



# **RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

Final Report

## **Inquiry into Country Football**

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ORDERED TO BE PRINTED

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*December 2004*

*By Authority  
Government Printer for the State of Victoria*

No. 95 Session 2003-04

Parliament of Victoria  
Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee  
Inquiry into Country Football  
ISBN 0-9757058-0-6

# Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee

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# Terms of Reference

## PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES ACT 1968\*

### REFERRAL OF INQUIRY TO THE RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT

### INQUIRY INTO COUNTRY FOOTBALL

That pursuant to the *Parliamentary Committees Act 1968*, the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee is required to inquire into, consider and report on the following:

The impact on life in rural and regional Victoria of Australian Rules Football and, in conducting the Inquiry, the Committee is to:

- (a) assess the current strength and long-term viability of Australian Football competitions and clubs in regional and rural Victoria;
- (b) assess the role Australian Football plays in building community identity, social interaction and pride in rural towns. (This should be considered in conjunction with complementary long-term existing relationships with netball and cricket competitions.);
- (c) investigate how demographic shifts, changes in sport and entertainment preferences and other social changes are impacting on participation in country based football;
- (d) identify the effects that the decline in the number of rural Australian Football clubs is having on country towns including whether other sport and recreation clubs/activities are meeting community social needs in towns where the Australian Football clubs have ceased to function;

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\* The *Parliamentary Committees Act 1968* was repealed and replaced by the *Parliamentary Committees Acts 2003* which became operative in December 2003.

- (e) identify the impact that specific costs are having on rural Australian Football associations and clubs. The costs to be investigated (but not necessarily restricted to) include insurance, local government charges and pricing policies, player payments and water availability and cost;
- (f) recommend actions that peak football organisations (administrators, leagues and clubs) might consider undertaking to support the future success of country football and participation in sport in regional and rural Victoria.

The Committee is required to report to Parliament by 30 September 2004.

Received from the Legislative Assembly

3 June 2003

Amended 31 March 2004 (reporting date extended)

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## Chair's foreword

I have great pleasure in presenting the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee's final report on its Inquiry into Country Football. As representatives of rural and regional electorates, the Committee members appreciate the vital role that Australian rules football plays in connecting and sustaining local communities. The Committee anticipated that there would be keen interest in this Inquiry and was pleased with the high level of community involvement.

Through submissions to the Inquiry, public hearings and dedicated research, the Committee members gained a better appreciation of how Australian rules football contributes to rural and regional Victoria's 'social capital', the problems currently faced by some country football leagues and clubs, and how leagues and clubs have risen to the challenges presented to them in the current environment. It became increasingly clear to the Committee that, although the number of country football clubs has declined since 1990, football is not 'in decline' in rural and regional Victoria. Unprecedented numbers of young people are playing Australian rules football, whether through the Auskick program, at school or in junior football competitions. Despite the Victorian Country Football League's statistics showing that the number of young men playing football falls sharply upon them turning 19 years old, the rate of football participation across country Victoria remains high, which is encouraging.

One of the major challenges facing country football is population loss; specifically the loss of young men aged between 18 and 25 years. Population migration, whereby young people move from small rural towns to larger regional centres or Melbourne, has significantly reduced the 'pool' of young men available to play and compete in country football. The effect of population migration has been particularly severe in the Wimmera and north-west Victoria, where communities have borne the brunt of club amalgamations and closures. Difficulties for country football clubs associated with attracting quality players have been compounded by a range of other factors, including an increasing administrative burden on volunteer administrators, rising costs, player payments and the lack of funds to upgrade football grounds and facilities. The evidence demonstrated to the Committee that many football clubs and local communities are both resilient and resourceful, and have developed creative solutions to the many challenges facing them.

A critical factor in the success of country football has been the creation of partnerships with netball leagues and clubs. The relationship between football and netball is vital to the ongoing viability of country football, as it increases club membership (and, as a result,

income), boosts fundraising activity, involves more potential volunteers and strengthens clubs' community focus. Allied with this is the importance of football/netball clubs as 'community hubs'; a place where the community can gather and interact. Those football and football/netball clubs that have actively sought to develop family-friendly policies and which have created an environment that is inclusive and welcoming for the whole community have reaped the benefits, both on and off the field. Cementing the place of football and netball clubs in local towns through the adoption of family friendly policies and programs is clearly a way in which clubs can secure their future.

Although country football clubs and leagues have amply demonstrated their ability to 'help themselves', there remain areas where additional support would be welcomed. The Committee has made a range of recommendations directed at football's peak bodies and local and state government, which are designed to provide this support. It is apparent that volunteers in sporting clubs would benefit from additional assistance to meet their many financial and legal obligations. It is also clear that the huge potential of country football is being constrained by the often poor and inadequate state of some grounds and facilities. The Committee has made funding recommendations to address both these issues. However, the injection of additional funds into country football will not be sufficient to ensure its continued success. The Committee also believes the Australian Football League, Football Victoria and the Victorian Country Football League should continually review and improve aspects of their operations to ensure that they are adequately responding to the needs of all people in rural and regional Victoria who play and support grassroots football.

