all be in that area having a nice time while I was trying to do the ground announcements. In the mid-2000s, I was the WAFL match day ground manager for, I think, four years, which was a paid WAFL position. I would have to walk off the field with the umpires wearing a WAFL shirt, not a Claremont shirt, which was not the most fun thing that I have ever done in my life. I care about the WAFL, the Claremont Football Club and the Dockers.

The Stirling Amateur Football Club is also in my electorate. Both the senior and junior clubs play at the same location; they are both called the Stirling Saints. One day I hope that they will come together, but they are both very good clubs. One thing that I have noticed is that community sport is struggling and football is struggling at a community level. From reading the Claremont footy club's annual report and learning about some of the things that have happened at the club, I know that WAFL clubs tend to run on the smell of an oily rag. The WAFL competition has dipped and waned from when I was a 13-year-old who went to lots of WAFL games. Obviously, the competition took a massive hit in terms of attendances and support when the West Coast Eagles entered the AFL competition, and again when the Dockers was formed. The West Australian Football League stabilised in the mid-2000s, but once the West Coast Eagles reserves, or second, team came in, it took another hit. I do not particularly agree with that decision. I have quickly read the report. The idea of linking WAFL clubs with the Colts and making the Colts—the third level—a premier league within the WAFL and making sure that they are looked after is a good idea, because the WAFL clubs are best placed to do that. I know a few football development officers who have worked or still work for the West Australian Football Commission and the WAFL clubs. Regional and metropolitan development officers and managers are not given a lot of money. Some of them run around trying to get sponsorships to run their competitions in the regions and the metro area. They generally do a very good job, well above what they are paid to do and well beyond the time they are meant to spend. They drive to games to see clubs and they attend training sessions. They make sure that umpires are working and that umpire advisers are bringing up the next crop of umpires. They do a very good job. In terms of the criticisms I have made about some of the things that happen in sport, I could make a similar speech about the Western Australian Cricket Association. Again, that organisation does some very good things, similar to the football commission, but sometimes those things do not filter down to community sport. The recommendation that the WAFL needs to be supported as a premier competition in Western Australia is so important to give the clubs the support they need to develop football in their own areas.

Years ago, Claremont Football Club bought a house in Claremont so that it could bring kids down from the Kimberley. The kids would live in the house and go to school in the area, and they would be close to Claremont Oval for training. Claremont has done well with its players from the Kimberley. All WAFL clubs need to be given the resources to do these sorts of things. Money needs to filter down to community clubs, because that is where the juniors are and that is where Auskick happens. I know that this year is a bit different, but money comes from the AFL's television rights and sponsorship. A lot of that money is—"wasted" is probably a strong word, but it is close to it. We need kids at the park playing sport, whether that sport is soccer, footy or cricket, but from a football point of view, we need kids to play sport. The committee's recommendations are about getting the football commission back to the grassroots level and supporting football development and football development officers. We need to give the clubs the resources they need to help recruit players, run competitions and get great umpires because that will help the entire system. I support the recommendation of the committee, which the member for Bateman outlined, about the draft age. If a draftee had to play 20 WAFL games or something along those lines, that would raise the standard of the WAFL and encourage more interest in the WAFL competition. It would also make such a difference to these kids, because they would be more ready to play AFL games than those who are being drafted now and who, as the member for Bateman said, will end up playing either no games or just a handful of games. I hope the football commission takes heed of this report. I congratulate the Public Accounts Committee for its report.

MR J.E. McGRATH (South Perth) [11.32 am] — by leave: As members know, I go back a fair way in football. I was a journalist in 1989 when the West Australian Football Commission was formed. Do members know why it was formed? It was formed because the West Australian Football League was broke. The league presidents did not get on with each other and they could never make decisions. The West Coast Eagles had been formed and were quickly going broke because money was being wasted there. The league presidents, who ran the competition for 100 years, missed opportunities to move football from Subiaco Oval. The league owned land in Inglewood on which it could have built a new football headquarters, but it did not do it. The league looked at Perth Oval as a possible replacement for Subiaco Oval. It looked at the old market site in Subiaco. Can members imagine having a stadium

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on the site of the old Subiaco markets? It would have been an inner-city stadium on a railway line. That did not happen; nothing was happening. The West Australian Football Commission was brought in. I was covering football at the time. Peter Tannock, a good man, became the chairman, and a guy called Jeff Ovens, who is now the chairman of Racing and Wagering Western Australia, was the chief executive. They became the most unpopular people in football. When a board is established to govern a sport or an industry, such as RWWA and the racing industry, there is a lot of resentment of people on that board because they have to make tough decisions.

