

**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 YORK  
FRIDAY, 26 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 10.56 am**

**GRAY, MR MERVYN JOHN**  
**President, York Harness Racing Club,**  
**examined:**

**FLYNN, MR PATRICK**  
**Horse Trainer, Vice President, York Harness Racing Club,**  
**examined:**

**DEADMAN, MR ROBIN TYRONE JOHN**  
**Secretary, York Harness Racing Club, Western Australian Country Harness Racing**  
**Association and Breeders Owners Trainers Reinspersons Association,**  
**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 will 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 the Chair, John McGrath; to my left is Max Trenorden, MLC, the Deputy Chair; and to his left is 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:** Would you please state your full name and the capacity in which you appear before the committee today?

**Mr Flynn:** I am vice president of the York Harness Racing Club.

**Mr Gray:** I am president of the York Harness Racing Club.

**Mr Deadman:** I am secretary of the York Harness Racing Club, secretary of the Western Australian Country Harness Racing Association and secretary of the Breeders Owners Trainers Reinspersons Association.

**The CHAIRMAN:** What we would like to gather from you today is a bit of an update about where the York Harness Racing Club sits at the moment, and how many meetings you hold. We gather that you no longer race at your traditional track at York but hold your meetings at Northam. Can you explain how that happened, and where you sit now? Can you also explain what your plans are for the future and for maintaining some sort of harness racing presence in York?

**Mr Deadman:** I will give just a brief history. The York Harness Racing Club is probably the oldest harness racing club in Australia—definitely Western Australia. It is a form of racing that first took place in 1846, probably somewhere in the bush, but officially for the club, 1922 is the date for its official participation in the harness racing industry. We are going on close to 100 years as a club. Our racing capacity ended some 18 months ago. We had an option to continue racing as a tenant at the community centre at Forrest Oval until 2014, but that was on the basis of putting \$150 000 into safety and infrastructure at the old course. We also had an option placed on us by RWWA to either race at Northam for Friday's Sky meetings, or continue racing where we were, with a guarantee of no further meetings after that. So it was fairly obvious, and we took the better option and decided to put in the \$150 000 towards a training facility somewhere in York. There was no proposition at that stage about where it was going to be. The situation we are in at the moment is that we have got no training track or fast work track. I underline that factor. A fast work track is required in York by the trainers here. We have not got that. We are transporting our horses to the Northam track, and that is putting a strain on their infrastructure over there. There are at least three to five trainers going two or three times a week to the Northam track. That is untenable from a cost point of view and also for the transporting of horses. At this stage we have plans submitted to the Shire of York and RWWA, which is Pat Flynn's department, and he will explain more about that. But everything is at the stage now where we are waiting on the York Racing Inc facility to be up and running. RWWA has promised to give us a concerted look into a training facility to be put into the racecourse here. We have to get an MOU between the York Harness Racing Club, the shire and York racing, and all that will be done as a concerted effort once we get the racing facility up and running.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Mr Flynn, would you like to elaborate on the work that has been done so far in preliminary investigation, I guess, into putting a training track inside the York racing track?

**Mr Flynn:** How it all came about was that in the early days of us moving from Forrest Oval, there was discussion between York harness and York racing about building a dual-coded track here that would facilitate both racing and harness. Under the wisdom of RWWA initially, it accepted the proposal, but then later on through occ health and safety it deemed that the harness component was not acceptable because of the rise and fall of this area here behind us. With the guidelines that RWWA submitted to me as far as a training circuit goes, it is only allowed to have a rise and fall of between one metre and two metres over the full circumference of the circuit. This land here is 10 metres rise and fall. So what I ended up doing was that some 15 years ago there was a plan drawn up by York harness and the old WATA, and from those plans I actually came up with a design that stands now of a 960-metre circumference circuit. At this present stage, there are 94-metre radius bends, which would make it the largest radius bend in WA. But in consultation with RWWA just recently due to occ health and safety issues, with the ambulance for thoroughbred racing, the design will have to change a little bit. But in saying that, the design will be that instead of being 95-metre radius bends, they will be 85-metre radius. That is actually just a little bit bigger radius bends than what Gloucester Park has. It will facilitate good, solid, fast work, with safety to horses and drivers—just horses in general. There will be no injury obtained through the design of the track. The actual training surface of the track will be of a design that is set out by—I cannot remember the gentleman's name now from Bunbury, but I got all the specifications from him, and that will be the actual surface of the track. As well as the track, we have got a proposal in to the shire for the re-

erection of some old existing stables that are down at Forrest Oval to the new site here at the turf club. They will be situated near the machinery shed. The reason for that is that through occ health and safety, the concern for me and for the club and for RWWA is that if we were to use the existing facilities here—that is, the turf club facilities—there is a problem in getting the horses from here over to the crossover to obtain the access to the training track. So as far as the safety component goes, it is better for us to build these other 24 boxes down at the eastern end, I suppose you could call it, of the precinct here. That will give easy access to the training facility. Also, in building them down there, when the sand track for the thoroughbreds is up and going, the thoroughbreds will have access to that as well. It will be easy access for them to get to the crossover to use the slow work track on the inside.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** You did not actually say where that is going to go. I presume it will be in that 10-metre rise and fall area?

