

## HARNESS RACING CONSULTATIVE GROUP (HRCG)

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2011 AT RWWA, 14 HASLER ROAD, OSBORNE PARK

#### 1. OPEN MEETING

The meeting opened at 1.00pm.

#### 2. PRESENT

Mr Ross Cooper	-	RWWA Director (Meeting Chairman)
Mr Richard Burt	-	RWWA CEO
Mr Ken Norquay	-	RWWA General Manager Racing
Mr Denis Borovica	-	RWWA General Manager Integrity (Acting)
Mr Bill Delaney	-	RWWA Chief Steward Harness
Mr Matthew Skipper	-	RWWA Manager Harness Racing
Mr John Burt	-	GPHR President
Mr Rob Bovell	-	GPHR Chief Executive
Mr Geoff Foster	-	WACHRA Vice President
Mr Kerry Clarke	-	President WASBA
Mr Terry Ferguson	-	WABOTRA President
Mr Nigel Johns	-	WABOTRA Representative
Mr Joe Iemma	-	Vice President HRO of WA
Mr Bruce Jones	-	WACHRA President
Mr Alan Parker	-	RWWA Assistant Manager Harness Racing
Miss Tamsin Taylor	-	Minute Secretary

#### APOLOGIES

Mr Gino Monaco	-	Senior Vice President GPHR
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The Chairman welcomed Mr Bruce Jones as the newly elected President of WACHRA and Mr Denis Borovica (RWWA General Manager of Integrity) to their first meeting and noted the apology of Mr Gino Monaco (Senior Vice President GPHR).

GMR took this opportunity to advise the group of the new structure in regards to the eligible bodies after the amalgamation of the Western Australian Trotting Association and the Fremantle Harness Racing Club. GPHR CEO has been advised of the new structure and requested to advise who will represent Gloucester Park Harness Racing at future Consultative Group meetings, via a letter delivered today.

#### 3. CONFIRMATION OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

The Minutes of the previous meeting held 3 August 2011 were confirmed and signed.

*Mr Bovell (GPHR Chief Executive) entered the meeting at 1.03pm.*

#### **4. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

##### **4.1 Action List**

###### **4.1.1 Letter from BOTRA regarding re-direction of Feature Race Stakes**

Addressed in Item 6.1

###### **4.1.2 Moving Starts**

Resolved. Remove from Action List.

###### **4.1.3 WABI\$ Breeding Bonus Scheme**

Resolved. Remove from Action List.

###### **4.1.4 WestBred Breeding Bonus Scheme**

Resolved. Remove from Action List

#### **5. ITEMS SUBMITTED BY RWWA**

##### **5.1 Wagering Performance – Verbal Update**

Report was noted.

##### **5.2 Harness Strategic Plan Update**

GMR referred to the Quarterly Update that had been published in the October/November edition of the Racing Ahead Calendar.

##### **5.3 Club Circulars Distributed Since Last Consultative Group Meeting**

GMR noted the report summarising the Club Circulars that have been distributed since the last HRCG Meeting held 3 August 2011.

##### **5.4 Integrity Division Year End Report**

Mr Borovica (RWWA GMI) spoke to the report submitted by the Stewards department, advising that the report was a barometer of the stewards' work through the year. There had been a high percentage of swabbing conducted with a small percentage returning positive results.

The Appeals Tribunal had seen a small number of cases with the majority of rulings in favour of the original penalty.

Mr Bovell (GPHR Chief Executive) questioned Mr Borovica as to why the statistics showed that there was more primary swabbing conducted in the Thoroughbreds than in Harness.

Mr Borovica advised that the Thoroughbred winners were swabbed in metro and country meetings, however notwithstanding the number of total swabs including TC02 and CPO/OOCT there were more in harness than any other code.

Mr Johns (WABOTRA) questioned whether there would be provision for freezing swabs, and what is the cost to process swabs currently.

Mr Borovica advised that the current costs were;

- \$185.00 for urine/blood tests, with a broader range of substances tested for, and
- \$25.00 for TC02.

These costs however were strictly for the laboratory testing and didn't include any other associated costs.

The total budget for swabbing was approximately \$800K across the three codes.

Mr Bovell queried the difference from when WATA was overseeing the swabbing, with an estimated \$265K spent per annum on Harness alone.

Mr Delaney (RWWA Chief Steward – Harness) advised that the swabbing strategy had not changed significantly in his career.

Mr Borovica advised that there were now more pre race screening tests conducted in Harness racing.

Mr Johns questioned if testing of hair will be available, as there was less chance of the prohibited substances being missed.

Mr Borovica noted that experts and vets had been in discussions in regards to this testing, and it was still yet to be approved.

