



**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - DR ERN MANEA, AO  
AHRC ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 25 AUGUST 2000**

I report to you as my responsibility as President on the activities of the Australian Harness Racing Council for the current year.

In reporting to the Council and its Members, the Council's responsibility is in relation to the 206 clubs in Australia conducting over 2,000 meetings, to the some 30,000 owners of the 14,000 starters who have participated in those races, and to the industry participants, approximately 6,500 trainers and drivers, and the approximately 500 studs and 2,500 breeders. The total economic expenditure within our industry for other than club track costs is approximately 2 billion dollars. By any valuation these figures indicate a very large industry involving a large number of people and as a board of directors affording the industry as a whole, we carry a heavy responsibility.

I said in my report last year that many projects we were involved with seemed to be coming to termination, however this has proven to not be so. Whilst planning has occurred in the computer upgrade for the Australian Harness Racing Council it has not yet commenced and in order to advance the matter Council needs to make the decisions necessary to conclude an agreement with the owners of the HaRVEY computer structure to allow the introduction of the material from the Australian Harness Racing Council into the national system.

The records of the Australian Harness Racing Council comprising the complete record of Australian breeding and racing for 140 years is an asset of the Council which is estimated to have a value of several million dollars. These records have been paid for by the owners, studmasters and breeders who contributed financially to the storage of this information, and as the custodians of this very valuable data comes under the governance of the Australian Harness Racing Council.

We need to decide as to the continuance of the production of the Australian Stud Book, and if so, to timetable the changeover to HaRVEY in order that the book can be produced and released before December 2000. There is a strong demand by the breeding industry for the continuance of the hardcopy Stud Book to be available to them.

Due to the diligence of Mr Ken Dyer and Mr Rod Pollock as Chief Executives of the Council and their creation of the changeover computer fund some years ago we believe we have a large portion of the costs involved in achieving this covered but there may be some extra small amounts of money needed to complete it.

The national website created by Harness Racing New South Wales which features national information is currently exceeding 1.2 million hits per month. It is obvious that this site has a great potential for marketing our industry and the investigation of this needs to become a major development for the Council. I have always felt that one of the deficiencies of the Council's activities is the generalised marketing procedure which I note the thoroughbred industry does in preparing material which appears in each state with minor changes of a local nature, and it appears that the website may afford us an advance in this area.

I am aware already of great difficulties for industry participants in the imposition of the Goods and Services Tax. The problems to be expected were well presented by the people employed by the Council to tour the states and make the presentations to our industry but despite this the actual day to day handling of the GST looms as a problem in many areas that were unexpected. I hope that the financial strictures caused by the lack of cash flow will not be an embarrassment to many areas of our less financially prosperous areas but it is a difficulty, will continue to be a difficulty and will require moral and documentary support from the Council. I hope that in a year's time we have not lost any people as a result of it.

The project of the ownership survey is complete and the report will be distributed at the Annual General Meeting. As I have previously stated the importance of the owners to our industry is absolutely vital, their financial contribution mirrors that of the Totalisator Agency funds provided by the off-course betting authorities. We cannot survive without owners and I hope that the Ownership Report is carefully reviewed by the future Council.

We are at present calling for tenders for the provision of DNA testing and hopefully this also will be completed in the near future, thus completing the horse identification project started some three years ago.

A continuing problem is the position of drugs. The Olympic competition is having problems, as are many other types of sporting events in various countries in the world. It is not a problem that will go away and the disciplines and rules and regulatory practices necessary to control the drugging of our horses looms as a continual volatile presence. We have now got testing procedures for Erythropoietin and Human Growth Hormone. These further tests will add to the costs involved in the disciplining of the industry and will also mean that the evil ones who seek to gain by criminal activities will transfer their thoughts to other medications at present unused. As I said in my paper presented to the Special Meeting the stimulant type drugs and the go-slow drugs are now readily identified and only a very stupid person would use them.

Because of the now expanding use of natural hormones and natural body chemicals the need for the creation of acceptable, statistically investigated and proven levels for natural substances has to go on. In this area there is always the threat of challenge at law and we must guard against this by doing the work that is necessary to prove our case. The Veterinarians World Conference at present being held in England will give us figures for most of these substances and I believe that we should adopt the world figures as part of our rules in order to protect challenge at law.

I receive continual correspondence from people insisting that the rules uphold the level playing field and that no one person should be able to circumvent our rules by manipulating and manoeuvring around the levels that exist in our present rules.

I again say to you that the safest way of maintaining the probity of natural substance levels is to test the horses before they race and if the levels are supposedly naturally elevated then to not allow the horse to race. I perceive that the future will prove that this is the mechanics of control that will solve this vexatious problem.

