

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE
REVIEW OF THE RACING AND WAGERING WESTERN
AUSTRALIA ACTS**

**INQUIRY INTO THE RACING AND WAGERING WESTERN AUSTRALIA
ACTS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT ALBANY
FRIDAY, 12 MARCH 2010**

SESSION TWO

Members

**Mr John McGrath (Chairman)
Hon Max Trenorden (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm
Mr John Bowler
Hon Alyssa Hayden
Mr Peter Watson**

Hearing commenced at 3.23 pm**SOLLY, MRS LESLEY****Registered Nurse, Albany Hospital Health,
examined:****ZAMBONETTI, MR TERENCE STEPHEN****Salesman, Primaries of WA,
examined:****O'LOUGHLIN, MR SHANE FREDERICK****Project Officer,
Albany Hospital,
examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on the Review of the Racing and Wagering WA Acts, I would like to thank you for your appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in its inquiry into the Racing and Wagering Western Australia acts. You would have seen a copy of the committee's specific terms of reference. For the benefit of Hansard and those observing, I would like to introduce myself and the other members of the committee present today. I am John McGrath, the Chair, alongside me are Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm, MLC, and Peter Watson, the member for Albany. This committee is a joint standing committee of the Parliament of Western Australia. This hearing is a formal procedure of the Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house itself. Even though the committee is not asking witnesses to provide evidence on oath or affirmation, it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. This is a public hearing and Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any documents during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record. Before we proceed, I need to ask you a series of questions. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to a parliamentary committee?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet provided with the "Details of Witness" form today?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness at today's hearing?

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Would you please state your full name and the capacity in which you appear before the committee today?

Mrs Solly: Leslie Solly, president.

Mr Zambonetti: Terry Zambonetti, vice president.

Mr O'Loughlin: Shane O'Loughlin, committee member.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your submission to this inquiry. Together with this information you provide today, your submission will form part of the evidence to this inquiry and may be made public. Are there any amendments that you would like to make to your submission?

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIRMAN: We have a series of questions to ask you today. But before we do that, do you wish to provide the committee with any additional information or make an opening statement to this hearing?

Mrs Solly: No, I do not think so.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay. I will start the questioning. I notice that in your submission you talk about section 35 of the RWWA Act. That section states, among other things, that it is RWWA's responsibility to foster the development, promote the welfare and ensure the integrity of metropolitan and country racing; and, in consultation with racing clubs, to establish policies for stake money levels and race conditions and programs. You appear to say that RWWA does not comply with its obligations under section 35. Could you elaborate on that, please, for the committee?

Mrs Solly: Yes. I think, John, decisions are made by RWWA without any input from the industry. I have given a few examples of this. They include the introduction of the rating system; or any safety issues that have come up in the past, such as the whip, running rails and track conditions; and, just of late, the saddles, which was only a couple of weeks ago. The saddles have safety stirrups to them, and they slip off if the jockeys fall. One slipped off down at Ascot the other day, and they have banned them altogether, which seems to be a jump-quick decision when you could then be looking at a jockey being dragged along. They are just a few examples of where we do not seem to have any input as an industry.

The CHAIRMAN: We will just run through the things you have listed in your submission. You start off by talking about communication and consultation, and you say that you do not get enough consultation or communication before programming is done. You point to the situation where Narrogin is linked in with Mt Barker and Albany in programming, whereas your two clubs are very close together, and Narrogin is a fair distance away. Can you elaborate on that a bit and on how you would like to see that done better?

Mrs Solly: I think Narrogin is probably a bit far away to become involved. I think at the end of the season when Mt Barker has finished and Albany is coming near the end, well, then, Narrogin will follow on. But Mt Barker and Albany certainly need some input as to what their program will be. We used to get that, but now we get the programs set for us and sent up, and that is it. We can discuss it, but not always with good results.

The CHAIRMAN: If we can just stick on programming for the time being —

Mrs Solly: Shane has got some comments to make on programming.

Mr O'Loughlin: On the programming issue, when we have asked a few questions about it, the reason that some of the races are set in distance is because they say Narrogin had that distance, and this is why we would rather you did not run a distance similar, or whatever. That is where we have a problem with the programming not being taken into Narrogin's consideration. When you consider that now probably less horses start from this region at Narrogin than was the case several years ago, and predominantly most of the horses at Pinjarra and Perth go to Narrogin, then I do not think the reflection is true in the programming between Albany, Mt Barker and Narrogin.

The CHAIRMAN: You also made a point about the number of meetings. How many race days a year does Albany have? Is it 20?

Mrs Solly: We have 12.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you think you need more race days?

Mrs Solly: Definitely, John. We cannot survive on 12 races. Being a training track with all the expenses that we have to put up here, we cannot survive on 12 race meetings.

The CHAIRMAN: Do any other committee members have anything to say about the programming issue?

Mr P.B. WATSON: It is interesting to look at what happens in Perth, because Perth Racing provides Ascot, and they are looking at ways of getting out of that, are they not, or being compensated for it? So it should not be any different in regional areas.

Mrs Solly: No; that is right.

