

**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 PERTH
FRIDAY, 30 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 1.00 pm

SIMONETTE, MR DAVID VINCENT

Chief Executive Officer, Western Australian Greyhound Racing Association,

examined:

The CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on the Review of the Racing and Wagering WA Acts, I would like to thank you for your appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in its inquiry into the Racing and Wagering Western Australia acts. You would have seen a copy of the committee's specific terms of reference. For the benefit of Hansard and those observing, I would like to introduce myself and the other members of the committee present today. I am John McGrath, MLA, the Chair. On my left is Hon Max Trenorden, MLC, who is the Deputy Chairman. Fellow members are Hon Alyssa Hayden, MLC, and Peter Watson, MLA. The 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 document during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record.

Before we proceed, I also need to ask you a series of questions. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

Mr Simonette: Yes, sir.

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

Mr Simonette: Yes, I do.

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

Mr Simonette: Yes, I have.

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

Mr Simonette: No.

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

Mr Simonette: No, thank you.

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

Mr Simonette: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Thanks again for your attendance, and we apologise for the last meeting we had planned, but there was a funeral that came on at very short notice that some of the members had to

attend, and we just could not hold it. Could you start by telling us a little about the WA Greyhound Racing Association and also the governance body of the actual association and the fact that you are actually a public servant and how this comes about, which is a bit extraordinary in terms of the other codes?

Mr Simonette: Sure. Greyhound racing started in December 1974 at Cannington, and it came after a long battle by the pioneers to get greyhound racing going. We had the Northam club, which began in 1971 and only got their track in 1996.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: I was vice-chairman.

Mr Simonette: We certainly recognised Mr Trenorden's name on many occasions. I suppose that the early pioneers were very well meaning but probably did not have the political know-how to get the legislation and all the things that they needed to get in place up and going. So it took greyhound racing a long time to get going, but once it did, the successful people were the Canning Greyhound Racing Association, which was the first administrator of the sport. Things were very good in the early days. They had 15 000-people and 10 000-people crowds and there was a much different situation, I suppose, back in the early 70s than what it is today in terms of competition for night sports. It found its way into some trouble by about 81 because, I suppose, they could not service the debt levels that they had. There were big repayments on the premises at Cannington, basically taken out by the Canning Ag' Society, who were really the formation of the first Canning Greyhound Racing Association. So by 81 they were in a little bit of pain. The government stepped in and helped out and also asked for the organisation to be restructured. There were a number of issues in the early 80s, but we became a statutory authority of the government, basically to make sure that the government money put in at the time was well spent.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you think that is the best model going forward for the running of greyhounds?

Mr Simonette: It is probably a little bit strange, because we are in the racing, entertainment, gaming side of things. We are not really a public service in that sense. We have to react to be aggressive in the marketplace to a different market than, say, maybe what the public works department would have to react to. It is certainly a question that we have been addressing as a committee ourselves. Under the strategic plan that RWWA put out, they also raised as an issue: is that the best governance model going forward? We have had discussions with our minister. He has basically put the question to us: what do you think is the best model? We have done some studies and we are in dialogue with him now. I think the future is that we will not be a government authority, but whether it is two years, five years or 10 years —

The CHAIRMAN: Can you tell us what you think is the best model?

Mr Simonette: Probably some sort of company limited by guarantee. We are looking at other models, including those that operate at Sandown Park and Angle Park. Again, we need to finetune those areas. At this point we have not made a decision on what is our preference.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Would it look similar to what you have now, but you would not have the ties to government for administration procedure?

Mr Simonette: Basically. We still have GOSAC employees who are employed under a government award. We report to the minister and we submit an annual report to Parliament. Obviously we have to fit in with the requirements of normal government. To be honest, it does not get in our way all that much. We are left to run our own business. I think we do it very well. The minister is there to assist and give guidance. Jon Nichols and Mr Waldron do that very well. They normally do not interfere in our affairs, but they are there to help at all times.

The CHAIRMAN: You refer to the Avon Valley Greyhound Racing Association in your submission, which is the association Mr Trenorden was involved in. You call it an affiliated club. Can you tell us about that arrangement?

Mr Simonette: Greyhounds WA has the licence to operate three venues—Mandurah, Cannington and Northam. The Avon Valley Greyhound Racing Association is made up of volunteers. It has a committee and people who perform race day functions. They look after their own trials. They do not receive directly an allocation of funds from RWWA. That money comes through us as the peak body. We give money to the Northam club whenever we can. We have a great relationship with AVGRA. It is not set up to be an admin organisation. The president is very much a leader by doing things rather than a paperwork person. We look after the paperwork side of things. We allow Mr Caruana and his team to look after the day-to-day preparation of the track, fundraising and maintenance of the venue. We assist in financial ways. If they run into any bother, we help them out as much as we can.