**Mr Flynn:** Actually, the way the track is designed, with 960 metres give or take a little bit, we have actually pushed it further to the east from the original design. So as far as cubic metres are concerned, instead of moving 190 000 cubic metres of dirt if the track were located to the west in the centre, the track has been moved 61 metres to the east of the existing winning post of the turf track; and, in doing that, it takes us away from the 10-metre portion of the track.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Getting back to the recent history of your club, you were one of the clubs that has been forced to rationalise and move your meetings to Northam. Are you satisfied with the formula that RWWA uses to determine the sustainability of clubs? Do you understand that there will be a requirement for some clubs to merge or maybe even fold in the racing industry? Do you have a view about the sustainability of clubs and how many clubs the industry needs, and whether all the regions have to be serviced? What is your general feeling about this growing issue in the industry?

**Mr Deadman:** In real terms, I do not think RWWA has spent enough time looking at the benefit of certain clubs to the industry, and most certainly it does not look at the social structure or the socioeconomics of a town and the impact on a town. York is basically a tourist industry town, one hour from Perth. Come here any weekend and the streets are chock-a-block full. Certainly when we had 14 to 16 meetings it was beneficial for the town to run those meetings. It brought people in and introduced them to York and so forth. We have always been viable from the first time. There was no reason to close York because of the fact that it was not a viable club. We did not ask for anything. We always covered our own debt. We had a voluntary committee. It cost nothing to run a meeting at York, and we were a benefit to the industry. As was mentioned earlier by my compatriot, York Racing is there for specifically-run horses that cannot win races anywhere else. We used to get good fields even with the non-TAB racing. We made money out of that racing. There was never a meeting that we ran where we did not end up with a positive figure in the bank. In this case, I think there was a desk decision made. Where it all started was in Bill Coghlan's days. He came around with a box brownie and took photos. Our infrastructure was poor. They did not accept the fact that the industry was happy to race under those conditions. We had a tin shed for the drivers' change room. No-one complained about that. Our infrastructure was substandard. We accepted that. But we were never given the opportunity to do better. We ran with what we had, and we ran successfully. We did not see the basis for closing our club down on that factor. But the elements from the outside came in—the fact that the infrastructure was poor, the fact that we were racing on a 666-metre track. All these elements came in.

**The CHAIRMAN:** What about your contribution to the TAB? Was that seen as a factor—that you were not generating the revenue?

**Mr Deadman:** One of the factors of generating revenue is opportunity. We raced every day of the week at York, and the turnovers were either good or bad, depending on when we were racing. We raced in winter. We raced on red-hot summer days in daylight. We raced on Sundays. We raced

every day of the week. As I have said, overall we have been successful. Contribution to turnover is, I suppose, profoundly judged by what you do in the long term when you have got the opportunity to do it. When we ran one Sky Channel meeting, we ran one of the highest turnovers of any club—we had one meeting—and then the industry saw that it had to go elsewhere.

**The CHAIRMAN:** How much better off would the industry be for shutting down racing at York, or how much better off would RWWA be?

**Mr Deadman:** Stake money only. That is the benefit. We would, say, get \$22 000 for stake money for running a meeting. That was the only benefit that they would gain. It cost us absolutely nothing to run the thing here. I think the racing industry at this stage is deemed to be turnover driven. The socioeconomics of a country town do not come into play. I think that is sad. You are looking at a situation now with Geraldton, where admittedly it has struggled for years and been given an opportunity to improve, but, again, a club in the north-eastern districts has been sacrificed for one reason or another. They never looked at opportunities in a club like Geraldton to run dual-code meetings in situations like this. I can speak from a country trotting association point of view, where we have put that to them and said, “Give Geraldton a go; they are not going to succeed long term, but they have got to run a dual-code meeting with their thoroughbred cousins and see how they go”. Things like that have never been explored.

**The CHAIRMAN:** There has probably been greater rationalisation of harness racing clubs throughout this wheatbelt region than anywhere else in the state—probably in Australia.