The CHAIRMAN: So what you are saying is that because of this region's contribution to the industry, and with the number of trainers that you have down here, you should be treated as more of a region than just as your two clubs, Albany and Mount Barker; you should have other considerations put in when programming is done; and you think that your club is capable and should have more meetings?

Mr O'Loughlin: Yes. The other reason for that is that financially, with 12 meetings, you are only ever going to hold your head above water. You are never, ever going to be in a position to be able to advance in any way, because you just do not have the exposure to more income with only 12 days. When you consider that out of those 12 days, you have probably got three or four that are good, and then you are sitting on the fence with the others just to get a reasonable income. Your number of real good days does not give you enough area to increase your income substantially.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you confident that you would not be a drain on the industry if you had more meetings—that you could still make your contribution so that your meetings would be cost effective—because that is something that RWWA might raise?

Mr O'Loughlin: I think we would be, because predominantly the horses train down here, and when the season finishes, not many of them will go elsewhere; they will probably go to the paddock. If we had more meetings, where they were spaced a little bit, it might be of more benefit. When the horses are in work, they will travel. But when the season finishes, they just say it is too hard; it is not worth having them in work. So we actually have less horses in work as a total region because we shut down so much, and that has an effect.

Mr P.B. WATSON: I think you said before we came here that there were a whole lot of horses who could not get a run—the three-year-olds out the back? Is that a problem?

Mrs Solly: Yes. You can only run what your track will allow, Peter.

Mr P.B. WATSON: That is what I am saying—putting on extra races.

Mrs Solly: Yes. For this week coming, Tuesday, we had 140-odd horses nominated. Most of them—I did not count them up—all trained here in Albany. We have about 250 horses train out here on the track. We can run a race meeting on our own, without anybody travelling. So if you take in the travellers, I am sure we could have another couple of meetings without any trouble.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Would the club prefer to have an extension of the season in terms of when you start and finish, or would you prefer to have better, if you like, infill? I gather that there are perhaps months when you might have only one or two meetings, whereas in another month you might have three or four. Which way would the club prefer to go?

Mr Zambonetti: With the Albany Racing Club, at the moment we race from the end of October—early November right through to April, for only 12 meetings. That is virtually a six-month period with only 12 meetings.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Are you quite happy with that time frame?

Mr Zambonetti: Yes, but if we could just get a few extra meetings in there, possibly.

Mrs Solly: Because you find that, after that, Kalgoorlie and all those others start racing, and then you start running into jockey problems, and your winter teams have started up then—your winter clubs.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: So with the months that are fairly lean, where do the local horses go? Do they go up to Narrogin during that time?

Mrs Solly: There are not many meetings up in Narrogin during that time. I think Narrogin only has six meetings.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Some of them go to Bunbury and Perth.

Mrs Solly: Yes—Bunbury and Pinjarra, and Perth if they are good enough.

The CHAIRMAN: One thing that happens in other states, I notice that in Victoria they might have a meeting at Kilmore or Seymour one day, and they will have a meeting the same day at Sale or Mornington. Do you think that our industry and your catchment here is big enough to, say, have a meeting at Geraldton and a meeting at Albany on the same day?

Mrs Solly: Geraldton and Albany can go, yes.

Mr O’Loughlin: The only snag with that is probably jockeys. The other problem with that is funding in relation to whether you are on Sky or not on Sky. The minute you run non-Sky meetings and your stakes are less, that creates another problem.

The CHAIRMAN: But that could change when Sky get its extra channel.

Mrs Solly: Exactly.

The CHAIRMAN: We will just quickly go on to ratings, because we are going to get on to the training centre and the facilities at the course in a minute. You mentioned the ratings system. You say that it seems unfair that horses that win outside the metropolitan area receive the same rating increase as horses that win in the metropolitan areas. You say also that ratings should be increased in accordance with the stake money the horse has won, as this is a better guide to the quality of the race in which the horses compete. Can you just elaborate on that a bit, please?

[3.34 pm]

Mr O’Loughlin: Irrespective of stake money, ratings go up in accordance with the wins, not stake money. If you have a horse in a minor race in the country, you will go up in the same proportion in ratings as someone who wins three Saturday races. When you go to Perth, because your ratings are up, you are going to be handicapped accordingly. So, for winning minor, or weak races, you will go up a lot. New South Wales has made some major amendments to this. That appears to be the model Western Australians should be using. The other point on the ratings system is that when it was introduced, RWWA said there would be a lot of consultation and changes made with it. RWWA has made very few changes to it and basically said there is nothing wrong with it.

The CHAIRMAN: As a club, have you asked RWWA to reconsider the ratings system?

Mr O’Loughlin: This club has not, but the owners and trainers association has and a lot of the provincial associations have. But it seems to have fallen on deaf ears. From what I can see, New South Wales has done a huge amount of research into the ratings system. I honestly believe that is the model Western Australia should be seriously looking at.

The CHAIRMAN: We move on now to page 3 of your submission headed “Consultation”. The ARC submits a delegate from each provincial racing club should be entitled to an audience with RWWA each quarter. Once again, you are feeling obviously that country and provincial clubs are becoming a little more distant from the controlling body. Can you elaborate on that please?

