

**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 BUNBURY
TUESDAY, 6 APRIL 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 10.56 am

NOTTLE, MR KENNETH GEORGE
President, Harvey District Trotting Club,
examined:

JONES, MR BRUCE
Vice President, Harvey District Trotting Club,
examined:

The CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on the Review of the Racing and Wagering Western Australia 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; to my left is Max Trenorden, MLC, the deputy chair; Alyssa Hayden, MLC and Peter Watson, MLA. To my right is John Bowler, MLA and Matt Benson-Lidholm, MLC. 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: Could you start by telling us a little about the Harvey District Trotting Club—how many meetings you have a year, your financial situation, any input you want to give the committee about the infrastructure needs at the club, and basically the ongoing viability of the club in 2010?

Mr Nottle: We currently race 14 meetings year; financially, we are very, very viable. We probably do not have any great needs in terms of infrastructure.

Mr Jones: We have very good facilities.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, given some of the evidence that has been presented to the committee, you are very fortunate to be in that position. The main thrust of this inquiry, as you would know, is to look at the act under which RWWA was formed in 2003. Before we talk about general things to do with your club and any other ongoing issues, do you have a view on the RWWA act itself and the way that RWWA manages the racing industry?

Mr Jones: Ken spends a lot of time away; I spend a lot of time at the coalface. We were very happy when RWWA came about, as we were controlled by Gloucester Park Trotting Club, or whatever it likes to be known as now. I can only speak on behalf of the Harvey club; we are unique in the industry, somewhat like the Mt Barker Turf Club. The provision of a venue fee from RWWA is the lifeblood of every race club, trotting club and greyhound club today; without that, we would all disappear in a cloud of dust. Since Richard Burt came to the helm, we have found him to be a lot more approachable than the guy beforehand —

The CHAIRMAN: Ray Bennett.

Mr Jones: Ray Bennett. We find him a lot more approachable. I do not know whose assistance he had, but he has actually done a survey of all clubs—racing, pacing and chasing—which gave him a good insight into what clubs are actually about, and what some country clubs do to make sure they stay in the business. We find him very approachable. He came to a meeting in Harvey after we asked him; we always had problems with the other ones.

Mr Nottle: He has been very cooperative.

Mr Jones: Something that RWWA runs that we have found very helpful are the Sky club meetings. We get a chance to mix with the racing clubs, the chasing clubs and the pacing clubs. Racing and pacing are in a different world in terms of turnovers, but we have the same problems; their problems are, on average, usually bigger than ours. To us, as a club and as an industry, these are the benefits that we see. As a club in Harvey, we have a lot of negatives. When the RWWA first came out, the plan was the regional city plan or the regional area. We are a regional area. I always told Ray Bennett, and I tell Richard Burt, that we actually happen to be at the centre of the region for pacers. When they ran the 60-kilometre circle that they ran around Gloucester Park five years ago, around Harvey, somehow we did not get Bunbury or Serpentine in our 60-kilometre zone, but we got Collie. I rang Ray Bennett and asked him to run the same circle around Harvey, because he had told us that we were in a very delicate position because we did not have a horse population. When I put my compass in the middle of Harvey, we basically brought more horses in than there are around Gloucester Park, because he had justified the number of meetings at Gloucester Park by the horse population within that 60 kilometres. I asked him to run the same compass around Harvey, and I told him that we would have a greater horse population than Gloucester Park. He never refuted my comments and he never came back to it, so I suggest that I was right.

The CHAIRMAN: You were claiming Bunbury, obviously.

Mr Jones: Well, why not?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr Jones: I am a politician too, John.

The CHAIRMAN: And Bunbury would also claim Harvey, I guess.

Mr Jones: Yes, as we do. The reality is that in the south west, we have the majority of the horses, the majority of trainers and the majority of owners. That is how it is.

The CHAIRMAN: There have been clubs closed down in Mr Trenorden's region, up in the wheatbelt, including Cunderdin.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: There are five of them: Wyalkatchem, Trayning, Merredin —

The CHAIRMAN: In this region, there are a lot of trotting tracks, including Pinjarra, Harvey, Bunbury, Collie, Bridgetown and Busselton. Are you saying that this region can sustain the number of tracks and clubs that are there at the moment?