I am a patron of East Fremantle Football Club, the Sharks. Members talk about South Fremantle Football Club—please! East Fremantle Football Club has won a lot more flags than South Fremantle Football Club and it is a greater club! The game needed some guidance. To his credit, Peter Tannock provided that guidance against a lot of opposition. He and Jeff Ovens did an amazing job.

Racing and Wagering Western Australia was given approval by both houses of this Parliament to run the racing industry with no interference from the Minister for Racing and Gaming. If members think that we should interfere in football, why does the department of sport and recreation not run football? The West Australian Football Commission has been given the role of governing the football industry. I refer to the funding that the commission receives from the stadium. As Premier Barnett's representative, I worked with the stadium steering committee. There had to be some compensation for football in building a new stadium. I know that the Labor opposition did not support the new stadium. The Carpenter government wanted to rebuild Subiaco Oval. Our view was that the headquarters of football should be moved. But in moving football away from Subiaco Oval, we were taking a lot of revenue away from the West Australian Football Commission.

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: The member for Collie–Preston interjected yesterday. Does the member want to produce some money from his pocket so that we can have a bet on his seat?

The \$11 million a year over 10 years that the government gives to the West Australian Football Commission is compensation for the revenue it has lost from not hosting an AFL game every week, with 22 games a year. I do not think any conditions were put on that money; it was compensation. The government did not say, "We're going to give you \$11 million, but this is how you've got to spend it." The government had enough faith that the football commission would properly run its operation.

The Public Accounts Committee has done a good job. The report raises issues of transparency and talent identification, which has been taken away from the clubs. The South Perth Junior Football Club is in my electorate. The Minister for Transport is involved in that club. I think one of her two children plays at the club.

Ms R. Saffioti: Two.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: She has two children playing at the club. She knows a good club. She is a very good judge. The club's nickname is the South Perth Stingrays. It has 558 registered players, which means it is a big club. I have spoken to it about this issue and it says that its main concern is talent identification. It believes that the talent programs should go back to the WAFL clubs. I am not against that. Obviously, the AFL would not like that because it is all-powerful and it wants the best kids in the AFL system, which is in its interests. There was a lot of criticism some years ago that there were too many AFL footballers, which meant that the depth of talent had weakened and a lot of ordinary players were running around. The AFL said that it needed better players out on the paddock so that it could put on a better show for the stations that were paying so much money for television rights. That is one aspect. The clubs have told me that the WAFC should be more involved in the proper governance of football.

Earlier this year, we had our love-in in Bunbury—they used to be called love-ins, but I do not think they call them that anymore. I was the shadow minister for sport at the time. I visited Hands Oval and some of the sporting clubs. The AFL officers down there were doing a damn good job. Do members know how big Western Australia is? Those officers go from Wyndham to Esperance. Football is a huge sport, with a lot of young people involved.

We talk about country footy. What is the answer for country footy? We can put all the money we like into country footy, but the populations in country towns are diminishing. They no longer have small farms; they have big, broadacre farms. Farming families are moving to Perth. The young people from country towns are moving to Perth. I have got them moving into my electorate. A lot of them have moved to places like South Perth. There is a big issue.

The member for Bateman raised the age of players. I do not mind lifting the age at which kids can play AFL, but then I think: what if I were a champion player like Tim Watson who played AFL at the age of 15 years and 305 days? He was a 15-year-old kid with a big body. When I go to Ernest Johnson Oval, I see kids playing under 14s who are bigger than me. They have big bodies. Kids are growing quickly now. If we stop these kids playing, next thing we know kids will go to court. That happened some years ago when a West Perth player was barred from playing. He took the league to court and was allowed to go to South Australia to play football. Young people will say, "Why am

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I prohibited from playing a game that I know I can excel at?" That is something for the WA football commission and the AFL to look at. I am not totally opposed to it. I think the worst thing that ever happened to football was when the Eagles won two premierships and the system required the players to stay with their aligned WA football league club. If they were not playing that week, they would train with those clubs and play on the Saturday. The Eagles would say, "We'd like this player to play in the forward line or the back line", or whatever. They won two flags under that system. It is probably one of the greatest teams in the last couple of decades. Then the system changed and the Eagles and the Dockers felt they needed to have a reserve team, or a second team, in the state league. Those kids started out as Colts. The fans who turned up every week and had seen them come through the ranks watched them on TV playing AFL. Often those kids, at the end of their career, came back to their WAFL club. That linkage has been broken, which is a great shame. When they have a bye or are mid-season in the AFL, some players will go to the club on a Saturday to watch a footy game, or they might be a guest speaker at a lunch. We have lost that connectivity.

