

Frank Cooper AO
B Com FCA FAICD

Dr A D Buti MLA
Chair
Public Accounts Committee
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
West Perth WA 6005

Dear Dr Buti MLA

Re: West Australian Football Funding

I was a member of the West Australian Football Commission ("WAFC") from January 2006 to December 2015 and Chairman from June 2010 to June 2015. The purpose of this letter is to note my experiences and observations on the funding arrangements within West Australian football and the role of the WAFC from my time as a member of the commission.

I accepted the opportunity to join the WAFC because of my belief in the importance of football in building and maintaining communities throughout Western Australia. That belief informs my position that all levels of football in WA, from AFL to Auskick in remote regions of WA, together form an ecosystem with a high level of interdependence. Each level has a role to play and, while imperfect in practice, recognising and supporting that interdependence is critical to the future of the game.

From my experience the only entity in that football ecosystem that has an objective perspective of the whole is the WAFC. All other entities from individual clubs to competitions are driven first by the self interest of the club or the competition. This is simply an observation and not a criticism. The significant majority of clubs and competitions below AFL struggle for survival and this self interest is the driving force that enables them to, at least in the most part, survive.

In considering the appropriate funding structure for football in WA it is worth reflecting on the circumstances that gave rise to the creation of the WAFC. While circumstances have changed somewhat since then the underlying reasons for establishing the commission remain valid today.

The WAFL is an important part of the WA football structure however it also demands the significant majority of the funding available to the WAFC. History to one side in my opinion the relevance of the WAFL in the current football structure is primarily determined by the exclusivity granted to it in respect of AFL recruiting. This right, together with the current funding arrangement, places an onus on the WAFL to focus on the development of the game and ultimately the development of AFL players. However, balancing these objectives with the desire of the WAFL to be a premium competition in its own right and each club spending on experienced players to support their own success has been an ongoing challenge.

The responsibility of the WAFC is to support the WAFL competition in balance with the development of the game across WA. As always, the demands and needs of the game across this broad expanse materially exceed the resources available. I have views about the allocation of resources by the AFL in this context but that is beyond the scope of this letter. Over the years the WAFC has tried a number of avenues of supporting football at the community and country level. These have included funding the WAFL clubs to carry out this responsibility and subsequently employing the development resources at WAFC level and placing them in the WAFL clubs. In both cases it was the

experience of the commission that too often the funding and subsequently the people were utilised by the WAFL clubs to support their own teams at the expense of community and country football development. The outcome is understandable given the limited resources of the WAFL clubs and their inherently conflicting objective of individual team success.

This point was demonstrated when the WAFC most recently adopted the alignment model with the AFL clubs. The WAFC tried to utilise the majority of the fees to be paid by the AFL clubs to support investment in the development of the WAFL competition and to enhance the balance sheets of the individual clubs. However, as part of resolving the dispute with the clubs over the alignment model the significant majority and ultimately all the fees were distributed to the clubs where it simply went into recurring spending.

In my view it would be a grave error to distribute WA football funds to the WAFL clubs with the expectation that it would be used to support community and country football development. It is too much to expect WAFL clubs that are already working exceptionally hard to stay in business to support country and community football development. The WAFC is the right entity to oversee the game as a whole and it has a strong record in doing so consistently under difficult circumstances.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Frank Cooper', followed by a period.

Frank Cooper AO

cc: Mr Wayne Martin AC QC
Chairman
West Australian Football Commission