Mr Jones: I would say we are. It was Richard Bennett's point, not mine, but I will play on it, because it suits my story: he had been over to Collie and said that he realised that a place like Collie Trotting Club might not be the most productive on dollars turned over per dollars spent there.

[11.05 am]

Mr Jones: I would say they are and it was Richard Burt's point, not mine, and I will play on it because it suits my story. He went over to Collie and said, "I realise that a place like Collie Trotting Club mightn't be the most productive." But on dollars turned over for dollars spent there I would say he more likely would be totally wrong, but he said there is 35 or 40 people who are up there that are into the trotting game, plus their families and their friends and whoever else comes along. Collie would have—I did not go there last meeting, I went to the three before—I suppose 500 or 600 people oncourse, perhaps 700. A lot of clubs down here, including this race club, would love to have that many people on our course, but he said, "I realise if we take trotting out of that town and take it to Bunbury or bring it to Harvey, those people might come for six months but, in 18 months they will all drop out of the industry." The industry is not good enough that it can stand that sort of thing.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Can I just make the point that that is what I think the Chairman was just saying. Where I used to live—Mr Nottle's patch it used to be—Wyalkatchem, for example, most of my parents' friends had trotters. There is none up there now.

Mr Jones: That is right, and I think Richard made the point that he said sometimes number crunchers get caught up in the fog and they do not see the real picture.

The CHAIRMAN: The situation that is being painted to us as a committee is that we have an industry that, particularly in thoroughbreds, has been flourishing. We have had a period of TAB growth since the formation of RWWA, which for about four or five years was quite staggering, and the industry across the board was seen to be going better than any other state in Australia on a per capita basis. Now through certain circumstances, RWWA has been put in a predicament whereby, with product fees and competition from other forms of betting, suddenly the revenue available to the industry is not as great as what it was. How do you see RWWA addressing this? How do you think RWWA should address this situation? Should it be closing down clubs? Should it be cutting back meetings from clubs that are not sustainable? Should it be continuing this drive for greater offcourse revenue or should it be fostering clubs around the country, such as your own or Collie, that play an important part in that country town?

Mr Jones: How often do you hear Woolies shutting a store down, John; they're usually opening one up. That is the way I look at it. You can shrink your base and I know economists will say you bring it in and the profitability is—John, I come out of the dairy industry. Ten years ago there were 450 dairy farms in this state, today there is 150 and in 10 years' time if there is an industry here, well, I will be surprised. So shrinking the base is a hell of an economist's theory and sometimes it does not work, but the problem is, John, as we go to Max, once that club goes, it has gone. It does not matter what happens in that town today, that club has shifted. Two years ago we were at a meeting at RWWA, and they never had enough money that year to pay the stake and they took money out of capital. This industry has been down there before, John—Helena Vale, the radio stations out at Perth, the buildings at Gloucester Park that you will have to go on. I suggested then that instead of paying stakes on predicted growth, why do they not go back 12 months and pay stake on what they knew they had? But, hang on; I am only a dumb dairy farmer, John.

The CHAIRMAN: Talking about infrastructure—and this appears to be the biggest problem facing RWWA—it would appear that for RWWA to continue to pay the stakes at the level that they are

now, they will not be able to come up with the funding for infrastructure at tracks all around the state. You are saying that your club is in a pretty comfortable position with regard to infrastructure, but others, such as Bunbury and other clubs, badly need money spent on their facilities. If RWWA says that it cannot produce this money without impacting on prize money, where do you think the funding for infrastructure should come from? Would you like to see industry going back to something like the old Racecourse Development Trust Fund where you had a set amount of money set aside, and where do you think this money might come from if we were going to move to that model?

Mr Jones: I do not know, John. We could hope for another massive boom in this state, which, let us be honest, is where the money has come from in the past four years. When you are having booms like we have had in the past four years—any business booming like that—you can fly whoever you like; it is whether you have the ability when things get tough or whether you say something when things get tough that you tough it out. That is when we will find out whether RWWA is any good; we will find out now—the penny has dropped. We used to have the unclaimed dividend, that is what used to be the money, and I do not know where they get it from because, let us face it, no government at the moment is going to hand money to a racing code and we do have a lot of money coming in to the racing code. I do think in this state that we suffer from the small man syndrome as in we have always got to be paying more stakes than the eastern states. At times we forget we have 2.2 million people in this state stretching from Kununurra to Hopetoun and Victoria has seven million or eight million in the south west. We do at times in this state have a problem in that we have to be paying the most. Eavesdropping on Bunbury there, they are talking about stakes. I was talking to Matthew Skipper, the racing manager, the other day. I said, “Well, if you’ve got a problem with stakes, Matthew, why doesn’t every club run an RO?” At \$2 500, I have saved you \$3 000 on a meeting before —

The CHAIRMAN: Can you explain what an RO is?