Mrs Solly: I agree that we should meet more often. I have some thoughts about it being quarterly because when we think of all the trotting clubs, dog racing, provincial and country racing clubs, it

would take someone a full month to interview everyone. I am not sure how it would be done, but I think there definitely should be more communication between RWWA, the associations and the clubs.

Mr P.B. WATSON: On the RWWA board there is supposedly a country representative.

Mrs Solly: No, there is not.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Have you ever been approached on any issue by the person who is there to look after country areas?

Mr O'Loughlin: No.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Thank you.

Mrs Solly: One of the things that could help with communication would be to have someone on the board who represents provincial country racing.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Would it just be racing or racing and trotting?

Mrs Solly: The person would have to represent the whole lot otherwise there will be too many people on the board, will there not?

Mr P.B. WATSON: That is right.

Mrs Solly: So you probably need someone from the country presenting their case, because it is quite different from that of the city. The person could represent the trots, the gallops, the dogs and whatever.

The CHAIRMAN: It has been suggested to us by other people who have made submissions that you might be able to have a small subcommittee under the board of RWWA that would deal with those issues. While obviously the industry does not want too much duplication and the industry does not want to go back to the past, do you see that a person or a small body could represent the three codes and disseminate the information from RWWA or do the negotiations on behalf of RWWA?

Mrs Solly: They probably have that, having the trainers, jockeys, owners and representatives of provincial and country. They do have that money.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you think it needs a bit more?

Mrs Solly: Yes. It needs someone actually sitting on the board itself so that that person is there to have a say.

The CHAIRMAN: That could be a person who could represent harness racing and thoroughbreds.

Mrs Solly: Yes. It has to be a country person.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Do you think it should be put in the act?

Mrs Solly: I think so.

Mr P.B. WATSON: It is no good saying that person's responsibilities are to look after regional racing, trotting or whatever. The act should describe how it will be done because anyone can say we will look after country racing, but the only time to check up is when the act is being reviewed. It should say a percentage is to be put aside for country racing infrastructure and stake money, apart from the metropolitan races. From what we have seen so far—I should be careful here being a country member—it seems to be city-centric.

Mrs Solly: It does, Peter. We used to have unclaimed dividends put aside for facilities and services and whatever in the Racecourse Development Fund, but where has it gone? Obviously, it is running the industry but we do not know where it has gone.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Would you be prepared to lose a small percentage of the stake money if that money were put in for an infrastructure fund?

Mr O'Loughlin: Stake money is small enough as it is, thank you very much.

Mrs Solly: No.

Mr P.B. WATSON: It is just a suggestion.

Mrs Solly: I think it can come from other places such as unclaimed dividends. Millions of dollars came through the industry when the WATC was running it. Do not get me wrong, RWWA is doing a far better job than the WATC did. Unclaimed dividends supplied different race tracks, and it almost got to ours and then it went out.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: To what extent did the club here benefit from that racecourse development fund? Was it important to you? I gather from our meetings and discussions with other bodies that not being the case any more is a cause for concern in many instances. People are saying that their particular club or racecourse was the beneficiary of quite significant amounts of money and that now is not the case, particularly for clubs that own their facilities or have minimal rents and rely on a lot of community involvement.

Mrs Solly: Racecourse development built our stables over there many years ago and no doubt did a lot towards the track. Along with, I think, Geraldton, Northam and Pinjarra it was just about our turn when the racecourse development fund finished, so we did not get that big money that we were going to get for a building. But we certainly benefited from it in lots of different ways.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Are there examples around here of where the club and the local community have banded together to put facilities in place that otherwise should have been presented by either RWWA or the previous administration from Perth? Can you give me any examples of where you put shoulders to the wheel and the local community and club has put things in place?

Mrs Solly: The race club itself has put up different amenities.

The CHAIRMAN: Who funded the bookmaker cover there?

Mrs Solly: We did, along with the bookmakers.

The CHAIRMAN: Was it 50–50, was it? How much did the club put in and how much did the bookmakers put in?

Mr O'Loughlin: About \$8 500 each.

The CHAIRMAN: While we are on facilities and we are talking about the need for some sort of infrastructure fund—I must say you are not the only club that has suggested that need—we have had a look today at the jockey's room and the general facilities in your administration area of the stewards room. I have to say that it is fairly substandard for what I would regard as a major provincial course. How much do you think it would cost to renovate or rebuild that facility and have a new facility that would be up to normal workplace safety standards for jockeys, stewards and people in the office?

Mrs Solly: To renovate it would be nothing at all because we got quotes on that and nobody would touch it. The quote was \$750 000. That of course, includes outside yards.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Lonnie's air conditioned office.

The CHAIRMAN: How many attempts have you made to get some funding through RWWA for this project?

Mrs Solly: Many years.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Ever since I have been in this job.

The CHAIRMAN: Peter Watson is the local member, and obviously, Peter, it is something you have been aware of for some time.

Mr P.B. WATSON: It is, throughout both governments. It is something that we have been pushing for more than 10 years. It is just not good enough. OH and S, WorkSafe and all those sorts of things —

Mrs Solly: We try not to get too involved with them.