The committee has raised a lot of issues. I am sure the West Australian Football Commission and the Eagles and the Dockers will look at the report. We have to remember one thing: the world has changed since the Eagles came in. We have to come up with a system that will be beneficial to the WAFL clubs, but we cannot do anything to harm the Eagles and the Dockers because they are the powerhouses; they provide most of the funding for football.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie-Preston — Minister for Sport and Recreation) [11.42 am] — by leave: I commend the Public Accounts Committee for the report that has been tabled in Parliament today. It will take some time to fully digest it. After a brief overview, it is a wake-up call for football. It is not about Parliament or a minister taking over football as such, but it is certainly a wake-up call for the grizzles and groans that are out there. Anyone who has been in football in the last five years would have heard that there were problems about transparency. From my quick reading of it, that has been identified in the report. There were problems with communication between areas, and very similar to South Perth, about some of the talent identification systems that were pulling apart the system, not putting it together. The kids who went to talent identification wore a black T-shirt. With the football commission, they lost that connection with their communities. When they were finished or did not quite get through, they did not go back to their club. Those are the sorts of things we have to address in the future.

Governance and transparency is a must for any club, whether it is football or soccer or whatever it may be. That seems to have drifted away a little bit from what was there previously. Every football club in a WAFL area especially will have a different opinion, and never will the two ends meet totally. But there has to be reasons for the decisions that are being made and put out there very much in the public arena.

There was a huge argument before \$11 million in funding was signed off. Gillon McLachlan came over a couple of times to try to assist—I will leave it at "assist"—in the process of getting that signed off. It is public money, and it should not be forgotten that it is public money. The government and the people of Western Australia have a right to understand where that money is going. We are not saying where to put it. Taxpayers should know exactly where that money is going. That has been blurred to some degree. Some of the reports have cost huge money. Even its financial statement at the end of last year was one of the biggest glossies that I have ever seen. It probably could have paid for three junior football coaches for a year. I made that comment to the commissioner. I have faith in the changes that have already happened. After meetings with Wayne Martin, the commissioner, he has given me faith that a process has been developed to go forward. In recent times, when the committee has been meeting, we have not met because I think that could be interference in the committee's report. We have worked through that with the commission.

Some people have seen the errors of their ways about trying to diminish the role of a parliamentary committee. I think that was quite an appalling move. Some others, who probably were not called out as much, have also had a say. It is notable from the report, after the number of phone calls I got from country football, that no individual country league put in a submission to the committee. I do not quite understand that. From Fitzroy Crossing to Esperance, I had people ringing me to say, "The system is broken; we should be doing this." Everyone had a different opinion—that is not what I am saying. When we look at the list of people who contributed, they are not there. I wonder why. I have heard gossip of why that did not happen. I certainly took the south west league to task recently when we announced upgrades at Hands Oval. They bolted. The executive group took off and left me standing there because they did not want to talk about it. That was disappointing to me. We missed out on that real grassroots stuff. The local WAFL clubs and the Perth Football League came in and had a say. Darrell Panizza saw me about it and then made a submission. I think that is really great.

Mr J.E. McGrath: Did the South West Football League put in a submission?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: No.

Mr J.E. McGrath: The south west league did not?

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Mr M.P. MURRAY: That is what I am saying. I cannot make any comments because I do not have any evidence on that. What I will say is that it disappointed me. I see Don McCausland's name in the report. I know quite well that he has had arguments with every footy club in the south west league over years, but he has some very good thoughts. He put in a submission as an individual. The league itself did not do that. That takes away a little more information that the committee should have had. It is certainly a disappointment.

I really welcome the report. I thank the committee for taking that on in the short time that it had to do it. It is an excellent report. It can only help. It is not the be-all and end-all. If the West Australian Football Commission is foolish enough to dismiss this report, so be it, but I think it will come back onto its shoulders. It would be very wise for the WAFC to look at that. It does not have to pick up every recommendation, but it can at least understand what the football community has been talking about and consider how we can go forward to make our great game even greater.