Mr Jones: Well, you come to the Bunbury races, John—you are a racing man—you have your maidens. We have very few maidens in our code; we start at COs. Well, an RO is worse than a CO; it is basically for the horses that are really struggling. There are a lot of hobby blokes —

The CHAIRMAN: And you do not get a penalty for winning it—or do you?

Mr Jones: You get an RO penalty that does not affect your CO, so you would not get an extra —

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: So you can win two maidens, in a way?

Mr Jones: You can win as many as you like of them before you affect your CO penalty. It is like when you enter the CO you go in bottom weight, not top weight.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, but a lot of people own slow horses, so —

Mr Jones: Most of us do, John! I pointed out to RWWA that we—as in Harvey—all struggle no matter how well we perform. We have a few things, being in Harvey, which stick in our throats, I suppose. We really struggle to hold our meetings; nearly every year we have to go and fight for our 14 meetings. When RWWA came into being, they were to reward those who were successful. I can tell you in Harvey’s case we have never been rewarded. This year we got our 14 meetings—we had 13, actually; Ken had to ring up and argue with Matthew Skipper that —

Mr Nottle: That was last season.

Mr Jones: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you have 14 meetings when RWWA was formed in 2003?

Mr Jones: Yes we did.

The CHAIRMAN: So you have maintained your meetings?

Mr Jones: We have always had to fight for them. There was a time we ran 17, and when all the minor clubs went to TAB we dropped to 11 or 12 but we got back to 14 one way or another. They usually cut a meeting off us—cut us to 13—we go back, argue our case and somewhere or other they find that other meeting. One of the meetings they took off us was the first Tuesday in January, which is our Italian Cup. It is our second best night of the year, so Ken gets on the phone and says, “Matthew, you’ve given our meeting to Northam; we’ve only got 13.” When I ask Matthew Skipper for meetings for Harvey, they cannot find any, but they can find meetings for other clubs. I would not mind it if we were not successful but we are a very successful club.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you just elaborate: earlier in the hearing you described your club as a unique club similar to Mt Barker. Can you explain?

Mr Jones: We do not fit the norm as in our figures are as good, if not better. It is very hard today. Once upon a time we used to get all the figures from all the clubs and we have to get someone to sit on a computer and pull them down to get them. We have raced behind Pinjarra, which is our number one club, on a Tuesday, so they get first whack of the horses and we get second—we always get more horses than Pinjarra. Just to digress, when we do our fixtures we are not allowed to have a meeting in front of Bunbury because we will drag their horses. Matthew skipper can deny that if he would like to, but that is what we are told; we are not allowed to race before them. We might have only an 800-metre track but the public, the trainers and the punters like us. As I say, returning to where I was, at two meetings we raced behind Pinjarra back to back, so we should get killed. On one night we broke even with them on their offcourse turnover, and the other night we did them easy. So, the punter will punt on us, and when you put those figures up, there is no argument against us. But it has been long—that history goes back 30 years, John—the industry was prepared to let us go 30 years ago, as Ken pointed out, for \$100 000 they could have bought the Harvey complex. The industry could have bought the Harvey complex for \$100 000.

The CHAIRMAN: The one that is there now?

Mr Jones: The one that is there now—\$100 000. The worst of it is that the president of WATA then happened to be the Mayor of Bunbury, which did not do us much justice and I will tell Ernie to his face. Ernie said the horses can go to Bunbury, so we have always had this problem. When Charlotte Mills came through and did her survey, she asked the question. Where the Harvey complex is, there were 40 blocks set up beside it for six or eight horses that we trained on it on the northern side. If you call in there, you will see it; it has all got houses on it now. The industry could have bought the whole lot for \$250 000. Now, would that not have been a jewel in the industry’s crown today if, in the middle of the horse population, we created a situation where a young bloke could have put a house and half a dozen stalls, but the industry let it slip. That is old history, people—I cannot do anything about it—but it always hurts us that we were prepared to let go. Ken brought it up, and it had slipped my mind, when we asked for \$100 000, Bunbury got \$65 000 to do up a kitchen and restaurant. Where those new stalls are, the bulldozer went through it; it never ever worked. I think at times we do have a reason to feel aggrieved at Harvey, when we do perform well. I think Dianne Begg said to me, “I do not know what you did to Richard Burt when you had him down there, but he’s come back and he is blown away with your complex.”

