

BRIDGETOWN HARNESS RACING CLUB INC

Submission notes to Parliamentary Review Committee.

We are pleased to report that in our opinion RWWA has generally made great advances in the administration of the harness code in WA since its inception. Stake money has risen, costs to race such as driver's fees, nomination fees and spider insurance have been eliminated and the standard of racing generally has been markedly improved through a thorough racing integrity upgrade.

Our concerns as a "community" harness racing club centre on the growing gap between the community clubs and prime clubs. By comparison, community clubs are granted less meetings with less races at each meeting and less stake money to race. Community harness meetings are suffering from inferior radio broadcasting and thus far no opportunity for visual broadcasts. RWWA has consistently made no industry funding available to upgrade facilities at minor tracks, whilst not relenting on their standards for racing integrity. The RWWA period has featured the closure of York, Merredin, Trayning, Wyalkatchem, Cunderdin and now Geraldton tracks, with persistent rumours regarding pressure for Albany, Wagin and Central Wheatbelt currently circulating the fraternity. The same period has also featured major upgrades to facilities at Bunbury, Northam and currently Pinjarra. RWWA policy is one of thinly veiled centralization. This is being achieved through neglect of minor tracks and support for the major venues through facility upgrades and shepherding of race meetings toward the major venues. The vast majority of career penalty racing now occurs at Gloucester Park, Northam, Pinjarra and Bunbury. This is a major shift that continues to make participation more expensive and uneconomic for participants living outside the golden triangle.

RWWA has stated from the outset that it will deal with harness clubs on an individual basis. This has represented a shift from the previous approach, where much club business was transacted through WACTA (now WACHRA). RWWA's decision to remove financial support from the organization that represented country harness racing clubs despite the recognition of that organization in the legislation that created RWWA itself, has put increased pressure on country clubs and fully tested the resolve of the WACHRA member clubs to become self funding whilst experiencing a major decline in effectiveness and importance. RWWA has taken the divide and conquer approach and it has been successful to the detriment of smaller clubs.

Of further concern is the current RWWA practice of allocating jackpot pools. All clubs contribute to jackpot pools, including both on course and off course patrons. RWWA's current practice of allocating jackpot pools is of concern as jackpot pool money is consistently being stripped away from minor clubs that help to generate it. The jackpots are allocated to major meetings, usually with great success and so further contributing to what is becoming a great divide in turnover performance.

Due to the very short notice provided to us for this hearing our submission is brief, also partly owing to the fact that one of our two fixtures for the year was held this last weekend. A summary of the immediate difficulties faced in the conduct of this meeting follows;

- i) RWWA phone line from commentators position on course is incapable of functioning with current race calling equipment. This impacts on the likelihood of having the race broadcast on Racing Radio. Second meeting in a row with this problem.
- ii) RWWA chose not to "fixture sell" eastern state night harness meetings to our on course tote. This meant that our on course patrons were denied the opportunity to wager on eastern states meetings that started after 3.00pm our time. Our first race was at 1.45pm. Tote Manager estimated that our loss of on course turnover would be approximately \$2000, judging from the number of patrons who unsuccessfully attempted to place a bet. This RWWA decision was irreversible on the day.
- 'iii) But for a call from our Tote Manager earlier in the week, our access to SKY Channel vision on the day would have been nil, because RWWA had not advised SKY that our meeting was on.

We are aware that Bridgetown has become a minor club within the industry, with meeting numbers falling from eleven to two in the last thirty years. What we desire is a recognition that small clubs have and deserve a future with an amount of support and cooperation from RWWA that is fair and commensurate with our input to the industry overall. Whilst we have not yet seen the RWWA Strategic Review of Harness Racing document, we do hope that under the terms of the review, survival for community clubs can become more than the year to year proposition than it currently is.

BRENDON S GARDINER - SECRETARY / TREASURER
Bridgetown Harness Racing Club
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