MR W.R. MARMION (Nedlands — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [11.49 am] — by leave: I will try to be quick. Some 15 years ago, I did some work for the West Australian Football Commission via the Department of Sport and Recreation when we were looking at the facilities of West Australian Football League clubs. Part of the brief was to go to Hanson Oval and find out about the facilities in the south west. I played one game of football when the Marsh Rovers in Derby were short a player. Because I played sport, I was asked if I could fill in as a reserve against the Broome Meatworks team. I played in the last quarter and still remember the two kicks I got. Both of them were free kicks after I got knocked to the ground and had about 10 people on top of me.

I have not had time to read the report, but from what I have managed to glean, I can see that it is obviously a very good report that covers a lot of ground. It can only be beneficial for the finances of the WA Football Commission, which is quite a grey area. Before I became a member of Parliament, I also worked on an assignment for the City of Subiaco to work out an agreement between the City of Subiaco and the WA Football Commission on what would be a fair rental price for Subiaco Oval. Because the football commission is a private organisation, it was quite difficult to find out from its accounts what its revenue sources were and what its gross income was.

I will point out a couple of things after hearing some of the comments during this debate. On a minor issue, I felt fairly disappointed to read in the chairman's foreword the comments about Simon Moore-Crouch and to hear his name raised in this house when the member for Armadale finished off with Simon Moore-Crouch's comments about a "dog and pony show". I had to look up on Google what that meant; it is a presentation. I do not know why it was necessary to mention a private person, Simon Moore-Crouch, whose family are strong volunteers at YMCA Coastal City Hockey Club. Generations of his family are hockey players and he is a volunteer there.

Dr A.D. Buti: It's already in the report; it's not private.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I am just saying that it is disappointing. Allow me to finish. It is a minor point.

Dr A.D. Buti: It's in the public domain.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Please do not defend yourself. I am making a comment. The chair did not have to put his name in there and then say that the committee did not find any evidence that what he said was true and therefore the committee would not raise it, but the member raised it in the foreword. I am just making a comment on that. We can agree to disagree, and that is fine.

Another point I will make, which the member for Collie-Preston also made, is that it is public money and there should be some sort of accountability and KPIs for spending government money. Going back to hockey, every \$5 000 for our hockey club is important. If we get \$5 000 from Healthway, a lot of forms have been filled in and there are KPIs for getting that money. I think it is valid for the Public Accounts Committee to do this report on what state funds are going to the football commission. I think we have a right to know that. This report addresses funding going to the juniors and to football development, which is important for any sport. I still play hockey, although I am not a very good hockey player. A member mentioned Jeff Ovens, who was an A-grade hockey player for the University of Western Australia Hockey Club. A number of that club's members, not all of whom played A-grade, went on to become presidents of Hockey Western Australia. That is a very strong club, like my club, the YMCA Coastal City Hockey Club, although I used to play for the University of Western Australia Hockey Club too.

Mr F.M. Logan: Digby tells me you weren't any good!

Mr W.R. MARMION: I will not comment on Digby!

Another more general issue beyond what is raised in this report is that state funding for all sports is important. I must say that my colleagues in hockey grizzle about the amount of money that goes to football and the little that goes to hockey. It is a vexed issue of how the state government can support all sports, not just football and hockey. The state government needs to somehow support a lot of junior sports. We need kids coming through and playing sport because it is part of keeping them healthy. We need to particularly balance their use of computers with physical activity.

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I think that sport, which kids enjoy, is important for their health and it is important for the community to support that. I commend the Public Accounts Committee for the report but I thought it was unfair to single out a particular person.

MR P.A. KATSAMBANIS (Hillarys) [11.55 am] — by leave: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this report and I congratulate the Public Accounts Committee for the work it has done. It is fair to say that I have glanced through the report and heard the speeches of other members. It would be unfair for me to comment in any great detail on the findings or the recommendations or any of the proceedings that led to the findings and recommendations of the report because it has only just been tabled. I would have to spend more time looking at it before doing that, but I think it will be extraordinarily useful.

Other members have made the point that Australian Rules football binds us together in this state in many weird and wonderful ways, including the ability for us to banter with each other about our representative teams, be they AFL or West Australian Football League teams. It is a unique part of being Australian, and certainly being Western Australian or living in the southern states of Australia, that football is a lot more than just a sport; it is uniquely cultural and binds us in ways that sometimes we take for granted. I think it binds us in ways that break down barriers between people, classes, political parties, and people in suburbia and country towns. That is why football is so important to the fabric of our society.