**Mr Deadman:** There is no reasoning for that.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You think that has not been the right decision?

**Mr Deadman:** In real terms, I do, because if you ask the question, you get a variety of answers across the board—there is not the horse numbers; there is not the breeding. It is profoundly stupid to think that without metropolitan competitors coming to any country meeting, you would hold a meeting. Bunbury has probably got the strongest horse population in the state, but it could not possibly hold a meeting with the numbers that it has down there. In reality, there are a lot of clubs that could do better given the opportunity. I think we were one of them. But historically, we are gone. The thought is that by putting in a good training facility, there is a chance of racing again in the future, but I see that as extremely on the backburner.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Are your meetings at Northam profitable? Do many York people go to those meetings?

**Mr Deadman:** With the meetings in Northam, we will finish in front handsomely. Unless it is a specifically attractive meeting to York people—and that will be rare—they rarely go over there. We have lost membership, we have lost commitment, and I guess we have lost support.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** In respect of the agreement that you have obviously got in place with Northam, what sort of operational issues stem from this involvement? I am mindful, by the way, of the fact that Richmond Raceway was sold, and that the Fremantle Harness Racing Club has moved to Gloucester Park, but there are significant differences there, because you are talking about basically the Perth metropolitan area. What are the problems that you as a club have in administering your four Sky meetings from Northam?

**Mr Deadman:** We do not have any problems at all. We have a very good mutual agreement and understanding with the Northam club in terms of us racing over there. We did start to take our own staff over there, but with four meeting a year that are spaced well out because of the programming situation, it was just untenable. So to keep everyone happy, we use the continuity of Northam staff, and the York committee stands in if required. So it is basically a normal meeting under the veil of a York harness racing day. That is how it is run.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** How many meetings a year does the Northam club have?

**Mr Deadman:** Eighteen I think it is now, and with our four it would be about 22.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** It is a busy club.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Are there any other issues? Basically, the duties of this committee are to look at the legislation and see whether the legislation has worked in putting this new governance model into the racing industry. Are there any other areas that you have concerns about?

**Mr Deadman:** I think representation of the harness racing industry on the board has not been great. I take on board from the earlier discussions there has been a situation where in this case Ross Cooper has been restricted in his representation of harness racing because of his activities on the board. Basically he has got the blinkers on and he has got to do what he has got to do. The perception is that harness racing is not well represented. Ross was a very strong supporter at the recent meeting with the York Harness Racing Club and the executive of RWWA over this issue and he was fully supportive of the race club. We were going to get lumped with a sand track for jog work here, and it was something we did not want. I had to point out in the strongest possible terms that it was a waste of industry money, and I got strong support from Ross, but the agreement right from the word go was that we were going to get a fast work track to replace our racing track down here. So that was one of the good things I could say about Ross.

[11.15 am]

**The CHAIRMAN:** So that was one instance where consultation did work and you were able to have your message listened to.

**Mr Deadman:** It was a hard fight. We were going to get fobbed off with something we did not want; I can tell you that. In reality, we still have not got anywhere closer to what we require but at least it is a head start. We have got a guarantee of \$150 000 from RWWA and the rest is yet to come.

**The CHAIRMAN:** There has been some suggestions that the industry representatives on the board might be better sitting below the board and then you would have a board of non-industry people who are people with expertise in commerce and finance and all that sort of thing. Then you would have your industry people below it, and they would be the people that the clubs at grassroots level could have regular dialogue with. Have you thought about that model?

**Mr Deadman:** Yes. Mr Chairman, in reality we are probably a bit better off than the thoroughbred racing. Consultancy has improved; there is no doubt about it. One of the things I have got to add, unfortunately, is that when RWWA first came into power they inherited a lot of staff from WATA; and a lot of the activities from RWWA have been adopted by WATA, and there was just the same old same old. The situation of programming, handicapping and everything is still one of the strongest arguing points in the industry, and we have been hammering at that through the other industry bodies which I represent as secretary. I must say that they are now addressing the fact and they are consulting more with programming, handicapping and race dates. We have only just had them released a matter of days ago and they are calling meetings. There is a structure now within RWWA, you have Sky clubs and non-Sky clubs. And, as I said, being turnover driven, and probably to an extent rightly so, because that is where the dollars are coming in, it has taken over the industry. As I said, the benefits are there for RWWA but not necessarily in country towns. The consultation is better, but it really needs to be improved. They have got to come back to the people who in the long term are going to get the benefits, and get them back.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** If we can keep in the same area, earlier on RWWA came up with a plan for the thoroughbred industry. There was talk about a trotting plan for years. Have you ever seen a trotting plan?

