

## PINJARRA HARNESS RACING CLUB (INC) BACKGROUND

The Pinjarra Harness Racing Club (formally Pinjarra Trotting Oub) was formed on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1950. The meeting was raced on the Greater Sports Ground Development on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1954. The current location was purchased in 1959. The Pinjarra HRC property is 100% owned by the club.

The current 1000 metre track was opened in 1990 and remains to this day as the largest and fastest track in Western Australia, with a track (State) record of 1:53.3 mile rate. The vast majority of trainers view the Pinjarra track as the best track in WA. The track was the first in Australia to use flexible pylons in place of a running rail in 1990.

The club has been strongly community orientated and very much indebted to contributions of many volunteers in the early years.

In 2009 final funding announcements were made to enable the club to build a \$2.5m Pavillion. Funding was sourced through the State Government, Peel Development Commission (Royalties For Regions Scheme) and Racing and Wagering WA.

The harness racing industry sees Pinjarra as an important ingredient in the future of harness racing in WA. With the new Kwinana Freeway extension the track is less than one hour from Perth CBD and very close to the freeway exit.

In NSW and Victoria the metropolitan tracks have been sold and the showcase tracks relocated in the outer suburbs, closer to the people and the industry participants, therefore freeing up large amounts of capital for future industry planning.

The Peel region has a hugely expanding population and the Mandurah area is seen as a strategically important tourist destination in the State. Pinjarra HRC sees itself as an important part of the future of harness racing in Western Australia and has a 5 Year infrastructure Plan in place to achieve its potential.

Mr Revell Douglas,  
Pinjarra HRC (6 April 2010)

## RWWA REVIEW - PINJARRA HARNESS RACING CLUB (INC).

Since the introduction of RWWA in 2003 the harness racing industry in Western Australia has followed the economic times of the State. Betting turnovers increased as WA harness racing cashed in on the rewards of a mining boom; in turn industry participants enjoyed increased stake money distributions.

With the economic crisis came a downturn in betting and a lack of investment in the industry. To the credit of RWWA maintaining stake levels have been a priority and the industry rates highly on a nationwide level on this front.

RWWA in the good times have not planned for the future and instead have an out-dated harness racing product. This product now struggles to compete with inter-state rivals that now are racing on tracks that are up with the best in the world with breeding programs and incentives to match.

The breeding industry has not been encouraged in WA and as a result a large portion of the horses are brought in from Eastern States or New Zealand. A large emphasis on Wagering has seen the local industry shrink and the future is looking bleak.

Now we are in difficult times RWWA is in cut-back and retreat mode and positive planning has been put on the back burner.

### Corporate Objectives

#### 1. Growth

Lack of future planning and innovative strategies in ensure growth of harness racing Product.

In a climate of declining turnover revenue and increased competition RWWA seem to provide little leadership on new initiatives to help growth.

The next generation of participants are being ignored with an attitude of fix what is broken now rather than a strategy to grow the industry.

No new initiatives for harness racing and no facilitating of new thinking from the clubs. This was evident in the 2010 Strategic Plan, where no positive new initiatives were included. More of a holding mode to (as the title indicated) "Protect the Product".

#### 2. People

When RWWA was first set up (2003) it would seem that the current staff from WATA were integrated into the new organisation. Many were at the end of their working life and changed department to suit them, rather than finding a person to fit the objectives of the position. From a club point of view they seem unwilling to go outside their comfort zone to innovate or help rejuvenate the industry.

### 3. Internal Process

Until the recent (enforced) staff reductions there was a feeling that the staffing levels were not as efficient as the industry would like.

### 4. Customer

The standard of ~~service~~ to both industry and TAB customers are adequate.

### 5. Stakeholder

The industry consultation could be improved. There is minimal consultation with clubs planning major strategic plans and the future of racing clubs. Often a very short turnaround time for clubs to plan a response or consult with their local Committees or industry participants has led to industry discontent.