The CHAIRMAN: Can you tell us a bit about the complex, your track—who owns the track?

Mr Jones: The track is owned by the Panetta boys now.

The CHAIRMAN: So it is privately owned?

Mr Jones: It is privately owned, we —

The CHAIRMAN: And you do not pay any rent for it?

Mr Jones: We pay a peppercorn. I paid the old gentleman \$20. Fifteen years ago I gave him \$20 and I suppose I still have \$5—five years—of that to run!

The CHAIRMAN: And how long does the lease have to run?

Mr Jones: We have another five years on the lease at the moment.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you guaranteed to have that?

Mr Jones: Well, we are guaranteed it.

Mr Nottle: One of our vice presidents is one of the owners.

Mr Jones: He now owns three-quarters because Chris King-Lethbridge who bought it —

The CHAIRMAN: And you do not pay rates or anything?

Mr Jones: Yes we pay rates. We pick up all the bills; we have to meet every bill that our fellow clubs meet on their own land and we have 14 meetings to do it. We asked for 20 meetings.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: Bruce, you mentioned 20 meetings, Bunbury make no secret of the fact that they would like more meetings and they would not mind if they took them off you.

Mr Jones: Dead right.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: In fact, there is a good chance that rather than increasing the number of trot meetings or trot races in this region, they will just redistribute meetings between clubs. What do you say about that?

Mr Jones: John, I have lived that for 30 years now, so I just take it on board because clubs north and south of us—I have been in the politics of this for 30 years—have been trying to take our meetings off us. We were the club that let them run their first meeting on our track, so I suppose that is your sibling coming back to bite you, is it?

Mr Nottle: I think the big thing with the allocation of the meetings is that over the many, many years now we have not cost the industry money at all, produce as much as everybody else, but we still battle to get meetings.

The CHAIRMAN: Just on that point, do you think RWWA is making enough of the opportunity to race because with harness racing, unlike thoroughbred racing on turf tracks, you can race every day of the week. Do you think the industry is making enough use of the dates that are there, the opportunity, or is it a problem that Sky Channel cannot cover all those meetings?

Mr Jones: Well, John, we have just been given Thursday night—we are now a Thursday night club.

The CHAIRMAN: Pay night—it is a good night!

Mr Jones: We hope it is, John, because there was no consultation. I see you have the book; we have not even got the book yet. I heard Julie say she got it off the internet. We are not aware of anything that is written in that book.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Can I quote you a paragraph out of the book because I think you might be interested?

Mr Jones: Yes.

[11.20 am]

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: The book is “Protecting our Product: A Vision of Sustainability for the WA Harness Industry”, page 12, and I will drop half of the first sentence to save a bit of time. It states —

RWWA recommends the protection of healthy stakes via a slight reduction in meetings and consequently races. Currently too many tracks host a broad spectrum of racing opportunities which is unsustainable. Over time there is a need to better utilise optimal tracks which will be the subject of ongoing investment given they are prime wagering revenue optimisers.

Mr Jones: Yes.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: What is your view on that statement?

Mr Nottle: Our view is that we could be one of those clubs.

The CHAIRMAN: You could be an optimal track?

Mr Jones: Yes; an optimal track.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Clearly, this report is saying you are not.

Mr Jones: It is saying we are not, but somewhere through there it should also have that—transport, and all these things, go into it, Max; we are in an optimal position,

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: I read that out because our job is to review the RWWA act. The five years are up and the review is here; this will be the only review for the next 20 years, I would say. It is time to look at the way it operates. Currently, RWWA is saying, from my very quick reading of this report this morning, I might add—it was the first time I had seen it—that the way to optimise harness racing in Western Australia is to rip out a few tracks I can tell you, from my knowledge of the central Wheatbelt, is that all it does is take people out of the industry.