**Mr Deadman:** No. RWWA has just released a strategic review, which we have just had elements off, but we have not had the actual document released at the moment. But from what we understand, venue fees at Gloucester Park are going to be reduced because they race country racing at

Gloucester Park on Tuesdays. They are now going to get venue fees, which is half of—they are going to get country situations racing at Gloucester Park in future. We do not really know the full kit and caboodle of it. We do not know what sort of impact it has had, other than Geraldton losing meetings and Williams losing a meeting at this stage. That is all we have really got.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** What about input into a plan that is coming out?

**Mr Deadman:** That will come to industry once it is released. I understand it is going to be next week released to industry and then they will get the feedback from there. So whether they take notice of it or not, I guess —

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** Before Matt has a go, I am just a little interested because you are in a bit of a unique situation where you have got Northam, yourself and the dogs all operating from one venue, and it does not happen anywhere else in Western Australia. Is that a workable process? Is there trouble with that? Are there infrastructure issues?

**Mr Gray:** Yes.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** Ground management issues?

**Mr Deadman:** Yes. Mervyn and myself are both on the Northam committee, as you would understand, not necessarily just representing York interest. But there are issues. As you have got with any dual-code situation, there will be issues here no doubt if we do get our own training facility up and about. Every club—you know what they are like—they build fences around them and that is it, and they are protective of their product, and that is understandably so. But I guess it is just management of those issues that keeps them going. So I think every club has got to try to work in together instead of working against each other.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** Are they issues for a body like WAGRA, or that more a local management issue?

**Mr Gray:** I think local management. Yes, definitely. Mr Trenorden, the major one over there seems to be the dogs, mainly with the training times and things like that and working on the tracks; but with the committee from Northam and the chaps from the dogs, they have worked in together. They have a process in place now which is hopefully going to work in the long term. One of the things was that the chap used to go down and get the dog track ready for trials and he would get out there with his tractor and there would be horses still on the track; and that was a problem. But now that has been rectified. He has been given set times. Trainers of horses know what time he is going to be there. He is not allowed to start beforehand and we can be off the track before he does.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** It is just interesting. I asked a question earlier on in respect of the number of meetings that you and Northam have. The four Sky meetings that you do have, is it anticipated in the medium to long term that you may be looking at either increasing that at the expense of the Northam club or do you envisage Northam becoming more of a larger regional centre for harness racing in the overall context of the whole locality and possibly you having six, eight or 10, or going back to what you might have even had 15, 20 years ago. Where do you stand in relation to the number of meetings that you currently have and where you would like to go in the future?

**Mr Deadman:** I think the issue surrounds the financial problems that RWWA have been confronted with in last year with product fees and TAB pooling. I think there is something like \$18 million that they have got to find, and that, of course, puts constraints on the distribution which affects your stake management. We have got no intent of eating into Northam's meeting whatsoever.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** I am mindful of the fact, though, that a number of other closures have occurred over the years, if you go out to places like Wyalkatchem and the like. But we heard from the York racing representatives today and the fact that this area is now going to become or is some sort of an equine precinct, I am just mindful of the fact that Northam being, if

you like, the regional growth centre—I think, Max, you would agree with me there—that there maybe is the capacity down the track to increase the number of meetings. Money aside at this particular point in time, is that something that you would be hoping for to increase the overall presence of harness racing in this particular locality?

**Mr Deadman:** Yes. Again, Mr Benson-Lidholm, we have raced successfully for a long time.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** I realise that.

**Mr Deadman:** We know how to do it right. And, clearly, if we could get more meetings, we would jump at them. So in reality, while not affecting anything to do with the operations of the Northam club, we would like to get more meetings, in a nutshell, yes.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** I am also mindful of the consultation point that you made earlier on and the capacity to appeal. When you were offered the four meetings, what was the club's response to that? Was it basically: take the four meetings and go with it, or did you make any comments to RWWA or communicate with them in that respect?

**Mr Deadman:** Yes, we did. Clearly we wanted more. As I said, if a bank account showed a deficit and we were just hanging in there, it would be a different scenario. But we had four meetings pushed on us and had no option but to take them, and that was clearly it.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** Can I just keep it in that context. So to the east you used to have six, maybe seven clubs going back 20 years?

**Mr Gray:** Gosh, yes. Seven, at least.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** Yes, and now you have got two?