The CHAIRMAN: Do they have their own bank account?

Mr Simonette: Yes, they are an incorporated body. They run their own accounts. We pay them a meeting fee, or a subsidy to race each time they have an event. We also help them out with capital grants and so forth.

The CHAIRMAN: In that regard, you have retained principal club status.

Mr Simonette: Pretty much.

The CHAIRMAN: What is your relationship with Mandurah?

Mr Simonette: It is the same thing.

The CHAIRMAN: So you provide the funding—it is channelled through you to Mandurah?

Mr Simonette: Correct. We treat Mandurah, Cannington and Northam under the one umbrella.

The CHAIRMAN: How is Mandurah going?

Mr Simonette: It is going well. We have just had a three-week shutdown period to allow us to reshape the rail, upgrade the septic and make a few changes to the track. We upgraded the track in about 2006, but a few things needed to be ironed out. We have just done that. Currently all the racing has been at Cannington, which has been a bit of fun. We have had four race meetings at Cannington and one at Northam. All the public trials have obviously also moved to Cannington. We are looking at about 300 trials over three days. It is mayhem out there.

The CHAIRMAN: Speaking of Cannington, in the past year or two there were whispers within RWWA that maybe Cannington should close down and Mandurah should be the centre for greyhound racing in Western Australia. That was because of some issues you have with an ongoing lease with the Canning Agricultural Society. Can you provide the background to that and explain at what stage you are with that?

Mr Simonette: When the lease was taken out in 1981 it was done in three 30-year segments. The first 30 years expires in July 2011. The society said it would prefer us not to take out an option for the second 30 years and that it would be in our best interest to move to what is called the spare land at the back, or the trotting track land. Cannington comprises about 13 hectares of which currently we occupy probably seven. However, there is another five hectares at the back that is used for occasional trotting training. The thought is that the land at the front is very valuable. It fronts Albany Highway and is over the road from Carousel. We will always be in a battle with the landlord about what the land is really worth and what we are prepared, or can afford, to pay for it. We understand that argument, because on a ground rental basis the land is probably worth, maybe, four times the amount we currently pay. Our facility there is old. It was built in 1974. It is not falling apart, but the cobwebs are doing a good job in holding it together. We understand that if we were to stay another 30 years or even five or 10 years that we would be responsible for the maintenance of the infrastructure, because that is part of the deal. We have a landlord who would prefer us not to be there, but has offered us an alternative, which is the land at the back, on a 60-year licence agreement and the prospect of being in a rent review situation, as currently we are,

every five years—the rent is an agreed amount between the two parties. History will tell you that the two parties have never agreed on how the rent should be fixed. We could see ourselves being in arbitration every five years if, indeed, we were there for the next 30 years. It remains a possibility, because legally we still have the option of another 30 years. In the long term that land will become more expensive and will be beyond our means.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: Are there other sites you are looking at?

Mr Simonette: We have done a lot of looking over the past four or five years, certainly since I have been in this position and there are not a lot of alternatives for us.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: Have you looked at Gloucester Park?

Mr Simonette: Gloucester Park was discussed at some stage. There would perhaps be an opportunity to go there in some arrangement. It certainly would not be our preference. We believe we deserve a stand-alone venue; we believe our patrons and industry deserve a stand-alone venue. That would be our preference and what we have worked passionately for. We are not silly enough to turn our back on a fallback position—whether it be Mandurah or Gloucester Park or some lovely council that wants to help us out. We basically do not have sufficient funds to acquire land off our own bat and we certainly are not in a position to afford massive rentals to go anywhere within the metropolitan area that would be suitable for greyhound racing. It is a night sport and has trials during the day. It is not necessarily a sport that a council would rush to put up their hand to assist. Having said that, greyhound racing is a great employer of people. We have 150 to 200 casuals on our books who work each week and a full-time staff of 40 people.

[1.20 pm]

We have given Cannington its badge and its personality for many, many years, even before Westfield Carousel came along, so there are a lot of things that Cannington gives us. It is our spiritual home and people feel very passionate about it. If you take out the passion and look at it in a very practical sense, Cannington provides the mainstay of training as well as the focus of racing. So take Cannington out of the equation, where are people going to trial their dogs, where are people going to race their dogs, and where are people going to get their first experience of greyhound racing? I do not think the answer is Mandurah.

The CHAIRMAN: Because you have a good catchment south of Cannington, do you not, in that Gosnells area and Kenwick area?