Mr Jones: You will not get an argument from me on that, and I think the person who wrote that article should go to Busselton five or six nights of the year. Busselton races on half the size of a bike wheel. It is a gladiator sport, and TAB club in this state wishes it could turn the money over that it does. But, Max, I do not know how you get into an argument—that is an accountant's argument; I cannot argue with it. If you want to run those stories through, 25 years ago, Bunbury would have had a knife run through it. But some clubs are protected species; other ones are vulnerable.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Our job is to look at the total RWWA situation. I have stood on the top floor of the Toodyay race club when they have turned away 10 000 people because they were trying to shut the club.

Mr Jones: That is right.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: They only get 2 000 people at Ascot at Belmont.

Mr Jones: That is right.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: The argument here is, what do we do about all that? We need to talk to you about your circumstances, and relate that back to our position of reviewing an act. What do we do about all that?

Mr Nottle: I guess, Max, our circumstances are that we have the venue; we do not need money to be spent there. We see RWWA just running around and pouring millions into other clubs, and we think, "We've already got it here; why does this happen?"

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: But if we shut down tracks like this around the country, will that not affect the industry, as in your feeders to come through?

Mr Jones: You hit the nail on the head; we are back to the Collie situation.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: So should RWWA be responsible for ensuring that there is a feeder system to come through?

Mr Jones: Let us be honest: for RWWA to work in this state, we do not have to run a race, dog or trot meeting, because they can all be beamed in.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Yes; the product can come from America.

Mr Jones: Wherever you like. So if you want to be bloody-minded, you do not need to run a meeting on this side; if a punter likes to punt, he will punt on whatever is up on that screen. We

believe there is a social aspect in this, and at Harvey this year we spent just on \$100 000 on our facilities—mind you, there was nothing from RWWA—and that has been spent in our town.

The CHAIRMAN: What sort of crowds do you get to your meetings; and are they mainly local people?

Mr Nottle: No.

Mr Jones: No.

Mr Nottle: No, we get good crowds. We probably do better than most around us.

Mr Jones: Bunbury has had a sensational summer season in; Julie has done a very good job. They have the Saturdays that used to be Harvey's, and it suits Bunbury, and I would say that Bunbury has had a sensational year.

The CHAIRMAN: I read in the paper the other day that Bunbury will be the second city. Bunbury will be the major city outside of Perth in years to come, so obviously there will always be a need for a strong harness racing presence in this city.

Mr Jones: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: You are 20 minutes away up the road.

Mr Jones: 50 kays; the same distance as Melton is out of Melbourne actually.

The CHAIRMAN: You are saying that there should always be a place for you guys to have your 14 meetings.

Mr Jones: That is right. There should always be a place, and I think there has to be a place for Collie and Busselton; they run six meetings a year. How it can be said they are a cost on the industry, I do not know. They put so much money back into the industry.

The CHAIRMAN: You talked about costs to the industry, and we read about this massive turnover that is being generated now by the Western Australian TAB—unheard of record turnover levels. Under RWWA, we have changed to a new form of governance; before, we had the principal clubs.

Mr Jones: That is right.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you think it is costing the industry more to be governed by RWWA than it was under the old system? Do you think RWWA is being run efficiently enough, or do you think there is wastage of money that could be saved?

Mr Jones: I think it might have tightened its belt now, but there has been a huge wastage of moneys, as in —

Mr Nottle: Gloucester Park.

Mr Jones: Let us leave Gloucester Park.

The CHAIRMAN: You can elaborate on that, because we want to hear what you think about that.

Mr Jones: That report states that it is going to change, but, as a country club, we get \$5 500 to run a race meeting; Gloucester Park, the same meeting, same stake, they get \$11 000. And, into the bargain, they will get any of the titbits, as in—it has changed a bit now—if there are any carryovers, they will get the carryover. The Super 9 race meeting at Pinjarra had three carryovers of I think it was a quaddie or a quartet. Being a racing man, you will laugh at this: the races without the carryover had about \$1 000 or \$1 500, \$2 000 in the pool; the one that had the carryover was punted out to be \$20 000. If you can get carryovers, you can distort figures very, very quickly. Figures are very, very —

The CHAIRMAN: I had better remind you that I actually cut my teeth in harness racing.

