

On behalf of Football West, its Board and all its members, thank you for the opportunity to be here today and to provide comment and input to ~~the debate on~~ this very important discussion.

We are all aware of the damage, physical harm and social cost that alcohol and illicit drugs has throughout the community. As there are far greater informed and more knowledgeable trained specialists than myself in this area, I will limit my comments to commend the Government and specifically this committee for their efforts in this regard.

In saying that, let me provide a very small insight as to my background and tertiary and career history which undoubtedly flavours my message here today. By training I am an sports scientist and exercise physiologist, and spent the first 6 years of my career in health promotion and health advancement, including the then National Health and Medical Research Council in Canberra and the Healthy Cities Project. My early time has also been with the likes of ACHPER, the Heart Foundation and the Fitness Leaders Association, and more recently the then Australian Sports ^{Dry Agency} ~~As~~ author of then ASF's Fitness for Soccer manual, I would like ^{also} to think that I understand the space and the many objectives and outcomes that everyone is trying to achieve.

I am also conscious of the wider terms of reference of this Committee and its desire to look into the impact of sponsorship of sport by companies that produce alcoholic and other seemingly 'unhealthy' products.

In saying that I am however concerned at the increasing tendency to link legal and readily available off the shelf consumer products – such

as fast food, soft drinks, alcohol and other such items - in to the same category as tobacco and illicit drugs. There is no such thing as a healthy 'cigarette' whereas in these other categories, moderation and the provision of healthy alternatives can be effective messages that we should be looking at promoting as opposed to totally demonising anything that is put in one's mouth.

It is fair to say at the outset, and I am sure my colleagues in other sports will agree, that in these most difficult financial times, grassroots community sport relies heavily on the support from such areas and sponsors - often for its junior development programs, coach education initiatives and more general participatory and competition programs.

We all know of the role that sport currently plays and has played in the past in Australian society. Sport is intrinsically woven into the fabric of the nation and many of our national icons are our sporting heroes. We are also fully aware of the role that sport can play in the physical and social development of our young children. Improved health and physical fitness, greater social skills and self esteem, improved team work and so on are only some of the benefits that our children experience. Only recently the Federal Government's Crawford Report on sport in Australia highlighted both the role of sport in Australia and its impact on helping Australians - young and old - become more healthy.

Today I don't want to talk about statistics and government reports, nor standing committees, analytical research and trends, but rather I want to focus on reality. Cold hard everyday reality. What is

happening out there in club land, in the many zones and regions of WA, to the mums and dads, and the volunteer coaches, and in my office where almost daily, myself and I am sure my fellow colleagues are faced with running a state sports Organisation, under difficult circumstances. In the past two weeks alone, I have had to slash budgets, cut programs and deny staff the opportunity to conduct some wonderful and creative initiatives.

Despite doing our best to promote the game across this huge state, we constantly struggle against the tide of rising costs and expenses, and unfortunately diminishing income, what with the GFC and reduction in corporate sponsorship, increasing demands on ever reducing government funds and household revenue and discretionary expenditure amongst families under more strain than ever.

With this as a backdrop, quite simply and bluntly, Football West needs to and is compelled to look at all potential sources of revenue and funds in order to carry out its charter and to meet the vision that it has set for itself.

We will do this responsibly, and as always within the commercial sporting environment, we attempt to match the best fit in terms of the potential sponsor and their objectives and the various activities we conduct. We make value judgements on what programs are worth and try to put a dollar figure on the activities we run, both in terms of cost to the company and the value to a commercial partner.

If not already known, the Committee should be very aware of the many wonderful and exciting initiatives that we currently conduct and try to implement – many of which are done in conjunction with

the State Government and in particular Healthway and the Department of Sport and Recreation.

By way of background information, Football West has an extensive Health Policy that covers tobacco and alcohol, addresses food and catering at our clubs - such as promoting and encouraging healthy alternatives and smarter choices, and outlines sunsmart and injury prevention activities. We proactively endorse and promote this policy in conjunction with Healthway and through our many regional associations and clubs.

In support of this, we currently receive funding of approximately \$160,000 per annum from Healthway for the conduct of various junior and youth development programs. Conducted under the banner and message of 'Smarter than Smoking' this funding directly touches in excess of 20,000 children in the state.

We also utilise the wonderful package of education material, again developed by Healthway – fuel to go, go, go – in many of our programs and many of our junior clubs have signed up to be Healthway clubs.

As a major sport, we understand our responsibility and obligations and we do not shy away from these – in fact we actively endorse these and wish to do far more. However, let me again provide an insight into the real world that we operate in.

As the world's most popular sport with the world most popular event, the about to commence FIFA World Cup, football on a global and even national scale, benefits from financial support from a number of the world's largest companies including soft drink, fast food and alcohol sponsors. Two of these companies also support the

IOC, it's Olympic Games and the Solidarity Program that the IOC conducts throughout the world.

