



REPORT OF THE HRA CHAIR 2024

Welcome to the FY24 Harness Racing Australia Annual General Meeting in the surrounds of the Menangle Country Club. I pay my respects and thanks to Robert Marshall and the team at Club Menangle for your hosting of us all here this afternoon, and again this evening when we wander a little further down the road to watch history unfold in the latest edition of the industry's flagship TAB Inter Dominion Championships.

In this, my fourth such report as Chair of Harness Racing Australia (HRA), I acknowledge the difficult challenges being experienced at all levels of our industry, but particularly the complications everyone here today face to regulate our sport. I doubt the threats, challenges or competing priorities we face have ever been greater, nor more important.

Due to its intrinsic links to wagering, coupled with community concerns and perceptions about welfare, racing codes are constantly in danger of government reforms, which may mean well, but in reality have the potential to lose sight of the balance needed to ensure a responsible as well as a sustainable industry.

Indeed, recent wagering reforms and current cost of living pressures have already combined to impact wagering revenues, and while some have felt this more acutely than others, requiring tough decisions to implement change for the here and now as well as the future, nobody is immune, including HRA. As a member-based organisation, we need to minimize our financial impacts on Members while delivering on our value proposition in response of these challenges where we can through lobbying and educating governments for balanced regulations and policy, collaborating for creative solutions,

shared experience, the provision of expert advice and increasing or streamlining shared services where we can.

We also need to better communicate the focus and strides our industry has taken to support responsible wagering and ensure high standards of horse welfare; be prepared to counter emotional challenges presented by opponents with clear evidence of successful outcomes; and be prepared to challenge attitudes within our sport and see things from a wider perspective.

To this end, I note the attendance at today's meeting by Peter Nugent, a Director at Harness Racing New South Wales, who, since joining the Board in 2016 has not only had a vital presence in country NSW, but significantly, was the foundation Chair of the NSW Re-homing Company, where he set the agenda to change the attitudes of many in the industry and identify the obligations that we have to our horses to ensure that they are respected both during and after their racing careers. Peter retires early next year, and on behalf of HRA I thank him for his services and wish him well.

Acknowledging our obligations, and balancing participants needs while protecting our industry's social licence is imperative. We have seen the impacts of staying in the bubble, with a recent announcement to wind up the Greyhounds in New Zealand over the coming 20-months, while the equestrian competitions are grappling with controversies including leaked videos of cruelty during training among elite riders as well as a spotlight on the tack and gear used during competitions.

Despite the turbulence, the year has been studded with major highlights and achievement of our remarkable equine athletes who, along with the talented and professional women and men who prepare and drive them, remind us why we love this sport so much.

There were so many enduring memories during the year that it's hard to pick a favorite. 2023 Grand Circuit Champion, Leap to Fame's, dominance continued in '24 before connections took a conservative approach to his health later in the year, while his older

brother, Swayzee, secured his place in history with back-to-back New Zealand Cups after a dominant Victoria Cup win. What a mare, Lettucereason is!

Catch A Wave headed to Perth and netted connections a win in The Nullabor slot race before he backed it up with a Fremantle Cup victory.

Amongst the Trotters, a newly imported Italian bred entire Callmethebreeze provided some much needed competition for Just Believe and they carved out a rivalry before both succumbing to injury, while The Locomotive went about his business the only way he knows how, cleaning up everything in his way to rightfully start favorite in tonight's Inter Dominion Trotting Championship Grand Final.

This years' second running of the TAB Eureka saw, Don Hugo salute for some very happy Slot Holders, and excited owner Tony Liccastro, after a Luke McCarthy masterclass. As with the year prior, the quality and form line through the TAB Eureka is on display, with Don Hugo favorite for the Inter Dominion Pacing Championship Grand Final later tonight, with fellow Eureka star Captains Knock not far behind him.

But maybe the most exceptional feat during the year was achieved back on the 7th February when Chris Alford created history when piloting Im Wesley for his 8000th career win and one of the greatest milestones in Australian harness racing history - and maybe all of the racing codes. With no signs of slowing down, Chris sits ahead of the late Gavin Lang on 6303 wins, while the most wins by a jockey in Australia is Robert Thompson's 4441.

In a career boasting a massive 14 Australian driving premierships and a staggering 138 Group 1 victories, Chris will represent Victoria in the 2024 Australian Drivers Championship (ADC) at Globe Derby Park in a fortnights time.

Harness Racing South Australia deserve special praise for persisting to find a suitable date and have been rewarded with one of the more competitive and talented field of Drivers assembled for some considerable time.

Before wrapping up today, I wanted to leave you with an interesting statistic. As we know, not all opposition is from outside the industry. Many within our industry find change difficult, even when for the greater good.

The Breeding reforms to support local Sires, such as Mare Limits, and Stud Book Fees HRA have introduced in recent years are a great example of this. While heavily criticised, Stallions impacted by the Stud Book Fees served 23 more mares last year than the year prior, while average Service Fees have dropped by more than \$400 and over \$900k has been received in Stud Book revenue over the same period. Calls to remove these fees continue, but any impact on Service Fees is questionable as Studs have shown that they price their Stallions to meet the market.

However, probably the most positive and little-known statistic since the introduction of Stallion Limits and Stud Book Fees is the attraction and successes Australian Bred Sires are currently enjoying. Between 2003 and 2023 (21-years), Australian Bred Sires first crop average winners was 3.9. This figure included the record of 11 first season winners which was done twice, by Bling It On in 2019 and Vincent in 2022.

Currently, there are 3 first season Sires equal to or better than the previous record of 11: Poster Boy, with 21 (from a crop of 73); Soho Tribeca, with 16; and, The Storm Inside, with 11 at the time of writing. With 3 weeks of the 2023 season left to play out, it could be that three Australian Bred Sires break the previous record of 11 winners in the same season. This not only a far cry from the previous average, but well above one of the great Colonial Sires, Classic Garry, who had 9 winners from a first season crop of 79 35-years ago in 1989.

In closing I would like to acknowledge the strength and contributions that the committee structure provides HRA. Special thanks to the many people who serve and contribute to our industry in this capacity, as well as the well-functioning HRA Executive, Membership, Honorary Members and Staff. As I often say, the humble HRA office, led by our dedicated

Chief Executive, Andrew Kelly, may be small in number, but it is big on care and delivery for our industry.

And thank you - one and all.

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