Mr Simonette: Absolutely; and our research, even though it is old now, said that 80 per cent of our clients or patrons are coming from within a 20-kilometre band, which probably makes sense. It is an area that is not necessarily rich or affluent, so it serves its purpose really well for the clients and the patrons we get. We are very proud of that. We are happy to say that younger people and older people can come to our place and feel happy to be a part of that. We are proud of that. We do not want to be elitist; we want to be as accessible as we possibly can to everybody. That is why we do things like Perth Cup night; it is a free entry night. All our entertainment is always free. We want to make it affordable and accessible. We do not want to be making huge amounts of money. That is not our charter. Our charter is to provide the best facilities for people to enjoy our sport that we all love.

The CHAIRMAN: What would it cost to build the new venue, given that the council will obviously give you a long lease of the land?

Mr Simonette: It is not the actual council; it is the Canning agricultural society. It is giving us a 60-year licence agreement. The rent is 1.75 per cent of the unimproved value of the land. If the land is valued at \$10 million, we have to pay \$175 000 per year. We have that agreement for 60 years, so the land is available to us. To put what we need to put on there—we have done extensive work in terms of conceptual design; we have quantity surveyed it and reviewed it all—it comes to the

staggering total of \$19.2 million. We have \$3 million in the bank. My maths is not that good, but we are a long way from getting \$19.2 million.

The CHAIRMAN: Your industry is also at a period in its history when your turnover levels are probably at unprecedented highs. You actually generate more revenue for the TAB than what you get back, I believe, in stake money allocations. How important are you to the racing industry—to the overall thoroughbred, harness and greyhound industry?

Mr Simonette: I think we are very, very important, obviously. Just to give you some figures, which hopefully back up that, we provide 37 per cent of the starters for racing in WA. We provide 43 per cent of the races. So, in other words, we are providing more product than thoroughbreds; we are providing more product than harness. We take up only five per cent of the tracks, and that includes Northam, which races only 26 times a year. To give you some idea where we fit in, we take less than 11 per cent of the stakes. So producing 37 per cent of the starters, 43 per cent of the races, on five per cent of the infrastructure, we take 11 per cent of the stakes. We have a market share of 16 per cent of the local WA TAB turnover, but we receive only 12.5 per cent distribution back.

The CHAIRMAN: And you would have a much higher percentage overall, would you, or not, Australia-wide?

Mr Simonette: Australia-wide, I think the market share roughly of greyhound racing is always about 25 per cent, but the way the RWWA system works, which is probably a fair system, we cannot lay claim to any fame for what happens in the eastern states. If there is a race at Geelong and the local punter bets on it, Greyhounds WA does not receive anything, which I think is a fair thing because we do not contribute to the Geelong product.

The CHAIRMAN: And also your industry is a lot more cost effective. You do not have to have floats and things like that to take horses to the meetings.

Mr Simonette: The hobbyist and the professional can compete on equal terms. I was the best trainer in Mt Lawley for 20 years.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Good grief. There must have been a lot of competition!

Mr Simonette: There was; there was none. But I had two kennels in the backyard at my mum and dad's place, which are still there. I was able to have dogs that were more than competitive and won really good races. It is nice to be able to have that entry level into the sport. We have people like Linda Britton and the real elite of the sport who have 80 dogs and train at a different level, but they can still run around in any race, a maiden or a Perth Cup, and still be given a very similar chance.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Can I just get back to the core of your argument here? The interesting point, I think, in your submission is that in the past five years you have got only \$750 000 of grant money, which is two per cent. I guess some of that argument may be because of the fact that there is a question mark over your Cannington facilities, but I know that the Northam people have wanted lights for years, and I have no doubt there are other demands there as well.

Mr Simonette: Sure.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: How do you think that should happen? We are reviewing an act; that is what we are doing. So we are meant to be setting up this act to operate for years to come. There is a question mark in all three codes about infrastructure, and a significant one for you. How should we handle that?

Mr Simonette: With the infrastructure, and since we have put in my submission, I should say as well that Northam did receive about \$42 000 for a tractor. So, as a code, we have received \$792 000 since the introduction of RWWA. Of that \$792 000, \$750 000 went towards the Mandurah development, to which Greyhounds WA contributed another \$3.1 million. So we have been very self-sufficient in this whole process. Whether that is my fault or whether I read the play wrong or whether indeed I was correct, our view is that we should take responsibility and pay for things that

we believe there is a need for and that we can afford to do. So our view is never to go to RWWA cap in hand, because we always knew that come 2011 the critical question would be: how do we retain a metropolitan track? Hopefully, that is Cannington, but in lieu of Cannington, where else should it be or where else can it be? We were under the impression, and certainly given verbal assurance, if you wish, that we would be looked after when it came time for Cannington. A lot of money was given out through government and RWWA—\$31.5 million. I make mention in the submission there that we received less than two per cent of that. However, it was always in the hope that we do the right thing, we do not make noise, we are cooperative, and we continue, hopefully, to work in that spirit; but it seems like we have missed the boat, and unless something can happen dramatically in the next 12 months, unfortunately, I think metropolitan racing is under serious threat.

