



## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - MR GEOFF WANT**

### **HRA MID-SEASON MEETING 28 FEBRUARY 2014**

It is only four months since the Harness Racing Australia annual meeting in Melbourne but it has been an eventful time both on and off our racetracks for many in our industry.

The vagaries of Australian weather have again caused problems over summer, with drought still affecting many areas and bushfires devastating other parts of the country.

The worst affected participants were those in Victoria who suffered damage to property from bushfires in the Kilmore and Goulburn Valley areas in recent weeks. Thankfully no participants were hurt but unfortunately some horses were injured and one had to be euthanased. Our thoughts are with all those affected by the wild weather.

There has been some marvellous racing throughout the nation in recent months and we look forward to this continuing with the culmination of the 2014 Inter Dominion championship this weekend at Tabcorp Park Menangle. It is an amazing race meeting which will showcase harness racing at its very best - and at an outstanding venue. Ten top class races, seven of them Group One events, with more than \$2-million in prizemoney and an extremely open *tab.com.au* Inter Dominion final as the highlight!

Hopefully the weather will be fine and there will be a big crowd on course, along with plenty of viewers for Sky and Trackside, plus the special Nine Network coverage in Australia.

Harness Racing NSW and the New South Wales Harness Racing Club are to be congratulated for their efforts in promoting this second running of the Inter Dominion in its revised format.

It is a trans-Tasman day in real terms, not just in name, with plenty of New Zealand horses and drivers in action. The Australia-New Zealand rivalry will be to the fore in the feature trotting race, the Glenferrie Farm Challenge, when five horses from each country do battle.

This will be a fantastic lead-in to the big trotting races being promoted by Harness Racing Victoria in the coming weeks, culminating with the second running of the Pryde's EasiFeed Great Southern Star at Tabcorp Park Melton on March 22.

### **Inter Dominion Awards**

It is not just our racetrack champions we get to honour during the Inter Dominion carnival, but also people.

The Inter Dominion Event Committee each year considers submissions for awards to horses and participants and determines which, if any, are to be approved. This is a vintage year however, with five very special Inter Dominion awards being bestowed upon worthy recipients.

Two outstanding administrators who have made a significant contribution to both the Inter Dominion and our broader industry were each presented with the Ern Manea Gold Medal during the Inter Dominion heats at Tabcorp Park Menangle a fortnight ago.

They are recently retired Harness Racing NSW chairman Graeme Campbell and his successor in the role, Rex Horne, who stepped down late last year as chairman of the NSW Harness Racing Club.

The remaining three awards, being presented at the ball this evening, are the Our Sir Vancelot Distinguished Service Award - to the three time Inter Dominion winner Im Themightyquinn ... and two Brian Hancock Distinguished Service Awards - to Gary Hall senior and Gary Hall junior.

### **Agenda Items**

There are two Inter Dominion items on the agenda for today's meeting, one of them dealing with the tender documents for the conduct of the event for the three years from 2016.

Also on the agenda for the meeting is an update on the Wagering Working Party, established late last year to examine wagering issues and make recommendations as to how industry funding can be boosted.

This is a critical subject and we all accept there are no easy answers, but we hope the working party, chaired by Ross Cooper, can make some progress. We wish Ross and his group - Sam Nati, Harvey Kaplan and Shane Anderson - well in their endeavours and thank them for the time they are devoting to the project.

### **Lobbying**

Members are well aware of the lobbying campaigns undertaken by our industry in recent years.

A primary thrust of the lobbying of federal and state members of parliament has been for the framing of national legislation to govern the funding of the racing industry, in line with the recommendations of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Gambling. We have stressed that we believe this could be achieved without the states giving up control over regulatory functions, state taxation regimes or commercial matters.

Aspects of this have been endorsed by the states at the past two Australasian Racing Ministers' conferences and it was extremely pleasing to see the Victorian Premier, Dr. Denis Napthine, approach the federal government on this matter just prior to Christmas.

The Premier is also the Victorian Racing Minister and regularly attends harness meetings throughout the state, despite his busy schedule.

Dr Napthine wrote to the Prime Minister "*requesting federal government support for a national approach to enforce state and territory race fields legislation*" and presented a powerful argument.

This matter will no doubt be discussed at the 2014 conference of racing ministers, which is being held today in Wellington, New Zealand. The clash with our mid season meeting meant HRA could not attend the conference, but ministers and their staff have been provided with a comprehensive briefing.

HRA also made a detailed submission in November to the federal government's National Commission of Audit, established by the coalition to examine issues related to the *"current split of roles and responsibilities between and within the Commonwealth Government and the State and Territory governments, including duplication"*.