**Mr Deadman:** Kellerberrin. The Golden Mile is cocooned but it is still north east. You have got Kellerberrin, which is central Wheatbelt; York and Northam, given that Geraldton is in —

**The CHAIRMAN:** So you have only got three tracks?

**Mr Gray:** Three tracks, yes.

**Mr Deadman:** And Cunderdin is still a training facility, yes, but not racing.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** So what effect has that had? If you take the view that you see the future from remembering the past, what do you think the future is for trots in this central Wheatbelt area?

**Mr Flynn:** If I can make a quick comment.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes.

**Mr Flynn:** As far as the future not only for harness but the thoroughbred code as well, there has to be a place where newcomers of the industry can set their seats, I suppose, for a better word. In my early days in harness racing, when I first started off I used to go what they call the non-TABs, which was the Wyalkatchems and the trainings. And from there I learnt the industry as a whole as far as being a trainer, a horse person and a reins person at the given time. Once you progressed up the ladder, then you would get better horses to race at, say, a Northam or a Gloucester Park, but without the country facilities being around, because it is a cheaper avenue for younger people in both codes to set up and to try to obtain a name for themselves. It is classic for me personally at the moment because I got injured some 18 months ago and I have really been out of the limelight, for want of a better word, in both codes. Now I am just coming back in, but to obtain the confidence of owners or to get the owners that I used to have back is very, very hard. So really the country scenario must stay for the benefit of both codes because it is a learning curve for everyone. It gets everyone involved in the industry, plus also it gives back to the country community themselves where even with the onset of turf racing coming back here in September, the amount of community interest as far as business people saying, "We are looking at getting a horse" or "Do you know how



we can get involved in a horse?” So if country racing and pacing was to disappear, the industry folds and, really, it is the backbone of the pinnacle, which is Gloucester Park. You have got to have a base. You cannot build a house roof first; you have to start from the basics.

**The CHAIRMAN:** On that point, you talked about Gloucester Park. Do you think the authorities have become a bit too city-centric, and Gloucester Park in catering for country handicapped horses, or whatever you call it, is eating into an area where country clubs used to cater for?

**Mr Flynn:** Personally, I believe it is.

**Mr Deadman:** Looking at it in reality, Mr McGrath, the situation is that you have got Pinjarra, which is an excellent track—probably the state’s best track—racing, turning as much, if not better turnover than Gloucester Park, probably running better races for less. They get a venue fee of \$5 500 and you have got Gloucester Park getting \$11 000 venue fee for the rest and far more overheads. And I asked the question of RWWA why this was so, right at the inception of RWWA; and they said that they have got to prop them up. So it just did not make sense. Country racing should have gone back to the country clubs and the industry would have saved money. I think that is about to happen with this new process under the review. I think Gloucester Park is going to come back into the fold and race as a country club. But as long as you have got major centres like Pinjarra that can race successfully and have a good product, they should be favoured, and favoured strongly.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** In your perception—I know you have been looking at the industry for a long time—is Gloucester Park on Mondays?

**Mr Deadman:** Mondays and odd Tuesdays

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** The odd Tuesdays. That is run at a loss; is that your view?

**Mr Gray:** The turnovers are probably marginally better if it went to any other club bar Pinjarra, but in reality their overheads are far too high.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** Does it run in the red or does it run in the black?

**Mr Gray:** I would say at the moment it is running in the red very badly.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is that because they cannot use volunteer staff?

**Mr Gray:** No, everybody that does something at Gloucester Park is paid for what they do.

**The CHAIRMAN:** So there could be an argument for some of those meetings going to a country track.

**Mr Gray:** Absolutely!

**The CHAIRMAN:** Where volunteers could do the work and the same sort of horses could race.

**Mr Deadman:** Yes, but in fairness a lot of the clubs nowadays that are run professionally, your major regionals do pay for most of the people. The smaller community clubs are volunteer-based clubs but the bigger clubs are forced to put on a professional show, and they need to pay staff and they need the consistency of staff being there. So it is a different era now.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** In terms of your ability to compete with, say, Gloucester Park on a Tuesday basis, and places like Pinjarra and Bunbury, can you tell us something about the classes of horses that race at Northam and the sorts of stakes that are paid, just for the record?

**Mr Deadman:** Very similar type horses would race at the major regional clubs. Again, it is the geography. If you have got Bunbury trainers, obviously they are going to wait around to run their horses to travel less. They will run at Bunbury or Harvey, or Pinjarra maybe. Metropolitan trainers will come to Northam. The situation is travel and stake money of course, but all clubs are paying similar stake money for Sky meetings. So, yes, it is a pretty consistent class of horse that races there. Pinjarra gets the outstanding horses—there is no doubt about it—because of the quality of the track. It is the best track by far—probably in Australia in reality.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** I will ask you but, again, I will ask Northam when we get there: Clearly, Northam would have a track problem?

