



## HRA CHAIRPERSON'S ANNUAL REPORT 2021

First up, I'd like to thank all HRA Members for the privilege of serving with you all as Chair of Harness Racing Australia. Having been elected in absence to the position during the 2020 AGM, and due to the ongoing effects of Covid-19, I have not had the opportunity to meet my fellow members in person, and I look forward to doing so in the near future.

Regardless of the challenges, like so many industries across the globe in 2021, the harness racing industry in Australia learned to operate successfully within the concept of a "new normal" and live with Covid-19.

The strength and resilience of our code continues to shine, and it is this feature that I wish to pay tribute to. Not just the HRA Membership, but all of the industry participants and allied organisations that keep our sport functioning.

During this my first year as Chair, HRA has reset the governance agenda, strengthening our policies, confidentiality, procedures, preparedness and in an effort to set a strategic direction for the organisation that can sustain and service our industry through what continues to be turbulent times.

It has been evident to me for some years that harness racing has become increasingly less relevant to the population at large. Mainstream media coverage has dwindled, and as a result, the opportunity to engage with a younger demographic has not occurred. Unless we are able to reset the agenda and attract interest to the sport, we will continue to underperform against our peer sports and competitions.

The HRA Executive and Management are acutely aware of these issues and are now well advanced in planning to stage a \$2 million prize money Everest style slot race named *The Eureka*, which will be the richest harness race in the world! Funded with inputs from all industry sectors, this will be scheduled to start in 2023 and provide significant marketing opportunities for the industry and a real boost for breeders at the yearling sales.

Quite rightly, our State Controlling Bodies and Clubs are concentrating on the maximisation of base prize money to keep as many participants engaged and viable. The promotional impetus generated from *The Eureka* will benefit all facets of the industry and is another important step to restoring our relevance to the wider population.

The health and welfare of not only our horses but also our people are front of mind, and so we continue to take steps to protect and insulate our industry from outside influences – preferring to manage and balance industry needs with contemporary community standards rather than blunt regulations from governments. To this end, we continue to engage with governments at all levels in disease preparedness strategies, design traceability registers and set practical land transport standards, along with the continuous improvement of the Rules of Racing to regulate health, welfare, traceability and integrity issues.

On the people front, the HRA Executive also approved the formation of an Industry Training and Wellbeing Advisory Group (ITWAG), which was initially proposed by Harness Racing New South Wales – and I look forward to watching the progress of this group as they unify education and training activities, and benchmarks across States.

2021 has also been a period of significant change, with the monitoring and management of Stallion Limits, continuous improvement of the National Ratings System and a new Racing Season (Calendar Year) taking full effect.

Each of these important pillars continue to function well, possibly beyond expectation in some areas, as the industry enjoyed another year of record wagering from all sources (including Betfair NCW) in FY21, increasing \$113-million to a total of almost \$3.5-billion.

While 3.3% may seem modest, this was on the back of a 17% increase in FY20, so not only has the exceptional growth from the initial phase of Covid been maintained, but it has also grown again.

FY21 Import and Export Performance was also positive, with another 6% growth in Export (on the back of 17% in FY20) and turnover approaching the \$300m threshold internationally. While this is mostly positive, revenues remain under constant pressure and as such, as I have said many times now, change is imperative for the greater good of the industry and its long-term health. To this end, HRA will continue to investigate and identify new revenue streams and opportunities to expand the industry audience and investment. But success will only be achieved if everyone is playing their part!

In closing, I wish to record a special thanks to the many people who serve our industry on the various HRA Committees and Working Parties – but one stands out above all others, and it is my great pleasure to announce that the HRA Executive and Members have unanimously endorsed the awarding of the industry's highest individual merit award, the *JP Stratton Award*, to Mr Dean Cooper.

Dean has provided distinguished service to the Australian harness racing industry since 1993 in a myriad of roles, including Honorary Legal Counsel, Executive Member, Deputy Chair, Inter Dominion Event Committee Member, Chair of the National Rules Committee, Chair of the Integrity Conferences, and a representative at the World Trotting Conference on several occasions.

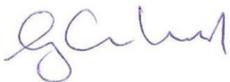
I'm sure you will all join with me in acknowledging, thanking and congratulating Dean on his wonderful contribution – which continues even today!

During the year, there were also several changes around the HRA Executive table. The long-serving harness representative from Racing Queensland, Ms Margaret Reynolds, was replaced by Ms Jodie Jones, while Ms Emma Grigson-Gair joined the Executive following the resignation of Harness Racing South Australia Chair, Mr George Fiacchi, and Mr Joel Wallace's term expired at Tasracing, with Mr Neil Grose appointed to the position of Harness Director.

I extend my sincere appreciation to Margaret, George and the steady hand of Joel, who all provided excellent representation of the local and national industry during their time on the HRA Executive.

I'd also like to record my gratitude to all Members of the HRA Executive who have been so gracious and supportive since assuming this role, namely Mr Dale Monteith, Mr Ken Brown, and Mr Bob Fowler, as well as all the HRA Membership who participate and contribute to the national agenda.

We also have an excellent, dedicated Chief Executive in Andrew Kelly, and the small team in the HRA office who do an outstanding job - your efforts are much appreciated, particularly given the challenges of Victoria's lockdown rules which have required extended stay home periods and impacted so much on everyone's day to day lives. The productivity and quality of work generated in this backdrop is nothing short of remarkable, illustrating the dedication and passion our staff have for the industry.

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'GC Campbell'.

Graeme Campbell OAM  
Chairman