Mr Jones: Yes, fair enough. Figures can be made to do whatever they want to. But I cannot believe the meetings that are run at Gloucester Park are not run on country clubs; we are cheaper to operate.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you think that if the figures were done, there could be an economic argument to move meetings away from Gloucester Park?

Mr Jones: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Especially as they are catering for horses that run at country tracks, and you think those meetings could be a cost saving to the industry if they were run elsewhere, where clubs rely more on volunteer labour.

Mr Nottle: Definitely.

Mr Jones: I will stand corrected on this, but I would say that 40 per cent of the horses that run at a lot of the Gloucester Park meetings have been dragged past the Harvey track.

The CHAIRMAN: To go to Gloucester Park?

Mr Jones: Yes, and then there is Serpentine, which is an hour north, and they have to come down. The one about the transport of horses: to pull horses into Gloucester Park on a Friday night—I suppose it is the same with Ascot, but they are a bit luckier, they go straight around the Polly Pipe—one day there might be a big traffic jam on the freeway and no horses will get there because there is only one way in and one way out of Gloucester Park; I love the place!

The CHAIRMAN: Are you saying there is a decentralisation of horse population from the metropolitan area, with trainers now moving further out?

Mr Jones: Most of the big trainers are at Serpentine South now. The argument comes up at the country derby, and Chris Lewis cannot ride in the country derby because he is metropolitan domiciled; if he had built on the other side of the block, he would have been country domiciled.

The CHAIRMAN: That is like getting the fuel card.

Mr Jones: That is dead right.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Are all your races Sky Channel?

Mr Jones: No.

Mr Nottle: No.

Mr P.B. WATSON: How many races a meeting are then?

Mr Nottle: Races a meeting?

Mr Jones: That depends on what night of the week it is. On a Tuesday we get the full, which could be nine; if it is on a Saturday night—it depends whether we have daylight saving in—it could be four or it could be seven.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Does Sky 2 change that?

Mr Jones: On Thursday nights it will. Last year, because we are not one of the chosen clubs and to give us our 14 meetings, they gave us the two Mondays that no-one else wanted. We were given a Monday as Pinjarra could not race that against the Bunbury–Pinjarra races, so it was given to us.

The CHAIRMAN: You have to concede that with the product fees that have now come in, RWWA needs people to bet on our meetings in other states, so Sky Channel coverage is so essential.

Mr Jones: It is imperative.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you see this as being the biggest problem facing RWWA, to get enough coverage?

Mr Jones: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you think RWWA has enough clout with Sky Channel, or is doing enough with Sky Channel?

Mr Jones: No; it has no clout at all. John, I would approach it differently in this state; they say they have a Thursday and they could not get it on, on a Sunday afternoon. I would be cutting the field sizes down on the stakes and I would be racing—because those big tracks in the east, they race RO meetings at \$2 000 or \$3 000. The average punter who has a horse—I laugh when I read in *The West Australian* that someone invests in a horse. If you think a horse is an investment, you live in a funny world. If you win a race it is an ego boost. Being a horse owner, I would far more prefer to win a race at Bridgetown than I would run last at Gloucester Park. That must be applicable to anybody.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Ken, do you have trouble attracting horses? Do you do anything to give them incentives to come?

Mr Nottle: No.

Mr Jones: No.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Or do you have to ballot many out?

Mr Jones: Yes.

Mr Nottle: Yes. People want to race at Harvey.

Mr P.B. WATSON: How many would you ballot out at a meeting?

Mr Jones: I cannot give you gate figures, but twice last year we had races owing, and I rang and asked the racing manager could we have the ninth race. He said, “Bruce, no, you can’t, because we’re dragging horses back into Pinjarra.” We are in an ideal position, but because it is an 800 metre track, they think they can get to the front and they think they might be able to win. But, on percentages, Gloucester Park has over 2 100 metres has 40 per cent leaders; Harvey has 30 per cent leaders, which is equivalent to Bunbury 1 000 metres and Pinjarra’s 1 000-metre track. It is one of those fallacies.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Do you any races on yourselves? In Albany, sometimes, they put on a couple of races.

Mr Jones: These Monday meetings, we have only been given seven races at 4 200, so we put an RO on to give us eight races. We have to dip our hand in our pockets.

Mr P.B. WATSON: But RWWA gets the benefit.