[11.30 am]

**Mr Deadman:** Northam track has suffered now for some years, and perhaps more, the curator of tracks than anyone else. It is just up to the standard of a major regional track. For York people using it as a training facility, it is nowhere near the surface we had on our old track here. It really needs a refurbishment. I do not know whether you know, but it has almost been done in half measures. Half the track was done about 10 years ago and then another half done, and the drainage was a problem. Jesse does a reasonable job in producing it on race nights, but it is not a good track for a major regional. It is not up to standard.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** We will wait until we get to Northam, obviously, but you are a user of Northam.

**Mr Gray:** Yes.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** So you would be looking for a different configuration of track, I presume, a different construction of track?

**Mr Gray:** For here?

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** No, for your track now, Northam?

**Mr Flynn:** No. I think it would be a more consistent surface. I do not use Northam track because I have got my own facilities. But when I was going to trials over there the topping was very inconsistent. There were soft spots, hard spots and half the track actually moved underfoot. It is not a good thing to have, especially if you have a decent horse and you want to keep him sound or whatever. But the make-up of the track itself, the topping they have got on it, it ranges

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** What I am trying to get to is you have been forced into a situation where your home track is now Northam.

**Mr Gray:** Yes.

**Mr Flynn:** Yes.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** So the question is, in a nutshell: is Northam up to scratch?

**Mr Gray:** No.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** To what extent then have clubs such as York Harness Racing Club conveyed the message to RWWA?

**Mr Gray:** It is fully aware of it.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** What sort of response have you had from them?

**Mr Gray:** No money. Clearly, it is a matter of finance. A track refurbishment like Northam would run into the hundreds of thousands, I am sure, because they have got to start from base up, and there just is not the funds around. So it is grin and bear it or find the money yourself. That is the attitude at the moment, which is quite sad.

**Mr Deadman:** Approximately six months ago we had a curator come up from Pinjarra. He is considered to be the best in the state and he came up and had a look at it and said that the track as it is now cannot be improved under the existing conditions; it needs a major overhaul. That message went back to RWWA, and the result was that no, there is no money available. We can do little top ups here and there, but you will not get anything in the major things for —

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** When you say it needs improving, are you talking about cambering or are you talking about the —

**Mr Gray:** The consistency of the track.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** Right; okay.

**Mr Gray:** Yes, the whole lot needs to be ripped up and re-laid.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** I think when we get there they will say they need to do the whole thing. So one thing just put in context for us, as our job is not managing clubs but we are looking at the act. One thing that strikes me in that proposal and with others is that you get this forced situation but there is no quid pro quo in it. You have moved to Northam, but you have not got better conditions; that is, the infrastructure and the funds have not followed to give you a better home than you had before

**Mr Flynn:** No.

**Mr Deadman:** We are going to remain a viable club for a long time but we are not doing anything to improve our surroundings. What we have got to do, and as Pat alluded to earlier, was make an attractive infrastructure to attract the industry to grow in the York area. I mean they are still going to race at Northam, which is 35 clicks away. So in real terms, if they can settle in York, train in York, race at Northam and surrounding clubs, we can see a good, real, rosy future.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** So the training track is vital?

**Mr Gray:** Absolutely!

**Mr Flynn:** It is.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Just one thing we did not ask you was how much will this track cost?

**Mr Flynn:** The pricing I had done nearly 12 months ago now in round figures would be \$300 000.

**The CHAIRMAN:** To rails and everything?

**Mr Flynn:** Yes.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** I just want to continue the line of discussion on RWWA and RWWA's responsibility in relation to the Northam set up. As far as you gentlemen are concerned, are there any occupational health and safety issues that exist over there, given that obviously there was a bit of an issue with this particular racetrack here in terms of cambering? Are there any particular issues that you have as people involved in the industry?

**Mr Deadman:** No, not to the extent where it is going to be life threatening. The track, as I say, is a major regional and if you look at major regionals you go straight to Pinjarra and look at the quality of what they have got down there. Every major regional track should be up to that standard. Northam has got the best stabling set-up you will ever see

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** A Taj Mahal.

**Mr Deadman:** It is brilliant; absolutely brilliant, if you know what I mean. It is just crazy —

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** What about running rails and things of that nature?