Closer to home, the Federal Government's national sports department, the Australian Sports Commission benefits from and promotes two companies that would be considered inappropriate and frowned upon here in Western Australia.

Similarly, our national governing body for the sport, Football Federation Australia currently and in the past, also benefits from similar sponsorship support from three major world wide food and drink partners. Several of the most successful and most popular programs ever run in Australian sport have been run by football - under it's former guise of soccer – the Coca Cola Youth Development Program and the McDonalds Super Skills activities.

As recently as two weeks ago, at a CEO's meeting of state football federations, each of my fellow colleagues spoke of the extensive funds that they each currently receive from fast food, soft drink, cereal and other food item companies and the various programs that they conduct as a result of such support. Across the country, Football West is the only, repeat only, football body that does not receive such support. Whilst we continue to be prepared to promote the healthy message as much as we can, at the highest level, the Football West balance sheet shows a lower level of income from sponsorship, and the real losers are the children and young players who do not receive similar programs as their counterparts in other states.

The biggest junior sporting competition in Australia is currently sponsored by McDonalds, Schweppes under its Solo brand and

through its sports drink Gatorade, reach thousands of football clubs and Cottees financially supports the very popular junior schools five a side competition.

Why do I tell you all of this ?

To the detriment of young children in the state and our young potential football participants, none of these programs are available to our junior members through Football West. Essentially, at a time when we are cutting back our programs and thus denying our juniors and youth players increased sporting opportunities, I am also forced to decline approaches from a number of companies deemed 'unsuitable' who we could otherwise partner with, to conduct such programs.

What is the answer ?

I think the solution lies within much of what the WA Minister for Sport and Recreation outlined several weeks ago when addressing a gathering of Business Leaders. Amongst other things, the Hon Terry Waldron promoted a position that focused on balance and common sense and that specifically targeted the protection of young people from alcohol promotion. He then went on to say ... and if I may quote him

' in an economic climate where local clubs and associations are finding it increasingly difficult to attract and retain sponsorship, it is incumbent on government to work with peak industry bodies to identify ways to provide support – not erect more barriers'

... further he stated 'to offset major reductions in income, organisations will need to either increase participation fees or decrease services'. Currently, Football West is doing both, and

unfortunately we are at a tipping point where we potentially could be losing members and young players from the game.

All of this was under the general mantra of 'don't ban it, change the message'.

In summary, Football West's fundamental role is to promote football in Western Australia and to provide football opportunities to all who wish to play it. Football West is aware of the joys and benefits that participants derive from their involvement in the game. Football West wants to work with the government and associated organisations to promote increased activity, and promote other healthy messages. Ironically, in our attempt to do so, it is hamstrung by reduced funding and support opportunities. Our hands are tied behind our back when we go out in to the community to fund much of what we do. As recently as last October, Football West was denied the opportunity for funding of \$50,000 for our Perth Glory women's team – a completely separate and autonomous team from the men's commercial club, because we shared, for the sake of promoting the gender equity argument ... the same name as the men. This is mandated to us by the national body, and we have no choice if we want to participate in the W-League. I should also state that this is a nationally broadcast competition and because of this ruling, the opportunity was lost to promote the Smarter than Smoking message on player's uniforms and around the ground. As such, our women's team program was drastically reduced because of this decision – again, once more, sport, football and our participants are the losers.

It could easily be argued that the attempts to promote increased health has actually had a counter result – less programs are

conducted, less opportunities are provided and less young individuals benefit.

Again quoting the Minister 'the Government does not advocate prohibition, stopping the promotion isn't the answer, education is the key'.

Football West wants to use the power of the sport and its world wide appeal and popularity and the simplicity of the game, to better educate our young Australians and to make them more active and healthier and better prepared for their adult life. Football West applauds what has been done in the past and wants to continue and expand this relationship further.

We want to build our partnership with the likes of Healthway and use the power of our sport to get the healthy message across. Sport is not the problem, rather it is the solution.

Just as it has been demonstrated in the past with the extremely successful QUIT campaign, sport and indeed football, has played a major role, together with other legislative initiatives, in the reduction of the percentage of people smoking and more importantly young children taking up the habit. Sport can play the same leadership and advocacy role, utilising the many sporting icons that we have and that our young children look up to and aspire to, to promote other healthy messages.

Just as you recognise and are all concerned with the impact that sponsorship by such companies has on the incidences of problems such as childhood obesity, diabetes and in general poor health, I would strongly argue that we look at this through an alternative lense, as many of you do, and look to use sport as a means of

delivery such messages. Sport, and football in particular, can play an active and dominant role in delivering these messages.

Again I reiterate Football West's desire to partner with Government and its agencies in delivering these messages. We look forward to further work and cooperation with Healthway and the State Government and truly believe that together we can make significant inroads to combating many of the health problems facing our society. Once more, I state that sport is not the problem, it is the solution, and Football West welcomes the opportunity to rise to that challenge !