To answer your question about infrastructure, there are two ways that this could probably happen. Either the distribution model, which is currently in vogue, reflects our performance and we are then able to put money away as a dividend from that performance, which is probably unlikely, or if there is a case for tax reform—and I believe that RWWA will push that, hopefully, with government soon—that money is put away for an infrastructure fund. I do not think that giving it to stake money—all the owners and trainers are going to go, “What?”—is a sustainable way. With the last tax reduction—when I was working for RWWA, I helped put that paper together for that tax reduction—it was said at the time, “We’re not coming back cap in hand to government any more. Hey, this is it.” It was needed at the time, but there was so much money given to it that I wonder if it really had the desired effect longer term. I think that now, certainly in our industry, we have very good stake money, but we do not have the facilities to keep up with that improvement in stake money. Sometimes when stakes are already at a good level, it is like tipping water into a bucket. There is the right level, and the rest just goes into nothingness.

[1.30 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have a representative on the RWWA board?

Mr Simonette: Yes, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: That representative has obviously been fighting your case for a new track?

Mr Simonette: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: If your lease expires next year and you do not have something in place before then, what are you going to do?

Mr Simonette: We are still in negotiation with the landlord and we have found that there has been quite a change in the relationship in the last 18 months—we seem to be getting on so much better. I am pretty sure that the landlord and Greyhounds would come to some agreement on an exit strategy that would not see —

The CHAIRMAN: That might give you a bit of an extension?

Mr Simonette: — greyhound racing turfed out on 27 July 2011, although I have marked that date on the calendar.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you aware of the financial constraints facing the industry as opposed to four or five years ago?

Mr Simonette: Absolutely. We are not expecting RWWA to write us a magic cheque for \$19.2 million.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Because \$19.3 million is what you want!

Mr Simonette: That would be perfect and we could have a party afterwards! We are going to put together a business case, which we are working on now. The model of the business case, I suppose, is that we would like some money from RWWA as seeding money, if you wish, and that we would

like to borrow money, and the rest would come from our reserves. Part of that funding of the borrowings really revolves around our ability to repay the loan, and that is where the distribution model just has to be so right. I am sure that anyone else who has given evidence about this has always gone on and said that they deserve more. My belief is that there has never been a distribution model created, or one likely to be created, which meets the needs of the codes, of individual clubs, or metro versus country versus provincial—you name it. There will never be one that is ideal. In our situation, all we are saying is that we would like sufficient money not just to live on a day-to-day basis; we need to be able to grow our business. That means that we need to look after our industry with facilities, we need to make sure that the facilities are attractive to patrons to come on course, and that we can look after our own future. At the moment we are just, sort of, treading water and we cannot see our way clear; we will never save up enough money to buy our own track, so how can we be inventive to get there?

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: How do your stakes compare with those of the eastern states?

Mr Simonette: Victoria and New South Wales, in terms of city stakes, dominate, but their structures are vastly different. They might have \$4 000, for instance, for a city grade 5 race, which is your basic type of dog. But their provincial stake money is less than what we pay at Mandurah. There is a very big gulf. They like to focus on city, whereas even though there is a still a weight towards city for us, our country and provincial, by Australian standards, are very good.

The CHAIRMAN: What is your city stake?

Mr Simonette: Around about \$3 000 to the winner of the City 5.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you about \$1 000 behind?

Mr Simonette: Yes, \$1 000 or \$1 500, but our industry is satisfied with the stake money. It is funny to say that, but they are satisfied with the stake money. It is about facilities: where do they train their dogs; where do they trial their dogs; where do they race their dogs; where do they come to the track and be proud of the facilities to validate what they do? It is a bizarre occupation, being a greyhound trainer, so you get validated by the fact that on a Saturday night, in front of a big crowd, you win a race. It is very important from that point of view. I think I can speak on behalf of the industry and say that the stake money is good in our business. It could always be better, but we are not here to battle for stakes.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: You are not complaining.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: Would you be looking more down the line of getting a higher percentage for your code to be able to just be sustainable on your own? Obviously you are going to need a loan or money somehow to get your \$19.2 million.

Mr Simonette: I mean there are a couple of ways of doing it. If the distribution model was such that we were getting more than just the subsistence amount to do our basic business, then we could be putting money away for the future. I know that every other club and every other code is competing for the same bucket of money. Our argument is quite simple —

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: But they also get infrastructure money back from RWWA on top of their percentage.

Mr Simonette: They have been, but we have not been. Whether that is our fault because we never came and asked, I do not know. Our real issue is the metropolitan track 2011. This has been something that has been known —

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: Who gave you “the nod and the wink”, as you said, to keep quiet and you will get the new track?