**Mr Gray:** No, we race with flexi poles in harness racing. It is not a problem whatsoever as far as it goes. As I say, the condition of the track needs to be improved to a Pinjarra standard and it will be perfect. It would also be perfect to get a 1 000-metre track there, which would be difficult. That would make it a really good centre.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** Just for the record, who put the money into Pinjarra?

**Mr Deadman:** In terms of their infrastructure, I understand it was royalties for regions and there was some input from RWWA. That is what I understand.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Are there any other points that you would like to make?

**Mr Deadman:** One was raised earlier, Mr Chairman, the days of the racecourse development trust, particularly in harness racing. Industry had an opportunity to judge what was or was not needed by a certain club. An application was made by a club. It went through WACHRA and went through a

process where we either said no, yes or whatever. We have lost that ability now. If you go to Pinjarra, a beautiful track, go and have a look at their stables—we have got better stables sitting at the York track here now—they are absolute rubbish. If you look at Northam, they have got a great stabling facility and an awful track. So these are the situations that really would have been considered by the industry, and not RWWA, and I am very critical of a lot of desk decisions that are made by RWWA where people have not gone to the extent of coming to the industry to find out more.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** I can see that you, Mr Chairman, have got the closing statement out!

**The CHAIRMAN:** We have got to find our way to Northam; I got lost last time!

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** I barely know where it is! As a last hurrah in your submission, can we have one last go at this representation process? If you three were the people designing a process that does all those things we just talked about for nearly an hour or whatever, what is the representation model we need?

**Mr Deadman:** If I may, gentlemen. Through WACHRA we have discussed this for 12 months. There are a lot of clubs out there that are forced to grab people off the street and put them in the job as secretary, treasurer or whatever it might be, a president thrown in or whatever. They are unstable. The proposal we put to RWWA was: give us a country liaison officer, pay him a figure of whatever, let him be the roving ranger to go to every club, sort out the problem, see if they are functioning properly so that you do not all of a sudden get a club saying, “We’re a hundred grand in debt.” A troubleshooter; that’s what we want, and it has been on the table now with RWWA for some time. We wanted the representation of that then back to industry, perhaps to WACTA, or whatever, the harness racing consultative group, and then feed that back to RWWA. We wanted that process.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** But how would you get it back into RWWA?

**Mr Deadman:** Through the industry bodies. The harness racing consultative group meets, and that is at the representation of all the groups within the harness racing industry. So then that goes to either it is policy or not policy. That is the recommendation from that group to RWWA. So that is the structure we have at the moment. I do not believe the capacity—which Ross Cooper is now filling and is doing the job 100 per cent—the perception by most clubs is that it is being done, but not done with efficiency to represent the feelings of all clubs.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** A few months ago I was down in my colleague Matt’s territory in Albany, and a fair few other places since then, and they were stating that they would like a process like I said to York—Beverley I might add —

**Mr Gray:** Not now. They have changed.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** Not now, that is right. That is part of the problem. But having a process where you do meet as an organisation and having a function that guarantees those decisions into the board; whereas at the moment you can still have your meeting and you can still give it to your board of representatives, but it does not mean it actually gets to the board.

**Mr Deadman:** No, not really, because as I said, Ross puts the blinkers on to a degree —this is Ross Cooper—where he is guided by what he has got to do as board member for the benefit of the industry overall. He is there for the racing industry, not specifically harness racing. So a lot of the club problems singularly are not addressed. This is where the point I made earlier that a desk decision might be made and goes into action, which does not necessarily benefit the club or the industry, and there is no argument put to or fro, and that is the sad part about. But if they addressed the proper industry groups in a manner where it could be relayed in a different language, if you like, to the people out there, it would work a lot better.

[11:40 am]

**The CHAIRMAN:** Just quickly on that subject: does RWWA send people out to the clubs?

**Mr Flynn:** No.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Do clubs get regular visits from RWWA people?

**Mr Flynn:** None, whatsoever.

**Mr Gray:** If I could just say: last year the chairman of RWWA, Richard Burt, came out and spoke to us as a group in Northam. It was very proactive, and I think some of the best information came back. One of his comments was that the board does not always hear the grassroots-level information passed through to them; it is filtered before it gets there, and that is why he actually took on the role of coming around. I found that one a very progressive meeting, and I would like to see a lot more of them.

**Mr Flynn:** If I could elaborate on that a little further, my own perception is that at the moment RWWA and the board in general is made up of policy makers and managers. There has got to be someone in the middle who actually can speak to both parties because it is very hard for clubs in general, be it a WACTA situation or an individual club, to actually talk to people in the policy region or the management region.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** The motivation for this bill—I am just giving my point of view here because a lot of people would disagree with me—overwhelmingly I thought at the time, was the principal club argument. So you had Perth racing at Gloucester Park and the argument was they had too much of the industry. Would you still say that Gloucester Park has too much of the industry?