### 6. Financial

Infrastructure requirements seem to be not well planned in past times. All other states have state of the art new harness racing tracks and facilities, whereas WA is still racing at the out-of-date 800m track at Gloucester Park as our show piece. At a time when the state was very well off due to the mining boom the governing body was not planning to improve the future needs of the industry.

### 7. Risk

Risk management for race day procedures are not up to industry standards. For example Ambulance procedures seem hap-hazard and are venerable.

### Other comments:

- From the point of view of the Pinjarra Harness Racing Club the RWWA structure is overall a positive structural organisation compared to other states and countries. The stake money and day-to-day running of clubs is well catered for by RWWA.
- From a development point of view RWWA have been seen to be reactive and lacking a strategy for the industry's future. An example of this is the PHRC had a very unsafe and inadequate grandstand that needed replacement. The club had to lobby politicians to get a \$1m grant from the State Government and source \$745,000 from "Royalties For Regions" funding (With help from RWWA). At this stage RWWA was able to contribute with \$750,000 of 'Development' funds, which was greatly appreciated but the uncertainty of funding did not allow for strategic planning to take place at a club level.
- On several key industry issues RWWA is very much still dictated to by the largest club in the state (WATA). The WATA is run as a very inefficient and industry fund 'draining' organisation that does not have to comply with the standards of efficiency that the other clubs are judged by.
- In 2010 the Pinjarra HRC planned and staged the inaugural 'Super 9's'. This was hailed as the 20/20 version of harness racing and something (I Quote RWWA CEO Richard Burt) that could 'reinvent the harness racing product'. The event created a record off-course turnover in WA history for a Country club and was the second highest on-course

turnover the club had received. Despite this RWWA cited hard economic times and a declining harness racing turnover when not allocating any **extra** stake money for this concept in the 2010-2011 season. PHRC required \$22,000 to stage another 'Super 9's' meeting and continue the momentum of an event that had the industry buzzing. Instead RWWA allocated \$20,000 to a 2YO race at Gloucester Park that in their own words was not going to add any significant turnover revenue to the industry.

- o The sport of harness racing is in a declining trend. RWWA have done very little to educate the general public about the sport or investment in the sport. Declining turnovers and participation are seen as inevitable and a strategy to get new people involved has never been addressed. Marketing racing has been a very minor factor for RWWA and the sport of harness racing has been let down on this front.
- o The WAGERING component of RWWA has very much overshadowed the RACING component in their strategic thinking.
- o Industry participants are worried about declining numbers involved with harness racing and the standard of the product. RWWA are showing very little initiative in growing the harness racing product and seem content with fixing problems as they happen.
- WA has a very high number of country harness racing tracks. In the 2010 Strategic Plan one club has been closed down (Geraldton). There is a case for more to be closed to make for a more efficient model that more accurately meets the industries needs and distribution models.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The Pinjarra Harness Racing Club is supportive of the Racing and Wagering WA Act 2003. The three code model is the most cost effective alternative for the governance of Racing and Wagering in WA.

We would like to see the following improvements to the model:

- A more balanced model with the future of harness racing in WA planned for and promoted more effectively, rather than a wagering domination. Without a breeding industry or youth participation the industry is slowly dying.
- A more positive leadership is needed to help develop a more marketable product that is seen as modern and exciting. The popularity of harness racing is diminishing with the general public losing knowledge of harness racing through industry 'survival' mode rather than fresh ideas and innovations.
- Greater industry consultation regarding the future direction of RWWA and harness racing in WA.
- Infrastructure planning has been lacking with money not spent on keeping up with modern demands of the sport: such as track size. Our show case venue has a sub-standard track circumference of 800 metres that is unpopular with the modern betting customer.
- Seven years after the transition from WATA to RWWA governance we believe the largest club (WATA) is still largely running the decisions at RWWA and short cutting proper procedure.