Mr Simonette: No, no, it was not a matter of keeping quiet, but it was just this —

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: “Don’t worry”?

Mr Simonette: “Don’t worry; you’ll be well looked after.”

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: Who said that; RWWA or a minister?

Mr Simonette: No, RWWA said that we would be looked after. I am sure that RWWA would like to look after us. I have no doubt that they are very honourable people who do their job very well. I am sure they would love to be in a situation of four or five years ago when there was a big bucket of money. I understand that the big bucket of money is not there any more, but we have to be practical and pragmatic and say, “If it’s not there, and we really want to have this track, what are we going to do?”

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Can I ask you a few questions about your new facility?

Mr Simonette: Sure.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: We were lucky enough to have a look at Ballarat. They actually said to us at Ballarat trots that they are not a trotting track, they are an entertainment facility that facilitates trots or pacing, or whatever you want to call it. They have a major focus on raising outside money. Could Cannington also have that opportunity? You already have a very good reputation for food and entertainment, and personally, from where I sit, your reputation exceeds the other two in terms of public amenity. Is there an opportunity for you to raise money outside of the mainstream in those areas? Also, have you thought about the Melton-type building, which we have been lucky enough to go and have a look at, which is more of an entertainment facility than a trotting facility?

Mr Simonette: Yes; in fact, my manager of grounds has been over to Melton to have a look at that, because I believe that is the latest prototype of the way to go. We have done a lot of conceptual modelling and we have actually even worked out who is going to sit where in the new building, even though it has no roof. Part of that does have a provision for a veterinary clinic that can operate there for seven days a week if need be. There is also a good opportunity to have a frozen semen insemination clinic there, because at the moment there is only one gentleman whose does that. He is one of our course vets, but he is up at Toodyay. He has already expressed that he would like to have that on our track. We also believe there is a good opportunity for a retail outlet that specialises in animal supplies, pet supplies, meat, because, at the moment, that is scattered everywhere. Although some operators will do it out of the back of a van, we think it is a one-stop shop. There is some opportunity for us to better utilise the facility because we know that the facility sits idle, from a cash perspective, most days of the week.

The CHAIRMAN: Have you spoken to the City of Canning?

Mr Simonette: We have spoken to the City of Canning but only informally. It has been interesting, because Dr Mick Lekias was the mayor and he was extremely supportive of greyhound racing. Joe Delle Donne is now the mayor, who, again, is extremely supportive of greyhound racing. They would do anything to retain the badge of Cannington. Obviously their hands are a little bit tied because the society own the land freehold and we are in a lease agreement. There is only so much—the word is “influence” but it is not intended that way—they can do, but they have shown their respect and support for us to stay there.

The CHAIRMAN: Will the society sell land to you?

Mr Simonette: No, it will not. At the last valuation in 2009, the land was valued at \$41 million.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: But you only want the back half, which I probably worth far less than half.

Mr Simonette: Yes, which is worth, I think, \$11 million.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Is there no state-owned land around Cannington? There is a little bit where there is the white building on the river.

The CHAIRMAN: You are not aware of any state-owned land?

Mr Simonette: Not that I am aware of, no. There is some council land that is vacant at the moment; that may be a consideration. But we are in this memorandum of understanding with the society, so we are hopeful that a good lease could be worked out. It is really more about the raising of the capital rather than the land.

The CHAIRMAN: You think it would have an impact on your code if you did not have a city track?

Mr Simonette: Absolutely. We would be the only greyhound racing organisation not to have a city track in Australia.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: We have had a bit of history where, in the past three or four years, the government or the minister has had some funds that have gone out to industry. The argument about reducing taxation has been put to us. What would be your favoured process? If there was a successful reduction in taxation—which is obviously out of our hands—would you want that money just given to RWWA as a total pool or would you want another development trust such as existed before RWWA? Could you tell us what you would like?

[1.40 pm]

Mr Simonette: It is my view—I have not taken this through the board, but I assume it would be of a similar thought—that it would be similar to the Racecourse Development Trust. It would be separate to RWWA, but on a business case—needs basis, we would put in a submission to those people who are independent of RWWA and independent of racing, if that is possible—obviously still with an understanding of what we are doing—and then let the best case win.

The CHAIRMAN: But is that not putting in another layer of bureaucracy?

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: What is wrong with RWWA? Why would someone need to be independent of RWWA, if RWWA is independent itself?

Mr Simonette: That is a good point, but I just wonder whether we would get much of the same if it was another body.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: Two per cent.

Mr Simonette: Slightly under two per cent! But in fairness, we asked for \$1 million for the Mandurah project and got \$750 000; that was a reasonable outcome. We went to RWWA for a tractor; we got two-thirds of a tractor, so I am not blaming RWWA for —

Mr P.B. WATSON: Did you get the wheels?