When public money is involved, there needs to be an element of transparency and an understanding in the community that scarce taxpayers' resources are being applied appropriately for the right outcomes. When there are question marks—even the Minister for Sport and Recreation, the member for Collie–Preston, highlighted this himself—and when there are whispers and more than whispers, it is important to shine a light on what is going on in the administration of football. From my observation of the committee's public hearings and from glancing at the report in the hour or so that it has been tabled in this place, I think the committee has made a very useful contribution to assisting in the future of football. People know that I am a passionate football fan and am a Collingwood supporter, which makes me a minority in this state—I recognise that—but there is a lot more to my love of football. I grew up watching Collingwood play almost every week. I grew up in the shadows of the light towers at Toorak Park, which is the home ground of the Prahran Assumption Football Club. On Sundays, I would spend my time there. I also spent a little time at a junior club unsuccessfully kicking around the bladder. I have continued that love of football throughout my life to this very day, and I think I have passed it on to my children.

Interestingly, what probably makes me unique in this place is that I have a very deep involvement in and therefore appreciation of junior football as it has been conducted in two different states. My oldest son played for a significant time in junior football. I was very actively involved in coaching, training and being the runner for the team during my eldest son's junior football career. At that time, I came across the member for Bateman, for a brief time, who was also a parent at the East Malvern Junior Football Club where the Knights played. Actually, I even recall playing in the midfield in a father v father match; I think it was Auskick v the more senior of the junior teams. I was playing in the centre square and roving to the wonderful ruck work of the member for Bateman, who was clearly a much better footballer than I could ever claim to be! Since I came to Western Australia, I have found that our local junior football club is a place where my family has felt very at home—the Woodvale Junior Football Club. My son and my two younger daughters all play football at that club and they love it. I have been active there, assisting where I can—everything from line marking to turning sausages to helping out with training. In the last few years I have also assisted as a parent umpire, which has given me a perspective on football that I have never had before in my long, long involvement with football as a player, spectator and supporter. I had never had the perspective of what it is like to be an umpire, and I have to say it has given me an even stronger appreciation of the volunteers, including umpires, who make the game so great.

From my observations, there are some real challenges. Some of them have been addressed in this report, but some of them go beyond the scope of the report; they go to the money involved in keeping the game going. That is a seriously important issue. The Woodvale Junior Football Club is extraordinarily successful. It has more than 900 registered players and nearly every player came back after the COVID-19 crisis, but as I travel around I see other clubs. Some of them are doing well, some of them are middling along, and a few of them are, unfortunately, failing.

The growth of women's football has been phenomenal. That is great; it is something that I have championed and supported for a long, long time, even back when I was member for North Metropolitan Region and the mayor of the City of Wanneroo, Tracey Roberts, got me involved with the Butler Falcons, a junior girls' football team, targeting—although not exclusively—girls from the African community. The growth of women's and girls' football is phenomenal, and I think it will continue to grow, but it has exacerbated the challenges that football faces in this state in a number of ways, including challenges around facilities. I will not go into the intricacies, but it is completely and utterly unacceptable for young girls to have to change jumpers in public parks. That needs to be addressed. We need proper facilities. Those who played football in my era will remember the old changing rooms we had—the communal facilities, let us call them. I would argue that those sorts of communal facilities are no longer appropriate for boys and men, and even less appropriate for girls and women. If we, as a society, truly believe in getting young

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people actively involved, dealing with their physical and mental health issues, getting them involved in a club and engaged in their communities through sport and participation in sport, we need to put really significant investment into improving and extending the existing facilities, because the number of teams continues to grow, especially in women's and girls' football. Whether members are on one side of politics or the other, we should encourage further investment in those facilities.

I am worried about the very, very narrow elite sporting pathways. My family and I have experienced that; not just me, but my cousins and their children also. I think we make participation in what are termed "elite" squads too narrow, too early. I think that is a major, major failing. It discourages participation by other people, for a start; it eliminates children who grow at different stages and ages; and it puts an unnecessary focus on some skills, usually athletic skills, at the expense of other skills—the skills that one needs to play the game, beyond just athletic skills. I think everyone is responsible for that. It is wrong to make pathways into the colts level a determination of the commission and the AFL as opposed to local West Australian Football League clubs. I glanced at the report, and I think the report refers to that. I think that needs to be brought back. We need to broaden the elite participation pathways and not narrow them down. By narrowing them down in the way that we are, we are creating a cliff that a lot of kids fall off between the ages of 13 and 15, in both girls' and boys' football.