Mr P.B. WATSON: That is the thing. If you make too much noise, they close you down. If you do not do it and something happens, they close you down anyway. The club is between a rock and a hard place.

Mrs Solly: To be fair to the government, RWWA has supplied the same amenities at Northam, Geraldton and Pinjarra.

The CHAIRMAN: You might be the next cab off the rank.

Mrs Solly: We were going to be the next cab off the rank, but it did not work. The money ran out.

The CHAIRMAN: Have you made an application through royalties for regions?

Mrs Solly: We have made that and we have a builder on side and we have made an application to RWWA with the aim of, hopefully, bringing both together.

The CHAIRMAN: What do the jockeys say when they talk to you about these facilities?

Mrs Solly: Lonnie could answer that very well but we will not use that sort of language, will we Lonnie? They are not impressed. It is not nice. When they get down in that room all their bags and saddles are on the floor and they have to walk over the top of them. It is not a good situation.

The CHAIRMAN: Are there no lockers or anything for their valuables?

Mrs Solly: We have to nurse them along a bit. It is only the good food that keeps them here I think!

Mr O'Loughlin: On that note, the day we ran a special trial day was a bit like today, but several of them could not continue to ride in the trials because of the amount heat that was in there. It was not a matter of getting off a horse and going into a cool room.

The CHAIRMAN: So it is not air conditioned?

Mr O'Loughlin: No; it is not air conditioned. There were a few jockeys who could not ride; they were actually sick.

Mrs Solly: They were too sick to ride.

The CHAIRMAN: Apart from the new administration and jockeys and steward's facility, what is the club's wish list of other things that you regard as fairly important in the general upgrading of the facilities for the public?

Mrs Solly: Once we got that, our first wish would be for a mothers' and babies' room, and the next thing would be toilets.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you need new toilets?

Mr P.B. WATSON: I will take you over after.

The CHAIRMAN: How old are the toilet blocks?

Mrs Solly: As old as this place.

Mr O'Loughlin: Since '75 when this place was opened, only minor alterations have been done in those toilets.

The CHAIRMAN: Have there been any issues with health and that sort of stuff?

Mrs Solly: We do not have a toilet for the disabled, which is a bit sad.

Mr O'Loughlin: We do not have change rooms for babies.

Mr Zambonetti: We have had issues, but we have catered for it by improving the septic system and things like that. But it will not improve; it will get worse in time.

The CHAIRMAN: On big days like cup days, you bring in portable toilets and things like that.

Mr Zambonetti: Yes. That is a bit untidy too in some ways.

Mrs Solly: That still does not bring in the mothers' and babies' room or anything like that.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: One of the issues that RWWA seems to have mentioned to clubs frequently over the past few years that I have been involved with this sort of thing is that if clubs want more meetings or better facilities and so on they need to demonstrate more horses on course, more nominations or more betting turnover. It is the betting turnover I am interested in. Can you as a committee give us any indication of how betting turnover in Albany has changed over, say, the past three to four years since the act has been in place?

[3.48 pm]

Mrs Solly: It has gone up every year, Matt. But one of the things that regulates this, too, is how many races they will actually fund for you, so if you can have eight or nine races, you are far better off.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I know Sky makes a heck of a difference, too. But give just a general picture as to how you have gone.

Mrs Solly: Our fields are bigger. We fill our fields. Our horse numbers are better and bigger.

Mr O'Loughlin: The other thing on that is that if the rating system is fairer, then you would find that your fields would be actually more competitive, but because it is not, it actually hangs out your betting turnover to dry a little bit. So I think there is a fair bit in the rating system that dictates your betting turnover.

The CHAIRMAN: If you had a horse good enough to win closer to the city, will you go up there for the ratings and for the better stake money.

Mrs Solly: You have to, otherwise you are weighed out down here.

The CHAIRMAN: Talking about prize money, can you tell us how RWWA allocates your prize money distribution, and do you feel that you have enough consultation on that and that you get enough forward notice of what you can look forward to in the next year, so that you can do your budgets and things like that for your meetings?

Mrs Solly: No, we are still waiting for that for next year. It has been going to be told to us for the last couple of months, but we have not got it yet.

The CHAIRMAN: Does RWWA do it on a per meeting basis or per race basis?

Mrs Solly: Per race. Sorry, not per race, per season—so much for so many races. But, Matt, on your talking about more horses, one of the things that really support you earning more money is the better jockeys, and your punter's dollar really goes up if you get good jockeys on your racecourse.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: That is a good point.

The CHAIRMAN: Which you do get a bit.

Mrs Solly: We do, but we would probably get better if we had better facilities.

Mr P.B. WATSON: They would follow the money. They would come down even if the facilities were bad, if the money was good, wouldn't they?

Mrs Solly: Yes, but if the facilities are good and the money is reasonable, they will come anyway.

The CHAIRMAN: The other point that you raised under the headline of "funding" had to do with the fact that you do provide a training facility here. You mentioned a figure of \$250 000 a year.

How much of that do you get back from RWWA in the repayment, so to speak, for providing a facility for the industry?