Mr Simonette: Some wheels were missing! I am not blaming RWWA because we did not go to it and ask for money. As much as the stats will say it is less than two per cent, maybe we were at fault for not doing that. I have been going there since the first day and saying, “Every time a pencil breaks, we’re going to sharpen that pencil. We’re not going to go back and ask RWWA for a new one.” I worked at RWWA for 18 months when it first began, and I could see all this happening: “Oh, well; suddenly the club’s got no responsibility, RWWA’s there, it’s their problem”. We took a different philosophy; our philosophy is that it is our problem. If we really need help, we will go and see Big Papa, but otherwise we will look after it ourselves.

The CHAIRMAN: Have you been to the minister? Have you spoken to the minister about some direct support?

Mr Simonette: I have had meetings with the minister, but not necessarily about direct support.

The CHAIRMAN: About your future?

Mr Simonette: Yes, he is well aware.

The CHAIRMAN: What has the minister told you?

Mr Simonette: That he is supportive of greyhound racing remaining in the metropolitan sense, but other than that, as a public servant, I need to be careful about what I say. I would say that Mr Waldron is a very supportive minister and is a very good bloke who is very easy to talk to. We have not really called upon him in any formal sense to do anything.

The CHAIRMAN: Under the RWWA model, the minister really does not interfere; it is meant to be fairly independent of government. Do you think the actual model has been good? You said that you worked at RWWA for 18 months or two years.

Mr Simonette: I think the model is fine.

The CHAIRMAN: It is a good form of governance.

Mr Simonette: I have no problem with it. Some of the decisions made by management may be a bit questionable; maybe I do not understand some of the reasoning or maybe it is not expressed in a way that I find palatable, but —

The CHAIRMAN: But that will always be the case whenever someone is making a decision.

Mr Simonette: Absolutely. I make no bones about it: the task of RWWA is a huge one. It is superimposing itself on a structure that has been around since the year dot, and has taken away some very powerful power bases. A lot of people did not like that. A lot of people still do not understand what the role of RWWA is. Some people still do not understand the distinction between what WAGRA does as a club, and what RWWA does; they just see a strange man wearing a tie at the track—he must be important. Is he RWWA or WAGRA? They do not care, as long as they get what they need. There is still some blurring of roles. RWWA had to come in and take away the big power bases, and that is always a difficult thing to do. It then had to learn about what racing is, what all these weird people are doing, and why they are so passionate about it. The demands and problems of Broome, for example, are so different from the problems in Mount Barker. Even though they are both supposed to be country racing, they are so different. The trainers will have a different view from the jockeys and so on. I make no apology: I think RWWA has done a great job in coming as far as it has with such a mixed bowl of lollies; it is all over the place. It is very difficult to consult and communicate with the industry because we have so many different levels of society and they are spread so geographically. RWWA has done a good job in a short amount of time. I think the structure is good; as with any business, there are always improvements to make, and hopefully that will be the case. We certainly support RWWA's continuance and hope that it gets better at what it does.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: Touching on your comment before that one, you said that maybe there should be another body at the top, distributing the money. Do you think RWWA should be answerable to someone else, or be more answerable?

Mr Simonette: No, I do not think so, necessarily. I think the board is well aware of what it needs to do. I am just talking in terms of simple infrastructure. I suppose I would answer that question quite differently if I had been on the receiving end of that \$31.5 million; I am saying that from our point of view. I still believe in the principle; just because we are greyhound racing, it does not mean that we deserve a new track. I would have to show that it is going to produce what I say it is going to produce, evidence that very strongly, say how important it is to racing and the industry, and say how we can give payback to that investment. I think that any body that could do that effectively, efficiently and transparently—whether it is called RWWA or another acronym does not really matter—would need to be, in some sense, independent, I think.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Is that because of your niggle that, although you are totally supportive of the process, there are always influences going into that board?

Mr Simonette: I think, without being disrespectful, thoroughbred racing is given perhaps a higher mantle than harness racing, and harness is given a higher mantle than greyhounds. RWWA did not invent that disrespect; that has been there since the dawn of time. Greyhound racing is seen as lesser

of the three codes. I would like to see RWWA taking a more active role in helping with that disparity, but I cannot blame it for the disrespect; that is just how it is.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Would you be happy to go into a bidding war for further money, if it were there?

Mr Simonette: Absolutely. It is the only way it could be done.

The CHAIRMAN: The new venue that you would like to establish —

Mr Simonette: McGrath Park! Sorry, Trenorden Park! We could do an acronym! It has come down from \$91.2 million to \$19.2 million!