Mr Jones: They get the benefits. It gets worse than that: the other clubs get the benefits.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: We can only review the legislation. What do you see us doing to protect what you are talking about, and also give credence to the social benefits and importance of racing? In other words, not just looking at what is better off course, but the number of people who go on course and that community involvement in racing?

Mr Jones: Gee, that is like pulling a balloon out of the air. I am not a racehorse person at all, but I will be here on Bunbury Cup day.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: I am talking about racing as a whole, including greyhounds, trots and races.

Mr Jones: All together? Gee —

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: Just to protect the sorts of things you are talking about.

Mr Jones: I agree that it should be in legislation, otherwise it will eventually go. They will eventually make it so tough for these minor clubs with the rules and regulations. They are all relying on voluntary contributions to make it go round, and it will eventually get too tough for them to comply.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you think the industry might have created a monster then, in some regards, if RWWA is not going to be accountable for its actions? Do you think there should always be some sort of mechanism for accountability of RWWA, either to the government or to the minister?

Mr Jones: John, for a club like Harvey that was always our fear, that, in the long term—like any quasi-government organisation—it would have a tendency to grow within itself. To try to put that out, once they get on that roll, is very difficult. I do not know how you would legislate for the Toodyay Cup meeting. It is a great meeting. I was there this year; there were hundreds of people there.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Do you think we should put in the legislation that money should be put aside for regional racing and trotting?

Mr Jones: I definitely do. I do not know whether it is possible, because the reality is that people will come back into the country area. I feel sorry for the Wheatbelt area; it has lost its population and demographics through this get big or get out. It has killed the country. They had fantastic football clubs and cricket clubs, and what has rolled through has killed them.

The CHAIRMAN: But the South West has not experienced that.

Mr Jones: No; we have not experienced that.

[11.35 am]

The CHAIRMAN: In fact you are growing down here.

Mr Jones: We are growing, yes.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Gentlemen, you have made quite some emphasis of RWWA's focus on improving turnover.

Mr Jones: Yes.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: And you did make mention of the fact that if we had enough races from the United States or wherever else —

Mr Jones: Would not need us.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: — it would generate the sort of income and they would be happy, they would close down a number of other clubs.

Mr Jones: Yes.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Have you got any sort of demonstrated figures which show how your club's capacity to generate either oncourse or offcourse turnover has improved over, say, the last three, four or five years since the act has been in place?

Mr Jones: Gee, you have got a hard one there for me.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: No, but understand where I am coming from. We are looking at the act and we are looking at how RWWA may well respond. I have not checked this out yet. I have no idea what the implications are for clubs that I am associated with.

Mr Jones: Once you went on a Tuesday night, there was very good turnover. And Saturday night, unless you are in the summertime and can make oncourse gains, Saturday night —

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: You are suggesting, of course, all along that Sky is imperative.

Mr Jones: Yes, imperative. Yesterday at Harvey we turned \$120 000 over on a Monday afternoon. If that had been on Sky, we would have more like done 240. That is in this state, and then we would have done 240 in another code in—what are we with?—SuperTAB. Then the other codes would bet in. I suppose this is a little thing. For us as an amateur club it is very hard for us to glean these figures out of the TAB. We know what we turn over. It is very hard for us to judge our figures

because our dates are changed so much, as in our Saturday nights have been taken off us and we have got Friday nights which do not turn over the same as Saturday nights. Tuesday nights are excellent. Look, I am surprised on our figures, that Matt Skipper tells me that every meeting is down and I would take him to —

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: You see, I would suggest if Matt Skipper says that to you, and the pair of you as president and vice-president are sitting back listening to that, it might be incumbent upon you to get to and check your figures out to disprove that sort of thing.

Mr Jones: Yes.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Because, as we all seem to acknowledge, the bottom line number that the bean counters come up with is what they are going to turn around and put it to you and say, “This is a reason for your club perhaps not receiving the attention that maybe you deem it appropriate that it does receive.”

Mr Jones: Yes.

Mr Nottle: Bruce mentioned earlier that before RWWA came into existence we had everybody's figures for every meeting, so we knew where we stood compared to other clubs. That has not happened since they have been there.

Mr Jones: They will not get involved in them either.

Mr Nottle: So we do not know about Bunbury or Pinjarra, other than speaking to some of their club members, we do not really know.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: Gentlemen, do you get hassled by the administration of the liquor act?