Mr O'Loughlin: Probably somewhere around \$80 000 to \$90 000.

The CHAIRMAN: So the club has to carry the rest of the cost.

Mr O'Loughlin: Yes, it is substantial. Bunbury and Pinjarra also did some figures on what they reckon they were out of pocket on training.

Mrs Solly: Every training track will tell you that they are out of pocket.

Mr O'Loughlin: Out of pocket substantially.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand that as part of the act it is RWWA's responsibility to provide training facilities for the industry or do you think it is a bit of a mixture?

Mr O'Loughlin: It is probably a bit of a mixture.

The CHAIRMAN: If it is a bit of a mixture, does that place clubs like yours at a disadvantage against a club that does not have a lot of local trainers?

Mr O'Loughlin: That is right; it does.

The CHAIRMAN: So is that a big issue for you?

Mr O'Loughlin: Yes.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Here you cater for Mt Barker, too.

Mr O'Loughlin: Yes. It is a big issue.

Mrs Solly: The \$120 000 we spent on that main grass track out there this year. On the sand track in the middle, every time we reload it with sand, which is frequently, Trevor, isn't it, it is \$600 a load—\$6 000 a time and \$600 a load.

The CHAIRMAN: Is RWWA's subsidy for providing a training facility just a fixed amount? How do they determine it? Is it based on the number of horses that start at your meetings and the local horses? What is the formula that they use to give you that?

Mrs Solly: That is what they started out telling us—that it was based on the horses. If I can bring Lonnie into it, I think it is a set figure now, Lonnie, isn't it?

The CHAIRMAN: You need to repeat what Lonnie said, because he is not a witness.

Mrs Solly: It is tied to the 2007–08 season, as to the number of horses we raced in that time.

The CHAIRMAN: What if your numbers went up?

Mrs Solly: It does not help you if your numbers go up, which they have done.

The CHAIRMAN: So do you think this is an area that needs to be looked at?

Mrs Solly: Definitely. When it first came out it was tied to the number of horses, so if you had 60 horses, you got paid for 60 horses, and if you had 200 horses you got paid for 200.

Mr P.B. WATSON: What percentage have you gone up since then, do you think?

Mrs Solly: What do you think we have gone up in percentage?

Mr O'Loughlin: I think we have probably gone up from when it originally came in and till now probably around the 30 per cent to 40 per cent mark. It would be easy. The problem you have got with being down here is that you have a lot of horses that are trained here but never raced here. That is where your costs come.

The CHAIRMAN: Why is that?

Mrs Solly: You get Wolfie's horses.

The CHAIRMAN: The race in the city boy.

Mr O'Loughlin: Paul Hunter, for example, has a lot of horses in work here that never race here. Youngsters he has in work get sent back to Perth. So when you have got a training facility —

The CHAIRMAN: So he is preparing them for a Perth trainer?

Mrs Solly: Yes.

Mr O'Loughlin: So you have got the costs of training horses that you are never going to see on your track.

The CHAIRMAN: Have you suggested to RWWA that if you showed them the books and what it costs you to employ staff, and for machinery and equipment to maintain the tracks, wouldn't that be a better process?

Mrs Solly: They get a copy of our budget every year, so they know what it costs. I think to be fair —

The CHAIRMAN: How would you like to see them determine how much money you get back from what you pay to maintain these training facilities on behalf of the industry and the trainers? Obviously, you would like to get the whole of the \$250 000 back. But can you see a better way that you could be reimbursed?

Mrs Solly: I think if we had more meetings, John. You are paying out a lot of money for 12 meetings and, as Shane said, we finish on 25 April, and then you will have two-year-olds training for next year from May, June, July, August. They will not race here; they will go back to their owners or somewhere in Perth. They will train down here. So you have got a lot of work, a lot of money going out, a lot of wages for 12 meetings.

The CHAIRMAN: How do your training fees compare with those of, say, similar sorts of tracks in regional WA?

Mr O'Loughlin: Very similar.

Mrs Solly: Yes, you have sort of based it on that otherwise you would get too many grizzles from the trainers. You have got to base it on an average of what everybody charges.

The CHAIRMAN: Is said that the prize money has gone up since the inception of RWWA.

Mrs Solly: We have two tiers to provincial. You have the top tier, which is Bunbury and Pinjarra and Northam, and then you have the next lot, which is Geraldton, Albany and Kalgoorlie. So you have two different layers of prize money.

The CHAIRMAN: What are you offering now at the moment for your average race?

Mrs Solly: \$9 000, and you can work that as you want. You can take some put it on a big race.

The CHAIRMAN: The \$9 000 is what you are allocated by RWWA. Do you pay more than \$9 000 or less than \$9 000?

Mr O'Loughlin: We pay more than 100 per cent of the allocation.

Mrs Solly: Only just more, because we cannot afford to do much more.

Mr O'Loughlin: In line with the stake money, this is another point with the ratings. As I say, when you win a race in Bunbury for a bit more stake than here, you get up the same in ratings, so it has that effect. People will think that if they have got a horse, they will travel with it to get that marginal stake money, because their ratings will go up otherwise for the same.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Do you pay a travelling fee?