The Chairman advised that at the World Trotting Conference he had attended, the subject of hair testing was discussed. This process was still not accepted worldwide.

Mr Burt (GPHR President) viewed the statistics shown by the report as a positive outcome for Harness along with the other two codes. Mr Burt suggested that the RWWA approach the media to broadcast the positive results.

RWWA CEO advised that the RWWA had already approached some media outlets and they had not yet run the story. However would follow up with Rob Edwards.

Mr Burt suggested that Robbie Dewar of the Sunday Times may have space available in his section to publish the article.

The Chairman suggested that it be highlighted that the report noted historical information, as there had been a succession of positive swabs highlighted in the last several months.

Mr Burt noted that testing and charging people who are not following the rules should not be something to be ashamed of.

## 5.5 Novice Driver Concession Policy Amendments November 2011

MHR advised that when Mr Trevor Warwick, the new driving master commenced, he was keen to review the policy. The new policy was to be introduced with the new HPR system,

however this has been delayed. A sliding scale system has been created for the interim. The new policy is currently on hold.

#### 5.6 HRA Briefing Notes from 30 August and 10 October 2011

MHR tabled his briefing notes from the HRA meetings held on 30 August and 10 October 2011.

MHR advised that at the meeting on 10 October 2011 the National Breeding Review was discussed. The HRA's objectives are to look at recommendations and how they will progress.

The Chairman elaborated upon informing the delegates that the proposed import fee was recommended to be between \$2K - \$5K for male horses and questioned the amount of \$1500 for broodmares, when States were trying to improve broodmare stocks.

Mr Burt (GPHR) suggested there was a need for races for fillies and mares to increase their racing potential and their form for the studbook, so as these mares could be bred from in the future.

MHR advised he would reconvene the HRCG breeding subcommittee to discuss the findings of the review.

Mr Burt noted that the issue needs to be addressed now with decisions to be made to keep increasing the horse population and building the number of horses racing.

Mr Ferguson (BOTRA) concurred with Mr Burt, advising that BOTRA's figures had indicated a 20% downturn in mares being served.

Mr Parker (RWWA AMHR) then noted that the number of mares bred last year had decreased 18%, however this was a National issue and not isolated to WA. With 220 foals already notified this season Mr Parker was hopeful that the projected targets would be met.

Mr Clarke (WASBA) indicated the need for a whole package going forward. With major changes required that would entice people to breed horses in WA, with the resulting filly offspring being made worthwhile. NZ imports are needed to keep the number of horses at a sustainable level.

Mr Parker advised that it was in Australia's best interest to continue to import mares to diversify the breeding stock and that it would be preferable for a rebate to be paid for mares who are bred to Australian stallions.

Mr Ferguson stated that the amount of fillies and mares that have raced unsuccessfully was due to the lack of opportunities.

The Chairman noted that the quality of mares needs to be taken into consideration, with opportunities available for quality mares with preferential draws.

## 6. ITEMS SUBMITTED BY REPRESENTATIVES

### 6.1 Open Letter to RWWA – Correspondence from WABOTRA dated 17 May 2011

Mr Ferguson (BOTRA) advised that as a discussion paper there had been mixed response from the industry with the majority of participants welcoming BOTRA's proposal. Opposition had come from GPHR and the owner's association.

Mr Ferguson cited the turnover for feature races was disappointing, along with the best prize money in Australia on offer and the lack of interstate competitors. Mr Ferguson suggested the distribution of stake money be rethought, with the levels distributed more evenly.

The Chairman questioned Mr Ferguson on what BOTRA considered was a reasonable amount to remove from feature race funding would be. Mr Ferguson advised that this was a discussion paper only and the suggestion to remove money from feature races was just for discussion not action.

RWWA CEO questioned what funding the HRCG members believed should go into elite, metro and provincial stakes and how they would achieve it. RWWA is attempting to action the increase in funding without depleting the stakes from feature races. RWWA CEO noted the capitalistic model was prevalent in Harness racing and RWWA was trying to get to the core of it.

Mr Johns (BOTRA) recommended the capping of feature race stakes, with any additional funding be directed to country feature races.

RWWA CEO questioned what the industry would be like without the races to aspire to, such as elite feature races.

Mr Burt (GPHR President) noted that the increase in feature race stakes had only been approximately \$300K in comparison to the feature race stakes in Thoroughbreds which had increased more significantly. Whilst Mr Burt agreed that the funding needed reviewing, he reiterated that the industry should not be alienated from investing within their industry. Exposure and the 'life blood' of the industry were in feature races.

MHR indicated that he believed BOTRA's point was more about what return there was from the investment made, not in decreasing the feature race stakes.