The CHAIRMAN: Would the \$19.3 million provide an opportunity for you to create a new atmosphere, given that you already run very good meetings? A member from the upper house has already told us that your meetings are very successful. Where would this take greyhounds forward? If you get this money, or you get an opportunity to be able to borrowing enough money to go ahead into this venture, what are the possibilities in your plan or vision for the future of Cannington greyhound racing?

Mr Simonette: The first thing we are probably looking at addressing is the fact that the Cannington complex is a very big, wide, sparse complex; it has six or seven bars, toilets down one end, people down the other end. It was built for a crowd of 15 000 people, and they got that twice; they realised the vision. The fact is, to build something as grandiose as that is not possible these days—we would be up to \$91.2 million. We are trying to come up with something that is cost effective, is bright, new and refreshing, but can also downsize us, because we do not get crowds of 15 000. We might get 5 000 or 6 000 on New Year's Eve; we get 4 000 or 5 000 on Perth Cup night and on our charity nights we get 2 000 or 3 000. But the general crowd is 1 500 on a Saturday night and 600 on a Wednesday night.

[1.50 pm]

How do we give those people a warm, welcoming experience but also keep ourselves cost effective in that we are not running six bars or two or three, or two or one—whatever it may be? It is about that, first of all. There are obvious economies of scale by doing that. We are going to do things in a more cost effective manner. Are we going to remain similar in the style that we race? Yes. What we have at the greyhounds is that you can almost lean over the fence—although not encouraging that—and touch the dogs. Our industry will encourage people, once the dogs have raced, to touch them. It is a very close immediate thing. We have grass. You can feel it. You are part of it. People do not need the binoculars to see where the dogs are a thousand metres away; they are right on top of you. We would keep those things. Our vision, I suppose, is more of the same. It is about family-friendly fun, being involved and being intimate, and we believe that we have a great product for that. We believe we have a product that says, “You’ve got a dog in the backyard—it may not be a greyhound—but you have an affinity with the canine.” That is what we are trying to extend. That is what our new business would be about. Obviously it will have other income streams, because we realise that greyhound racing will not pay the bills, but it is still about the community. We will still have our community bingo. There will be 450 people playing bingo tonight. No greyhound racing—oh, there is.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: That’s what Mr Trenorden said about Ballarat.

*sim: We do all those things.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: I have a question have seats for eating. You have a good reputation for feeding people and for entertaining people. How many would you feed on a normal Saturday night?

Mr Simonette: On Wednesday night, which was a quiet night, we still had 240 for tea. We will do generally 400 for Saturday night for tea.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: It is pretty significant.

Mr Simonette: Yes.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: That would be more than probably the other two.

Mr Simonette: Our emphasis has always been on that. It is still the old-style buffet. People like it, and we do it for \$27 on a Wednesday night. How do we do it that cheaply? I don't know. In some ways it is a loss leader, but I want people to experience what we have got. If that is the gimmick; that is the gimmick.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: Would the new facility be similar?

Mr Simonette: It is about a 400-seat restaurant.

The CHAIRMAN: And the track? We saw some plans.

Mr Simonette: It is identical to Cannington—an identical 445-metre circumference track.

The CHAIRMAN: And that is the size that is most suitable?

Mr Simonette: I think everyone Australia-wide thinks our track is perfect; and it is. We have a 600-metre track at Mandurah. That is damn big! It is bigger than York's circuit.

The CHAIRMAN: We noticed that one of the tracks we visited in the eastern states had a straight track.

Mr Simonette: Healesville maybe, or was it at a complex? Was it the Meadows with a straight track down the side?

The CHAIRMAN: It was a plan that we saw for a track somewhere. It was for the greyhounds in Queensland.

Mr Simonette: Was it the new Logan facility?

The CHAIRMAN: They have a new facility.

Mr Simonette: Part of our new plans as well is that the grandstand incorporates the kennel block. The kennels are at the bottom and administration just next to that, then on top is the public restaurant and public facilities. The idea, again is to bring dogs —

The CHAIRMAN: They will be able to hear the dogs warming up!

Mr Simonette: Or me singing in my office—it is probably very similar! The dogs will come out basically from underneath. Again, it is about trying to bring the product to the people.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: I think we touched on training tracks at the beginning and I might have missed it. Does Bushmead still operate?

Mr Simonette: Gosh! It has not operated since I had a fringe.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: Are there any tracks like that around or have they all gone to Cannington?

Mr Simonette: There used to be. They are all gone. Suburbia has taken over Bushmead, Hazelmere and Fairlight. We are starved for training facilities.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: You only have Cannington?