Mr O'Loughlin: No.

Mrs Solly: No, simply because most of our trainers are here anyway. They do not have to travel. I think it would cause too many problems if you had them standing out, they could not get a race and you pay somebody else.

The CHAIRMAN: It certainly sounds as if you have got enough horses.

Mrs Solly: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: I know perhaps with other clubs that the attraction to go to a track would be that someone was prepared to pay you \$100 or more.

Mrs Solly: Up till this year RWWA paid \$110 for every horse that raced, which helped that out. But if you paid Joe Bloggs to come down here and then I could not race my horses because he was here, it does not leave a very good taste in the trainers' mouths.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Fair enough.

The CHAIRMAN: What about the facilities for the public here? Are the public generally fairly satisfied?

Mrs Solly: I think we do a good job except for the toilets.

The CHAIRMAN: That is the main area of concern.

Mrs Solly: RWWA have told us, which is fair enough, that there are not any dollars to spend on something like this.

The CHAIRMAN: There was an issue two or three years ago, I seem to recall, where RWWA was looking at some sort of amalgamation of the structure of running, say, Albany and Mt Barker together, with a combined administration type of thing, so you could share the costs of secretarial work and whatever and keep your own meetings. Have you got any views on that?

Mrs Solly: I think that is a minimal cost, as our secretary would probably agree—a minimal cost for what it is going to cost. Nobody has ever been able to point out to us what the advantages are of having one administration. If there are advantages there—but, no —

Mr O'Loughlin: The problem we have got with that is that it is the same with Mt Barker. The bulk of their administration work is organising things actually on their course.

The CHAIRMAN: On the day.

Mr O'Loughlin: On the day, and that is where, if you are going to have a joint thing, then you will actually need the same amount of staffing, or probably a bit more, to be able to do the same job, so there are no real cost savings as such in that. I think that the big reason it has not sort of been pushed is because you are operating two facilities, then there is no real big win.

Mrs Solly: There is no gain in it.

The CHAIRMAN: There was also a suggestion, as I recall, that maybe for the club, because of the fact that you are so far away for Perth trainers to come down and they have got to come through Mt Barker and then through Albany to here, they were looking at a site on the other side of the town between Albany and Mt Barker—maybe a new greenfield site—for a racecourse, even putting the trots inside or something. Was that ever floated?

Mrs Solly: The government would not come up with the money, would they?

Mr P.B. WATSON: It was quite expensive to do it, wasn't it?

Mrs Solly: They cannot fund what they have got, so who in all the world is going to find \$7 million or \$10 million or plus to do that sort of thing. When the trainers have got adequate facilities here, who is going to put their horses in truck every day? This is why they live in Albany and drive three-quarters of the way to Mt Barker to train their horses.

The CHAIRMAN: This is the best place, in your view, to have the race track.

Mrs Solly: Yes, and it is here, so nobody is going to get the money in our time to build something like that.

The CHAIRMAN: Has there ever been any talk with the trots about putting a trotting track in the middle?

Mrs Solly: The trots have probably got quite sufficient money, but I think it is too far in there, John. The track is not right for them.

The CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I was going to ask in relation to the promotion of racing in the Great Southern, does the committee have a particular point of view about the service provided by Racing Radio?

Mrs Solly: No, I think it is good.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you hear it?

Mr O'Loughlin: The reception of it is a bit ordinary. Racing Radio reception in Denmark is pretty ordinary; you cannot get it most times.

Mr P.B. WATSON: You cannot get it at Lower King either.

Mr O'Loughlin: Not at Lower King.

Mrs Solly: Can't you?

Mr P.B. WATSON: You cannot get anything out there.

Mr O'Loughlin: Yes, it becomes pretty ordinary once you go immediately outside of Albany and probably Mt Barker.

Mrs Solly: When you are in the car, you have to tune in to Wagin, don't you?

Mr O'Loughlin: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: I am not sure if you told us before, but just for the record can you tell us how many trainers there are in Albany?

Mrs Solly: At the moment we are just close on 40 now.

The CHAIRMAN: That is 40 trainers with about how many horses?

Mrs Solly: Probably 250 or 300.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that the biggest it has ever been?

Mr O'Loughlin: It is probably the biggest now that it has ever been. Considering where the economy is it is a bit amazing because actually I have had a yack to a few trainers in the last couple of weeks and they said, "We don't know where all these horses are coming from."

[4.00 pm]

Mrs Solly: It is amazing how they turn up, but when you get the likes of Steve Wolfe, who has had over the years 60-odd horses in and out, that is big work; big income into the town.

The CHAIRMAN: Who does the work on the track? What sort of staff do you have to get to maintain the track?

Mrs Solly: We have a curator and an assistant curator.

The CHAIRMAN: Two full time?

Mrs Solly: Yes.

Mr Zambonetti: Just on Racing Radio, I want to make the comment that they actually promote country racing very well, so I think it they do a very good job.

The CHAIRMAN: They come down to your meetings too, do they not?