I know I do not have a lot of time left, but I want to focus on the pathways for girls. It is a disgrace that there is no senior WAFL women's football club in the northern suburbs. West Perth has sought a permit to do that; I hope it is granted for 2021, because it is critical and essential. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important report.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [12.05 pm] — by leave: I was not going to contribute, but given my love of football and all things football and sport, I thought I would make a contribution. I do not want to make a long contribution, but I would just like to pick up on a couple of points that have been made. We need to have a better connection back to the WAFL clubs, grassroots football and community football. That is a key theme of the report. There is an increasing disconnection between junior clubs and their local WAFL clubs. My kids know the AFL, as much as I try to tell them about the WAFL, and there needs to be a much better connection. The report highlights that, and I welcome all initiatives to regain a strong connection between the West Australian Football League and local clubs so that people can see a real pathway. I think that is very, very important. The member for Bateman's figures on that might be anecdotal, but they scare me when it seems people think only about the AFL, and that if a player does not make it in the AFL, there is nothing else. I do not think that is true; there are a lot of other good pathways, and the WAFL should be a significant pathway for young people to aspire to.

I want to talk about girls' footy. Ten years ago things were very different than they are now, and I congratulate all the clubs for supporting women's and girls' footy. It is now a lot better than it used to be. I tell my children all the time that when I was growing up there were no options, but there are now options for young girls. That is something that is going to grow. I pick up on the member for Hillarys' concerns about a lack of presence of girls' football in particular areas, but we need to continue to encourage girls' participation in all sports, including football. I have an eight-year-old girl and an eight-year-old boy who both play football and soccer. One thing that is very important for keeping younger girls playing—this may not be the same for all girls—is to have girls' teams. I saw in my 10-year-old girl's soccer club that sometimes the boys would not give them the ball, basically, so they could never develop their skills. That is what happened to my girl until I found an appropriate girls' team. The continuing need for better change room facilities and support for young girls is very important. They can choose football or soccer, but giving them the option is very, very important.

Again, I refer to the success and improvement of the women's league. The point was made to me once that when we started the women's league, many of the players came from other sporting backgrounds, such as athletics, but we now have a real pathway for young girls to become elite players. The success of the women's league will continue as more and more girls play the game. Again, I very much support that.

I also want to give a shout-out to all the volunteers. All of us who go to the games or have children who play appreciate the amount of work done by volunteers. I am always surprised by, and it warms my heart to see, the hours put in by people. Some of those people's children have grown out of the game, but they have commitment to community sport. I give a shout-out to my sister, who has been the registrar with the Roleystone Tigers for 10 years. Her boy is well past playing football, but she has a commitment. That is the commitment that many demonstrate. As I said, their children may have moved on, but they continue to volunteer. Again, I give a big-shout out to those volunteers.

I am a long-suffering Fremantle Dockers supporter and a long-time South Fremantle supporter.

Ms M.M. Quirk: How is that David Mundy? When is he going to retire?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Hopefully never! To quote Austin Powers, we are going to cryogenically freeze him and pull him out for every football game!

Mr P.A. Katsambanis: He is still top 22.

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Ms R. SAFFIOTI: If someone can play, it does not matter what age they are. That is my view. If they are not injured and they can play, they can keep going. That is my very strong opinion about things.

Dr D.J. Honey: We will start a petition, I will sign!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes!