Mr Simonette: We have Cannington, Mandurah and Northam. Northam would do 50 trials on Saturday. Cannington would do 200 a week and Mandurah would probably pick up 120 or 130 a week. What I am saying about the racetracks, they are training tracks that we race on, rather than racetracks that we train on. It is vital that we have these things. We also have the Southern River straight track, which is a lease with the German shepherd society, and that is just a slipping track. We also have another slipping track at St David's estate down in Mandurah. There are very few facilities for greyhound people to train. One of our points of difference, I suppose, and something that I am taking up with RWWA at the moment is that harness racing has the Byford centre, which

is a centre of excellence; thoroughbreds have Lark Hill. That is a lovely part of the world and fantastic, but they are RWWA costs and are not in the distribution model. Therefore, we are paying for training as part of our distribution.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: For horses.

Mr Simonette: When I ask the question where does Lark Hill and Byford—I am not criticising them, I am jealous. I would like to have one myself — where do they fit into the distribution model? They say they are pre-distribution model.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: I asked the question about mixing dogs and horses and could you put a training facility at Lark Hill or at Byford.

Mr Simonette: I know that Lark Hill has a big sign “no dogs allowed”.

The CHAIRMAN: That would be difficult.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: You only need a sand track for training. How much would that cost, roughly?

Mr Simonette: It depends what you want to do and whether you want a lure operating and boxes operating. We lease the Southern River straight track for \$100 a week. It is basically three to four metres by 300 metres, fenced off, and you gallop them.

The CHAIRMAN: When you go to either RWWA or maybe even government for some sort of funding for your new facility, what about your participant numbers in terms of trainers, owners and greyhounds?

Mr Simonette: We have about 1 800 participants of which 296 are trainers.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that a growing number?

Mr Simonette: It is static. It is about the same.

The CHAIRMAN: It has been the same for a while?

Mr Simonette: It is always around about 300. You know, someone comes in someone goes out. It is around about 300. One of the biggest threats we have and there is nothing that anyone can do about it is that it is difficult to get kennel licences. The original land out Southern River way, which was the worst quality of land and was the cheapest land was where the dog people went. That is why Southern River, Armadale and Bushmead were all in vogue. Now, that is what developers want. It is not that people want to get out of the sport, but when a developer offers them six figure sums obviously they are going to take it. There is nowhere else for them to go to set up, even if they wanted to.

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: That is an interesting issue because some of your trainers have gone to Brookton—there is not a track within cooe. There again, Morton has taken his race horses to Pingelly—not a racetrack in sight either. That issue of planning, I agree as a rural member of Parliament, is an issue you need to deal with.

Mr Simonette: There are some shires that allow it. Bakers Hill allows it and that is fantastic. And Brookton, as you mentioned, and the Shire of Murray is very good as well. There are some shires —

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: They hang on a thread, don't they? Your planning aspects are a worry for you. People are more accepting of trotters and race horses than of dogs.

Mr Simonette: There is a belief that the dogs are smelly and noisy, and they will get out and kill somebody—take a child! Any sensible argument says it does not happen, but a lot of the shires are influenced by people who have horses. They just do not want to have greyhounds in their area.

The CHAIRMAN: I have one question as an aside. What do you think about the regulation that requires you to have a greyhound muzzled at all times so that if you have a greyhound as a pet—I believe they are beautiful pets—you have to put a muzzle on it.

Mr Simonette: It is crazy. There is a lot of work being done to bring us into line with Victoria, which has laws that if your dog wears a green colour; in other words, that is the dog comes from an approved greyhounds-as-pets program, they do not have to wear a muzzle in a public place.

The CHAIRMAN: I was going to get one for some of the parliamentarians!

Hon MAX TRENORDEN: What—a muzzle?

Mr Simonette: The green collar maybe!

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: There is an argument against that if a dog has been bred to chase a lure. My dad bred and trained greyhounds, and my childhood was around dogs. I have seen one that is retired and is now a pet and a small family member in a fluffy jumper was squealing and running away and the dog chased, caught and jumped on the child.

[2.00 pm]

Mr Simonette: We would be naive and I would be wrong to say that that does not happen in terms of the dog's instinct to chase, but to go through the greyhounds-as-pets program they are taking dogs with a certain personality that do not have that instinct. They do a lot of deprogramming, if you wish, and a lot of testing, foster homes and the like to make sure—they do all those tests with fluffy toys and all that sort of stuff. So for our organisation to put the stamp “you've gone through the greyhounds-as-pets program”, we are pretty much guaranteeing you there is no drama. If there is any drama, that dog does not get the stamp. So we are saying only take the dogs through an approved program; they have animal behaviourists looking at these dogs. We have the most passionate people working in our greyhounds-as-pets program. We had three dogs in my office when I left there today. So we are not going to put anything out there that is going to damage our brand in any way, so the answer on the muzzles is, yes, for a dog that is racing, absolutely.

The CHAIRMAN: Thanks for appearing before the committee today. I need to 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.

Thanks very much for coming along.

Mr Simonette: Thanks, John, thank you.

Hearing concluded at 2.01 pm