Mr Zambonetti: Yes.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: My concern, Terry, is not so much that they do not promote country racing, but the point has been made fairly obviously that reception around the state—if you live in Albany, Busselton or Bunbury and places like that and you are within reasonable proximity to where the signal comes from, then there is not an issue, but the minute you move to Denmark or Lower King or somewhere like that, in terms of promoting the industry, to me there are significant problems. I just thought I would ask you as a committee what sort of issues you had with it, and obviously you do not have many.

Mrs Solly: Not in Albany, but —

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: No, but you are part of a racing industry that goes well beyond the City of Albany limits.

Mrs Solly: Yes, so they would not be able to hear, either.

Mr P.B. WATSON: I notice in your submission that you say that RWWA should be reviewed every three years.

Mrs Solly: Three or five years, I think. We all need somebody up there keeping an eye on us, do we not?

Mr P.B. WATSON: Is that three years?

Mrs Solly: Three might be a bit soon; I think at five you need to do things.

Mr P.B. WATSON: But it is currently five, is it not?

The CHAIRMAN: Other clubs have raised this. Do you have an issue that RWWA is really answerable to no-one, because it is an independent body? Does that give you come concern, because you are asking for a three-year review? I do not think that Parliament would want to be reviewing RWWA every five years.

Mrs Solly: Not every five years?

Mr P.B. WATSON: There is a clause that said it had to be after five years. It does not have to be every five years.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes; the first review, but I am saying that if it were put in place—that there had to be ongoing review of RWWA every five years—it might be accepted, but I am not sure that it would—are you saying that you have some concerns that there is no-one looking over RWWA to make sure that it is doing the right thing by the industry.

Mrs Solly: I have a concern that RWWA is a body, and we are the industry. When I say “we”, I mean that the racing people and the clubs are the industry, but as I have said all along, we do not have that communication with that body, so who is that body going to answer to?

The CHAIRMAN: And you are saying that if the industry becomes disenchanted with RWWA at any stage, who does the industry go to?

Mrs Solly: We cannot appeal. Who do we appeal to?

Mr P.B. WATSON: You cannot appeal to the minister, because the minister has no day-by-day control. That is the big issue.

Mrs Solly: That is the problem, so if anybody in the racing industry wants to appeal against the board or RWWA itself, who do they go to.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: There does not appear to be any capacity whatsoever, does there?

Mr P.B. WATSON: When you have issues, does RWWA get back to you? Some of the complaints we have had were that people ring up RWWA, and they just do not get back to you. Do you have that problem down here?

Mrs Solly: Yes, we do have that problem. We had that problem with the stewards. When I say “we”, I mean that the whole industry has that trouble with the stewards. They are very powerful men, but once again, there is no consulting with anyone.

Mr P.B. WATSON: My way or the highway.

Mr O’Loughlin: That is right.

The CHAIRMAN: Mind you, it was probably like that in the previous system with the Western Australian Turf Club running everything.

Mrs Solly: You never got anything, John. We got promises and promises from them, but we never got any results.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there anything else that you think we might not have touched on. I think we have gone through most points that you raised in your submission. Is there any sort of closing statement or comment you would like to make, or anything you would like to reinforce in our minds?

Mrs Solly: I think one of the things is that over the five years that they have been in, we have had three major reviews. We have had Croger over here twice, we have had RWWA doing its strategic review, which has been on the table for two years, and we still have not got it. Out of all those reviews, nothing seems to come of it. A lot of money was spent on Croger.

The CHAIRMAN: What was the Croger review? What did he look at?

Mrs Solly: He looked at how you could improve racing—how you could improve clubs.

Mr O’Loughlin: Revenue base, and attendance.

The CHAIRMAN: How to raise more revenue.

Mrs Solly: Now there is this strategic plan going on>

The CHAIRMAN: Is that for the racing industry. We heard there was one coming up for harness racing too.

Mrs Solly: This is for the racing industry.

The CHAIRMAN: You have not been presented with that yet.

Mrs Solly: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Have you been given a time line on when that might happen.

Mrs Solly: It started a couple of years ago. We were given a time every couple of months. I think now it is next month.

The CHAIRMAN: I think that is when the harness racing report is due.

Mrs Solly: I belong to the health department, too, so I am probably a bit sadistic. That does concern me—that there is no plan out there. I suppose we did have this with the racecourse development. We did have a plan, and that is probably the only thing. We had the WATC, but we did have a plan about who would get what, when and where. With the industry now, as it stands there is no plan.

The CHAIRMAN: If this committee looked at some way of setting up a racecourse development fund—a pool of money for racecourse development, obviously you would support that, but you would not like to see it come to the detriment of prize money.

Mrs Solly: No.

Mr O'Loughlin: When you talk about development funds, even to the simple point of putting up submissions and plans—before a club can actually build anything it has got to pay for plans and anything like that—so they are additional costs before you can start looking at anything. That is where the development fund could actually be of more value as well—in the planning department in relation to where clubs are going as far as organising the planning of buildings or whatever.

The CHAIRMAN: That is something that RWWA could assist a club with.

Mr O'Loughlin: That is right.

Mrs Solly: If you have already built three of those rooms over there, why are we paying another lot of planning costs to plan another one?