**Mr Flynn:** To a degree, yes.

**Mr Gray:** Yes.

**Mr Flynn:** It is not as strong as what it used to be, but it is still there.

**Mr Deadman:** It is essential that Gloucester Park is successful. It is the heart of harness racing in this state. It runs the Inter Dominion series. Whether it is a management issue, I do not know, but they have been running at pretty close to a borderline success for a long time, and with the new release of this latest strategic plan for harness racing they are going to suffer even more. I cannot comment on how their operations run, but they are certainly going to have to address a few of their problems in a very serious manner.

**The CHAIRMAN:** It is obviously not a top-secret document, the new plan that is being released next week, because you know about it.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** It was secret enough; I did not know about it!

**Mr Gray:** No, it is a preview. It was supposed to have been released in December but various things have happened. We do not know it in its entirety.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Are there any other points you would like to make before we wind up?

**Mr Gray:** The key one that I have is that harness racing as a total package seems to be the third of the three groups, and seems to be the lesser model. One of the things that annoyed me at our last meeting with RWWA management was with regard to this track where we went to chase up for a fast work track. The comment came back was that, “Okay we finally agreed after all our discussions, but you will not get that until we have finished with the York Turf Club.” To my way of thinking, I cannot see why; the money is set aside to get started. We have the facility once it goes through council, which is all we are waiting on now, and just say, for example, it was done by the end of April, I cannot see why they would not allow us to go in and do that. In this way we are now waiting until after the September meetings, I think, it was said, before they will start even looking at doing anything. That is another six months away before we can even contemplate starting, and your earthworks comes and before you know it Christmas is here and we are into the next year. Our members here and our trainers are not very happy at the moment with us because they are having to

travel to Northam to do their fast work. It is getting up every one's nose, to be perfectly honest, but RWWA just do not seem to see the urgency in what they are doing to us.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** I was born and bred in Wyalkatchem, so I will declare that early! In my youth there were trainers of standard-bred horses all through that area. I still have strong contacts up there, and there are very few there now. How many trainers do you have now?

**Mr Gray:** In York?

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr Gray:** Approximately 12.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** Do you fear those contracting?

**Mr Deadman:** Yes.

**Mr Gray:** They will under circumstances currently. There are already a couple talking about pulling out now. I must be honest in ourselves; we have talked about in the next 12 months we will probably be pulling out.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** For what reason?

**Mr Gray:** Just a lack of facilities. That may change if we get a decent track here in a hurry, but that is just generally the people. One of the women who trains here had six horses or thereabouts; she is down to one or two now. She is losing interest and before long she will lose those.

**Mr Deadman:** You have got to look at the aspect of not only travel but time loss. We are getting up at four in the morning to work horses at Northam and the cost factor is astronomical, with fuel. But you are losing half a day, so if you have got a team of horses, it is just so difficult; and you are hobbling three times a week. But the other factor is, and it is a concern to Northam, is that we are starting to butcher their track. It is not a good track to work on in the mornings anyway, but in reality the number of five or six—I do not know how many there was over there this morning—but there are more York horses using the Northam track than Northam horses currently.

**The CHAIRMAN:** From your talks with the York Turf Club, do you think they would have any problems with you getting your track started as quickly as possible?

**Mr Gray:** I do not know.

**Mr Flynn:** I think, going on that discussion we had with RWWA a few weeks ago, they are pretty adamant on sort of holding back until such time as everything is completed on the turf side of things.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes, but the York jockey club or the York Turf Club, what is their view on it?

**Mr Flynn:** In informal discussions there is not a problem with starting now. But it is like a lot of things; if you have not got the money, you cannot do too much.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** One last question, Ken: how much use does Cunderdin get? It used to be a famous place for trotters once.

**Mr Deadman:** It was a good track, and I would say there are probably two families up there; the Elliotts, who are prominent, probably have got about a dozen horses between them. So I do not know how much they actually use their track or whether they just utilise it for jog work. I really do not know.

**Hon MAX TRENORDEN:** We had some famous horses come out of Cunderdin.

**Mr Gray:** Dainty's Daughter for one.

**The CHAIRMAN:** So a track here would be used a lot more than the track at Cunderdin?

**Mr Gray:** Yes, absolutely!

**The CHAIRMAN:** All right. Thank you for appearing before the committee today. 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. Thank you, gentlemen.

**The Witnesses:** Thank you.

**Hearing concluded at 11.47 am**