Mr Jones: Of the?

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: Liquor act? It is just the number of security staff you have to employ and all the rigmarole you go through.

Mr Jones: We would hide.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: You would hide?

Mr Jones: Yes. I think Bunbury has here on big nights, but up to date they have not touched us up.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: But you never have any trouble?

Mr. Jones: No.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: You look after yourself?

Mr Jones: John, I will be honest, if we had to put the staff on, we would close our bar because we do not make enough. The bar today is pure and simply a service to those who might want to drink, because we are five kilometres out of town, and who is going to have any more than two mid-strengths and hop in their car? We had a huge crowd there yesterday; \$2 500 was the bar taking. When a can of UDL is \$6—well, a class-one [tre:///?label="hanlaptop"?datetime="20100406113900"?Data="ec74fa8e"fight?—](#)there have not been many people had much to drink. And you touch wood, we hope we never have any trouble, but it is not a problem on our courses. You know, it is just that we do not have the type of people. That is just how it is.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Not Kalgoorlie people, is what he is saying!

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: For Hansard I refer to the “Protecting our Product” booklet. On page 2 it says that Western Australia has had a nine per cent growth in foals, whereas most other states have had a decline. For example New South Wales has had a 34 per cent decline and South Australia has had a 31 per cent decline, but on page 12 it says that there is the threat of a declining horse population in Western Australia, which seems to be somewhat of a contradiction.

Mr Jones: Contradictory, yes.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: But as we go around we hear stories like your own. Do you personally know of any trotting clubs that are having trouble getting nominations for their fields?

Mr Jones: No.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Geraldton told us they had no problem getting nominations.

Mr Nottle: We certainly do not.

Mr Jones: We certainly do not. Max, I can only look at the fields and this year we have all managed to hold up our races. Some of them are a bit short-numbered; we might drop a few horses. But also the two-year-olds started late. This time last year we were racing two two-year-olds on a meeting. We are battling to get one to stand up. The three-year-olds have just come back into vogue. I had this discussion with Matt Skipper and he said, "Oh, the numbers were a bit better than they thought." I said, "Well in the last few years we have had an extra 400 000 people come into this state." I said, "Most of them are working in the mining industry or part of the mining industry and there's five or six of them who've got a horse. Have a look at the horses that come from Collie; there's five or six blokes in every horse."

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: I have got a syndicate, which I am a member of, just three of us, and we are like everyone else here: we do it just for fun; we do not intend to ever win the Perth Cup. But we race our horses on two or three-year-olds. Is that a growing trend? Is that what you are saying; are there less two-year-olds starting?

Mr Jones: Because of the race meetings and the way they have been structured in Perth, I was at a program meeting a month ago and I suggested that next year they back the two-year-old races right back because they program these two-year-olds and they fall over so you are short of a race. And then they have got to split a race to give you eight races, so you are short of horses in two races.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: But that is not the question I asked. Do you think people are deliberately not racing two-year-olds?

Mr Jones: Max, in the trotting industry I would say the big-stake races being pushed back would have a bearing on it, yes. But in my case we do not race them anyhow; we are like you. But I think what has had a bearing this year is the big-stake races being pushed back which for a horse's sake, Max, we would be better off if we pushed them back later. Then we would have a five-year-old instead of a broken-down three-year-old.

The CHAIRMAN: Gentlemen, we are just about out of time. Are there any other points that you would like to make? I guess in closing I would like to ask your opinion on one thing. What do you believe is the greatest challenge facing RWWA and the racing industry in general—all the codes? What is the greatest challenge as we move into 2010?

Mr Jones: I hope to goodness that both sides of governments hold their steel on the pokies machine, because that would destroy us in this state, unless they let them have them oncourse.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: Unless you are the one with it?

Mr Jones: Yes, that is right, have them oncourse. What would you think, Ken?

Mr Nottle: Yes, the same. This might not be exactly answering that question, but we used to have a lot more consultation within the country clubs with our programming and so on. I think these days we just get told what is happening and I just think there should be more consultation within the industry itself.

The CHAIRMAN: All right. Thanks very much. You have made some very interesting points there. I just need to thank you for appearing before the committee today and advise you that a transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the 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 via 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. So thanks again, gentlemen, for attending.

Mr Jones: Thanks very much, gentlemen.

Mr Nottle: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 11.44 am