I think Tony Buti quoted former Premier Geoff Gallop. All sport, and footy in particular, brings people together. It creates a sense of community. We have done so well in the past, but we need to make sure that we continue to do well in the future to foster young people to create a dynamic and fun environment. I pick up on the comments of the member for Hillarys. Participation and working with others are really important skills, especially nowadays when people are so locked into individual screens. They do not even watch TV together anymore because they all have their individual screens. It is really important for children to understand the ability to work as a team, and to acknowledge that not everyone is fantastic or brilliant and the team is only as good as the weakest player, so they have to encourage everybody. Apart from my eldest child who has pressure to play professional soccer, I am happy for the others to participate and enjoy the game. They need to understand the rules of life that we do not win every time, we have to learn to work with others and we have to support everyone in our team. They are key things. That is what I want my children to learn from sport. If we continue to foster young people playing sport and doing these activities, it is good for the community. The sense of community, camaraderie and belonging to something is very important. What is lacking a lot in society is a sense that we belong to something. Even if it is the local football team or if someone is a long suffering Freo Dockers supporter, people are part of something that is bigger than themselves, which is really important. I thank the committee for all its work. I suspect the report will create a lot of debate, but it will be good even if we just achieve moving the discussion forward, support growing football in WA and support junior football. I support the member for Bateman on the draft age. That is quite an important discussion. If we can do those things, this report will have been well worth doing. I congratulate the committee members for that work.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA) [12.13 pm] — by leave: I have only just picked up this report “More than Just a Game: The Use of State Funds by the WA Football Commission”, and I congratulate the members of the Public Accounts Committee who have put together a report that on first glance appears to be a very in-depth discussion about some of the aspects of the sport. We must remember that state government money is going into WA football and we have to think about how WA football can contribute to the community. In his absence, I would like to pay tribute to work of the member for North West Central in participating in this committee inquiry. I am sure he made a very valuable contribution to the deliberations. He is a very passionate supporter of his community in every way.

There are a few little aspects I want to pick up on on this first look through the report. As a country member, I am very much aware of the importance of football and sport generally in the communities I represent, but here we are talking about football. Recommendation 5 is that resources should be secured to support the continued growth and also aspects of women’s involvement in football. It was very good to have the Minister for Transport; Planning make a contribution. It shows that this report may receive some favourable consideration from government, and I think that is important. The growth of women’s participation in football has been very quick. It is very important for women and girls have an option to take up football.

I think the member for Hillarys spoke about changing facilities being needed for girls. In the town of Muchea in my electorate there is a very limited set of facilities for the local football, cricket and netball communities. A staggering number of young girls are taking up junior football especially in that area, and a lot of girls already participate in netball. I have been there and seen the facilities; they are completely inadequate. Young girls virtually have nowhere to use as a change room. There is a small toilet block for the girls who participate in football and netball. The local footy team is the Chittering Broncos, and it is not unusual for 260 players to be involved in a day’s activity at that very small oval. There is a vast number of football participants for my electorate. Many of them are female, but, male or female, the facilities are completely inadequate.

I know applications have been made for funding. There has been disappointment in some of the results of those applications, and I can only speak of the great need that exists in the community for the facilities to be upgraded and to support all aspects of government and community to get behind women in sport in Muchea in the Shire of Chittering, because they are contributing to the outlet and growth of those young people in that area. Many of them are spread around rural and residential areas, where there is limited opportunity to get together and socialise over the weekends, so it is a great aspect of bringing the community together in that area. They come to Perth and play in the metropolitan competition. The Chittering Broncos is our junior football club. There is no senior football club associated with it, but, even so, hundreds of people play football there. There is a big need for facilities in the Shire of Chittering, and they will spill over and service kids in the southern areas of Gingin as well.

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I also note recommendation 6, which is to support junior and youth football development and participation. Again, that is a vital need in all areas. As a country member, I am aware of the need outlined in recommendation 9 to support investment in and expansion of programs promoting all-abilities football. Football is very important across the whole of my electorate. In the electorate of Moore, the town of Kalbarri, which is leaving my electorate and becoming part of the electorate of North West Central after the next election, has semi-annual football games against Shark Bay. It is a big occasion for Kalbarri. The Shark Bay team comes down and they have a march. They do not have a regular competition there, but it is a big occasion. Also, on long weekends the Northampton Rams go up and play a game in Kalbarri, which is well attended. I almost wore my Northampton Rams tie this morning, but for some reason, I neglected to put it on. It would have been fitting, given the topic in here today. In the electorate there is representation of the Great Northern Football League, with Northampton, Mullewa and Chapman Valley football clubs; the entirety of the North Midlands Football League; and the entirety of the Central Midlands Coastal Football League. Coming in after next election will be Dowerin and Goomalling to join Toodyay, Dalwallinu, Gingin and Calingiri in that league. Also in the Central Wheatbelt Football League, there is the Kalannie team, which is in my electorate. There is a very big representation of football clubs throughout the electorate. It is a very big social driver and a huge issue for country people to ensure that football continues in the future.

I thank the committee for its work and look forward to reading in more detail its excellent report.