The CHAIRMAN: Do you need to get RWWA's permission to do anything on your course?

Mrs Solly: No; it is our course.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: So the club owns the course?

Mrs Solly: It is a 99-year lease.

The CHAIRMAN: From the government or the council?

Mr Zambonetti: It is from DOLA.

Mrs Solly: We are answerable to ourselves, except that we have to watch the water system. We could not go out there and put a lot of oil on the track.

The CHAIRMAN: RWWA has been going now since 2003. Are you surprised that there has been no change on the board of RWWA? Does that give you any reservations?

Mrs Solly: Jobs for the boys.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you elaborate on that?

Mrs Solly: No.

Mr O'Loughlin: With committees, when your time is up you have to go for a vote to get voted back on. If you are dealing in a business, often members of the board have to get voted back on, but there does not appear to be that process with RWWA, and maybe there should be some process in relation to that, where there is a limitation on how long they can actually be on the board.

Mr P.B. WATSON: So instead of reviewing the board every five years, you would change the board every three years?

Mr O'Loughlin: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Maybe you are suggesting that we should look at how the board is re-elected, or the way it is appointed?

Mr Zambonetti: What is the constitution with the board?

Mrs Solly: There must be a constitution.

The CHAIRMAN: It is in the act, how the board is elected, and how the chair is appointed. That is all part of the legislation.

Mrs Solly: It possibly happens, and we just do not hear about it.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: You obviously do not have any input into the thoroughbred industry.

Mrs Solly: It possibly happens, but, once again —

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Obviously the thoroughbred industry nominates one person. As a small provincial club you have no input whatsoever into that.

Mr O'Loughlin: We would not have a clue who it was. Another thing I want to quickly mention is that, on the point of sake money, when there are increases, they are done on a percentage basis across the board. The bigger the piece, your percentage is going to be far greater than the one at the bottom. In reality, when RWWA took over, the stakes were quite low in the country areas, and provincial areas were at a reasonable level, but the difference between provincial and country got reduced somewhat when RWWA took over, depending on the rating of the clubs. Over a period of time, because it is a percentage increase, that gap is slowly but surely widening. We are going end up back where we were before RWWA came into power, with the gaps in stakes. I do not know, but that formula definitely needs some sort of review—how it is done and whether it maintains a set amount difference between whatever ratings a club has, or whether it will remain as it currently stands, with a percentage increase. As we know, the bigger you have, the bigger percentage you get, and the less you get.

Mr Zambonetti: The gap between city racing and provincial–country is a lot wider now than it was 10 years ago, but it should not be that. It should be the other way, should it not, or stay equal.

Mr O'Loughlin: It should stay equal.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: What about incentives for clubs that actively promote their program and, like I said before, could significantly show an increase in betting turnover.

Mr Zambonetti: That is putting the cart before the horse.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I know, but I am asking whether you would agree with me that there should be some sort of incentive for clubs to do that by way of better stakes, perhaps, apart from better facilities, of course.

Mr O'Loughlin: They have the option in their big races to be able to do that, and different programs, but the whole story is that, unless you run so many meetings, then you have got the resources to fund advancement. The clubs at our end of the scale, that only have the funding to exist, have not got the funds to actually stick their necks out and say that they will go and do this. You are not going to be in a position to be able to stick your neck out and advance. Those clubs that have 20 meetings or more have that little bit to play with, so they can have a crack at this, and they can win, but we are too restricted in what we have.

The CHAIRMAN: Have you worked out how many meetings you would like to have, in a perfect world.

Mr O'Loughlin: Really, the 20 meeting mark —

Mrs Solly: Somewhere between 18 and 20.

Mr O'Loughlin: You really need to be looking at 20. Even when we spoke to Croger, when he was down here and went through everything, with what we are running here, Paul Hunter said to him one day “On 12 meetings, do you reckon we can every improve?” and he basically said no.

The CHAIRMAN: Would you be prepared to run on other days that are not—like a Friday or —

Mrs Solly: We run on all days now.

The CHAIRMAN: You are prepared to run any day>

Mr Zambonetti: Especially with Sky.

Mrs Solly: If the second Sky came in—there is no racing on a Friday racing, unless that is something that we ran one year—Anzac Day was it?—on a Friday, but once the second Sky comes in, Friday is allocated for dogs and trots.

Mr P.B. WATSON: I have brought this up before. Do you think, with the significance of Anzac Day, that there should be a major meeting in Albany?

Mrs Solly: There should, but you will never beat Kalgoorlie at that will you?

Mr P.B. WATSON: No, but I will keep trying.

Mrs Solly: I do too, Peter.

The CHAIRMAN: You do have a meeting on Friday, though.

Mrs Solly: We have a meeting, but it is non-Sky.

Mr O'Loughlin: And it has less stake money, because we are non-Sky, so therefore that creates another problem for us.

The CHAIRMAN: But you might be able to be Sky when the new channel comes in.

I want to thank you for appearing before the committee today, and remind you that a transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for corrected of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and transcript returned within 10 days from the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added by these corrections, and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information, or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration, when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. Thank you very much.

Hearing concluded at 4.15 pm