



HRA CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT 2023

Welcome to the 2023 Harness Racing Australia Annual General Meeting.

It is my pleasure to present my third Report as Chair of Harness Racing Australia, a role I have enjoyed despite the obvious challenges we all face on behalf of our industry.

On reflecting over this time, and while challenges remain, much progress has been made by HRA in collaboration with you all as a collective membership group. HRA is an extremely democratic organisation, and while sometimes it may feel like the machinery of governance may hasten slowly, it is clear that we function extremely well because of it.

The identification of Standardbreds has been bedded down, and the decisions to microchip justified as competitive equine pursuits around the world have moved the same way, with traceability/identification a cornerstone of welfare as well as integrity in the eyes of governments at all levels.

The establishment of a Central Services Hub has brought about a more accurate and streamlined service delivery, automated where possible, for Members who have chosen to have HRA fulfil various administrative tasks under a service arrangement. This Hub has also managed the transition brought about by significant changes to the processes and documentation of import Clearances; enhanced regulation of Horse Status and traceability; as well as Sire Registrations, which has seen a small team excel with record transactions and safe, reliable data.

The National Ratings Handicapping System, while still a little controversial in some areas, has delivered real outcomes in the form of more competitive racing, more attractive odds, broader prizemoney spread and providing enhanced racing opportunities. While no system will ever be considered perfect, the Ratings Review Team continues to monitor statistics and feedback regularly, making adjustments where needed. Indeed, this Team are meeting again on Saturday

morning prior to the Inter Dominion Finals and this work will continue for this extremely important part of our industry.

HRA has established a new entity, HRA Events Pty Ltd, to deal with industry owned brands and commercial agreements, including those relating to the TAB Eureka.

As a group, we have worked hard to protect our Social License to Operate. This license has never been more brittle, and those who turn a blind eye or think it is woke nonsense, do so at their peril. Community expectations have evolved considerably, and with many governments in minority positions, relying on cross bench deals for support, we need to be vigilant and attune to this.

We are fortunate to have positioned ourselves well with our welfare activities and enhancements - activities which have won praise and respect across all levels of government and lead the way globally, particularly when it comes to our approach to traceability and preparedness for biosecurity emergencies. As we will hear from Kathleen Mullan later in the meeting, we should all be immensely proud of our effectiveness in bringing about what has been a significant cultural shift within the industry.

But, as recent events, various reviews due to report and deliver recommendations shortly, and the establishment of government working groups, we cannot rest. It is a constant battle to educate the wider community as well as our own participants, while balancing industry imperatives and the expectations from outside to ensure we can appeal to new markets and sustain the industry long term.

This is why we have developed a new timeline for industry consultation regarding alternate whip rule proposals until after the Western Australian features in April; why we need to integrate welfare codes of conduct with the Australian Harness Racing Rules and why we need to adhere to our own regulations regarding microchipping and Horse Status timelines.

By far the standout of my time in this role has been the establishment of the TAB Eureka – the richest harness race in the world, and the race our industry deserves.

The event lived up to its hype, delivering new markets for the sport and breaking records along the way.

The biggest crowd since opening night at Tabcorp Park Menangle were entertained with concerts, drone shows, high fashion and hospitality, while off-course, punters broke wagering records for the sport in pre-post betting and strong numbers in a soft market.

The storylines and theatre was everywhere, but fittingly, it was a 4yo mare who stole the show, with Encipher pocketing the \$1-million first prize, changing the trajectory of harness racing's major events and the lives of her connections in an instant.

Ultimately the continued success of this showpiece race will positively stimulate Yearling Sales prices and greater industry investment via ownership, bringing the sport back into the focus of a wider audience. In my view, these are areas which have been neglected for far too long.

Attention turns to 7 September 2024 for the second running and no doubt further brand enhancement, but before we do, I wanted to extend my thanks to all of you for your steadfast support. While the co-hosts, and I thank Ken Brown AM, Peter Buckman, Robert Marshall, Bruce Christison and your respective teams for the care you took to deliver such a special event, without the unanimous and continued support of all HRA Members, it is not possible to get to first base.

But our next big event is tomorrow night, with the Inter Dominion Championship Grand Finals across the road from here at Albion Park. I congratulate the Albion Park Harness Racing Club, represented here today by Brad Steele and Ken Rutherford MNZM and Racing Queensland's Jodie Jones and David Brick for all of the demanding work behind the scenes and the success you have already brought with excellent promotion, industry camaraderie and a thoroughly enjoyable social events calendar.

And Jodie, thank you also for chaperone duties for those representing their States, Islands and Country in the Australasian Young Drivers Championship, which also wraps up tomorrow night in what will be a great thrill for many of these drivers in front of a large vocal crowd.

As always, it has been an honor to serve as your Chair. This, my third year of a three-year term, which been made all the more enjoyable by a well-functioning HRA Executive, Membership, Honorary Committee and Staff. The humble HRA office may be small in number, but it is big on care and delivery for our industry and a major reason for my decision to nominate for another term.

In closing I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the HRA Treasurer, Dale Monteith, whose term with Harness Racing Victoria concludes early next year. Dale has served the industry diligently in various roles and his support and guidance on national issues around the Executive table will be sorely missed.

Thank you one and all.

Could I please have a mover and seconder to accept my Report for the purpose of the Minutes.