Mr Ferguson stated that owners and trainers could not continue in the sport as the gap between the elite and hobbyist grew.

MHR noted that the industry would be more equitable to participate with the introduction of the new HPR system.

"Mr Bovell (GPHR CEO) stated that RWWA had no strategic plan for harness racing other than to shrink it and prevent further growth."

*Mr Bovell exited the meeting at 2.13pm*

Mr Jones (WACHRA) stated that WACHRA did not support a decrease in feature stakes, however if there was any growth within the industry and an increase in funds they would prefer it went to 'grass roots' racing.

Mr Burt commented that it was immaterial for GPHR if the stakes increased or decreased, they continue to promote the races as the status needed to be maintained. GPHR was happy to work in whatever way possible with the country and provincial clubs. Mr Burt advised that owners purchased horses to win at metro meetings, and if it was any benefit to country/provincial meetings heats could be held at their tracks with the finals held at GPHR. GPHR not interested in becoming elitist, however there is need to protect Gloucester Park as a venue to showcase the industry.

The Chairman then requested the viewpoint of the delegates around the table.

Mr Lemma (HROWA) noted that feature stakes should remain the same. Owners are not going to spend \$250K on a horse to race for \$2K stakes at a country meeting.

Mr Clarke (WASBA) stated that feature stakes should remain as they are, however if there as to be any surplus in funding it should be directed towards country/provincial stakes. The more important issue was programming and the handicapping system. Mr Clarke believed there was no expectation to win with a Westbred horse when most horses winning were NZ or Eastern states bred.

The Chairman declared that the funding to feature stakes races didn't warrant changing at this point in time, however should there be any further funding it should be directed to the lower level of racing.

## 6.2 Current Start Points at Gloucester Park to be Returned to Original Positions – WABOTRA

Mr Burt (GPHR) advised that looking at the statistics it would be negative for the start points to revert back to their original positions.

Mr Ferguson (BOTRA) noted that prior to the introduction of the 7 & 5 starting formation, BOTRA wrote to GPHR to request the start points be returned to their original positions. Gaps had been appearing just after the release point, with the majority of participants in favour of the points returning to their previous positions.

Mr Delaney (RWWA CSH) queried the statistics Mr Burt was referring to as the statistics he had seen indicate an increase in horses winning from drawing barrier one. The 7 & 5 configuration and the new start points were not a good combination. The Stewards cannot act on the start points as there is no safety issue.

The Chairman questioned whether the 7 & 5 configuration was the issue.

MHR indicated that the 7 & 5 starting formation was in the best interests from a handicapping perspective.

The Chairman then noted that there was a perceived advantage for horses drawing barrier one.

Mr Burt advised that the GPHR had been in discussions since October in regards to the start points and it was not a decision taken lightly. Mr Burt would request Mr Bovell provide Mr Delaney with the statistics they had viewed when reaching their decision.

The Chairman then questioned who had jurisdiction to make the amendments to the starting points. Whilst the Stewards give final approval in regards to safety, they do not make the decision in regards to moving them.

It was decided that Mr Burt would advise the GPHR of the points made today and would review the start points. Mr Burt would be in contact with Mr Delaney to discuss the situation.

## 7. OTHER BUSINESS

### 7.1 Items Arising from Recent Board / IAC / Racing Operations Committee (ROC) Meetings

Nil

### 7.2 2012 Interdominion

Mr Johns (BOTRA) noted that for the Interdominion there would be 9 across the front and he was worried about the 3 horses in each race which would have started had it not been restricted in number.

Mr Burt (GPHR) advised that this was done for consistency.

### 7.3 Negativity

Mr Jones (WACHRA) noted the negativity at this meeting, stating that the industry is their own worst enemy.

### 7.4 New Handicapping System

Mr Clarke (WASBA) queried MHR on the new Handicapping system currently in production.

MHR advised that he was in the process of attending stakeholder presentations, with Northam Harness to be the final one. There was a handicapping workgroup meeting scheduled for next Wednesday (16/11) to discuss feedback received and prepare a paper for the recommendation to be tabled at the next meeting of the HRCG and then to proceed to the Racing Operations Committee in early next year.

### 7.5 Country Meetings

Mr Parker (RWWA AMHR) advised that he had recently attended several country meetings with large crowds and found this very heartening.

Mr Parker took this time to also note that WestBred only races were a better incentive to breed WA horses.

### 7.6 Outreach Program

RWWA CEO advised that there were to be a number of Outreach Sessions planned over the coming months to update participants on the RWWA Racing Strategy and wagering issues. RWWA CEO encouraged participants to attend.

**8. NEXT MEETING**

To be advised.

**9. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 2.48pm

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**CHAIRMAN**

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**DATE**