Four key matters were raised by HRA for consideration by the Commission:-

- the need for a national approach to wagering regulation and taxation
- the need for a national approach to dealing with unauthorised offshore wagering operators
- the need for a national approach to integrity standards, particularly in relation to non-racing sporting bodies
- the need for a review of Australia's taxation laws in relation to the breeding of racehorses.

It is understood the Commission of Audit will provide a draft report in the near future.

It is also worth repeating that a primary thrust of our concerns with legislative decision makers has been to ensure harness racing is not damaged by legislative change, brought about by concerns among politicians and regulators over forms of gambling such as sports betting and gaming machines.

### **Broadcasting**

There are several items on today's agenda relating to our broadcast partner, Sky Racing and it is pleasing that the company's chief operating officer, Brendan Parnell, will be addressing the meeting. It is a couple of years since Sky was last at one of our meetings and it is to be hoped delegates take the opportunity to glean as much information from Brendan and his colleagues as possible.

Other Sky-related matters to be dealt with today include a progress report on Hot Shots and an update on our negotiations over broadcast agreements.

Sam Nati will also be doing a presentation on TrotsTV which, whilst it is not directly related to Sky, I believe is vital to the future promotion and exposure of Australian harness racing.

Developments with communications should make our product more accessible to a broader audience - now, and in the future - but we need to provide the distribution platforms which make this possible, and promote them so people are aware they exist.

It is difficult for communications and digital technology experts to predict what will happen in the next decade, but no matter what happens there will be greater access to information and entertainment products. How we view them will depend on what devices are available and who knows what will be around in another 10 years. Most of us couldn't foresee the full impact of the digital era in the past decade or more, so it would be foolish to predict where we are headed.

If our industry is to expand, however, we must give our customers what they want, when they want it and via whatever device and distribution channel best suits them.

Most importantly, digital media enables our industry to fill the news and information gap caused by the erosion of mainstream media coverage but we need to target a broad audience to encourage growth in interest and participation.

I'll reiterate a comment I made at the annual meeting in October ... Trots TV has been a marvellous initiative by Harness Racing NSW where it is guided by people with extensive television experience. This should be a national undertaking and could be a vital component of an industry wide new media plan.

I urge you to either embrace this, or come up with another means of establishing a robust digital media plan for Australian harness racing.

### **Acknowledgements**

A special welcome today to the chairman of Harness Racing New Zealand, Gary Allen, and the chief executive, Edward Rennell. As stated often in the past, HRA has an excellent working relationship with HRNZ and we share many issues and ambitions.

HRNZ is to be congratulated for the decision to invite Australian horses to compete in the Harness Jewells, in the face of some harsh criticism. It is easy to be a critic and I'm sure those advocating the Jewells should be reserved for horses which qualify by racing only in New Zealand have no qualms about chasing prizemoney in Australia, when they have a horse good enough to campaign here.

They are also overlooking the wagering and promotional benefits. Well done to the HRNZ Board and management for the decision.

As always, I must record my appreciation for the work of our chief executive, Andrew Kelly, and his team in the HRA office in Melbourne and our tireless legal counsel, Dean Cooper. Many thanks also to the members of the executive for their dedication and support and to the members of the various committees which make such a positive contribution to HRA.

Congratulations must also go to Rex Horne, who has been appointed as chairman of Harness Racing NSW, only four months after stepping down as chairman of the NSW Harness Racing Club. He was awarded the J.P. Stratton medal late last year in recognition of his efforts and, as mentioned earlier today, has also been awarded the Ern Manea gold medal.

This year's other gold medal recipient, Graeme Campbell, stepped down four weeks ago after eight years as chairman of Harness Racing NSW, during which time he encountered some monumental obstacles but never lost focus on his objective of building a better industry.

Equine influenza was an unwanted distraction early in his tenure ... he drove the merger of the regulatory and commercial bodies in NSW ... he was heavily involved in the sale of Harold Park ... he persevered with the race fields legislation despite considerable legal obstacles ... he has championed a new era in integrity following the green light scandal ... and much more.

He was deputy chairman of Harness Racing Australia for four years and made a valuable contribution to the deliberations of the Executive. Personally, I have valued his wise counsel and abundant common sense and I'm sure you all join me in wishing Graeme the very best for the future.

And it would be remiss of me not to congratulate Ken Latta, who the executive unanimously appointed as deputy chairman following Graeme's departure.

I trust it will be a positive and productive mid-season meeting. In closing, I wish the NSW Harness Racing Club and Harness Racing NSW every success on Sunday ... you deserve fine weather and a big crowd to witness what I hope will be competitive but safe racing.

Thank you.  
Geoff Want  
Chairman