Mr Joe Beder has continued his attempts to secure national rules, which are almost there with some further amendments to be discussed at this conference. I find it very difficult to believe that there is any need for adjustment of so-called local rules thus causing confusion when the increasing movement of horses and drivers from State to State causes confusion and argument.

These 'local rules' really are minimal changes and it is surely time that this organisation matured enough to accept that voting at the national scene imputes an acceptance of majority decision made at the conferences.

I express my personal gratitude to Mr Beder for his considerable workload and undertaking the subject of the Rules and trust that the courtesies of the Council be extended to his updating proposal and that they are adopted.

We continue to endeavour to make our racing as safe as possible. The introduction of the protective vest has been delayed but will occur this coming season and the question of other equipment, helmets and sulkies continue to be kept under review.

The damages claims incurred from incidents in our racing since inception of the Legal Liability Insurance by the Council makes one wonder whether if there were no insurance there would be less claims, and certainly at the present rate of removal of monies from the insurance pool it will be impossible to maintain this as a particular measure for our reinspersons.

I have previously reported on the World Trotting Conference and we continue to receive accolades from overseas countries on the most successful conference ever held. The papers are on the national Internet site and are well worth perusing and I encourage members of our industry to do so whenever I have the chance to speak to them. I express my gratitude to the New South Wales Harness Racing Club for their efforts in securing the accommodation and organising the social activities at the Conference, to Harness Racing New South Wales for their financial support and the offer of staff at the Conference, and a very big expression of gratitude to our own staff, Mr Rod Pollock and the girls in our office.

I cannot mention Mr Pollock and our staff without offering them the highest praise. This year Jo Carr has completed twenty years of service. Jo was in the office working when I joined the organisation some twenty years ago. Another member of the staff Julie Davies will complete twenty years in the year 2001. Their enthusiasm, their intellect, the accuracy of their work and their general feeling for the sport are unique and I hope that the Council will recognise these staff members. We have added other members to the staff in recent times and these too are following the example of our long serving staff.

During my term as President it has been my pleasure to work with two outstanding Chief Executives, Mr Ken Dyer and Mr Rod Pollock. Their wisdom in forward planning, the setting aside of funds and clear enthusiasm and passion for our industry has been a remarkable finding in a world where people often tend to just do the job and forget about it after 5 o'clock. Mr Dyer's recognition as an expert in the field of breeding and history is world renown, and Mr Pollock following the World Conference has already assumed a dominating position in the harness racing world. There must have been a day when God was on our side when we interviewed the people for the CEO position following Mr Dyer's retirement and selected Mr Pollock. His vitality, enthusiasm and his desire to make harness racing the best in the world in Australia continue unabated. Apart from his unfortunate lapse in intellect in supporting the wrong football team, Essendon, he has no peer. The Council's position at present is one of a successful organisation, very well managed, economically run and futuristically planned. My grateful thanks to Rod Pollock.

None of the present members of the Council were present when I first attended the meetings. None of the present members of Council were present when I first became President and I have been able to watch over the years and observe the work of many delegates to the Council. It has unfortunately been one of the weak points of the Council that changes of government in different States result in changes of delegates to the Council but despite this we have had renewed enthusiasm and renewed vigour when new people come on the Council and collectively over my twenty years I feel the Council has functioned in a most effective manner. When the Council was formed in 1975 the strong proponents in the Council were representatives from South Australia and Tasmania, two of the so-called smaller States. I have always been very careful to endeavour to secure equality in the voting and in the powers of the various delegates at the Council table. The States may be small but they have big hearts. They may be small but they have a remarkable ability to often do things in a superior way to the bigger States in the modality of their presentations and development of their sport. It has always been my belief that it is absolutely essential that there should be equality at the Council and that the strength of our industry lies in keeping the smaller States strong and taking advantage of their abilities.

As I said at the outset we carry the heavy responsibility of supporting an enormous industry and acting as a governance body to help solve the problems that exist and have planned for the future with a wide breadth of vision. There has been, is and will be always challenges to the Council.

As I leave I hope to see the Council go forward in unity seeking ways to work together, to see the Council accept the responsibilities of protecting the investments of the large numbers of people who put a large amount of money into our industry, to go forward in the belief that the smallest member in our fraternity of harness racing supporters will be equally as protected as the large, to go forward in the belief that the harness horse is a horse we can love, admire, develop and present to the widest audience in the best possible way.

I thank you all for your support over the years I have been in attendance at the meetings. Thank you, one and all, and I wish you well in the future.

Dr. Ern C. Manea, AO

President