I would like to thank all participants from football's grassroots to its peak bodies who participated in the Inquiry for their valuable contribution. The hospitality of people living in areas where the Committee held public hearings was also greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank the Members of the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee, who worked tirelessly throughout the Inquiry to produce our final report. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the dedication and hard work of the Committee staff, namely the Executive Officer, Ms Kristen Murray, the Research Officer, Dr Vaughn Koops, and the Office Manager, Ms Kate Murray.

**Ben Hardman MP**

**Chair**

## Recommendations

### ***Chapter Five – Issues for consideration: club and league personnel***

**Recommendation 1:** That the State Government write a brief letter to all Victorian sporting clubs, explaining in simple terms the protection afforded volunteers under the *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)*.....page 138

**Recommendation 2:** That the State Government undertake consultation with Volunteering Victoria or other appropriate bodies on any legislative proposal that is likely to have an effect on volunteer recruitment and retention.....page 139

**Recommendation 3:** That when undertaking an assessment of proposed regulations through the Regulatory Impact Statement process, specific consideration should be given to the impact of those regulations on volunteers and voluntary organisations, and in particular, whether proposed regulations will have a detrimental effect on volunteer participation, recruitment, and retention.....page 139

**Recommendation 4:** That in addition to its current recognition of service awards, the Australian Football League (AFL) examine practical means to support and recognise grassroots football volunteers, such as complimentary match day passes, opportunities for country football volunteers to observe AFL and AFL club officials at work, or the integration of a broader range of training programs into AFL club forums and regional visits.....page 140

**Recommendation 5:** That the State Government develop and fund a multifaceted media campaign, to encourage, recognise and promote the recruitment and involvement of volunteers in clubs and associations of all sports, and that this campaign be linked to the program outlined in Recommendation 14.....page 141

**Recommendation 6:** That government provide funding for research to capture historical information about leagues, clubs and competitions (including competitions and premierships, best and fairest, leading goal kickers, life members, captains,

coaches etc.) and that this information be offered as a free, public online resource.....  
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**Recommendation 7:** That the Australian Football League (AFL) employ current and retired AFL umpires to travel around rural and regional Victoria to provide advice, support and skills development to people currently umpiring country football...  
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**Recommendation 8:** That the Australian Football League and Victorian Country Football League continue to develop programs to foster respect for, and retention of, football umpires.....page 155

**Recommendation 9:** That umpires, like country and suburban players, be considered ‘contestants’ for the purpose of the WorkCover scheme, and that adequate insurance be obtained by umpires’ associations to provide appropriate cover for football umpires.....page 156

**Recommendation 10:** That further activity, such as coach mentoring programs, be undertaken to support coaches in rural and regional football clubs to improve coaching competencies.....page 158

**Recommendation 11:** That greater funding and support be provided by the Australian Football League, Football Victoria and the Victorian Country Football League for coaching development programs at junior and Auskick levels of football, so that these programs can be provided at no cost to participants.....page 159

**Recommendation 12:** That the Australian Football League (AFL) develop a system to ensure that AFL clubs establish ongoing relationships with specific districts, leagues and/or clubs in country Victoria, and provide AFL club-based mentoring and support to coaches, trainers and medical staff associated with those country football districts, leagues and/or clubs.....page 163

**Recommendation 13:** That the Australian Football League ‘Club Start-up Kit’, or a version of that document, be adapted to provide assistance to existing and emerging clubs, and that it be:

- (i) expanded to include consideration of issues relating to the payment of players; and

(ii) that sections of that document describing financial activities and reporting requirements for football clubs provide more detailed descriptions and templates of how to manage complex financial transactions and regulatory requirements; and  
 (iii) that this resource be offered on-line, in electronic form, and in hard-copy .....  
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**Recommendation 14:** That in the order of \$2 million per annum over five years be made available by the State Government to develop and provide a comprehensive, integrated program to assist volunteers in community sport in the following areas:

- (i) sports administration;
  - (ii) understanding and managing volunteer liability insurance issues;
  - (iii) alcohol and food handling competencies;
  - (iv) awareness of current grants and resources available to sports organisations;
  - (v) general sports administration and organisation skills acquisition;
- and that programs should be run in rural and regional centres across Victoria to ensure reasonable access for all people .....page 165

**Recommendation 15:** That the Municipal Association of Victoria work with local councils and the Victorian Country Football League to develop a system to reduce the number of ground reports required before a game from two to one .....page 166

**Recommendation 16:** That the State Government make representations to the federal Treasurer, the Australian Taxation Office and other appropriate authorities to have participants in local football competitions, namely umpires and players, who receive less than the tax free threshold per annum (currently \$6000) declared as engaging in a hobby and therefore not subject to taxation, superannuation contributions and other associated requirements for these payments .....page 168

***Chapter Six – Issues for consideration: club infrastructure and maintenance***

**Recommendation 17:** That Sport and Recreation Victoria undertake a review of the current application process for Minor Facilities grants with a view to simplifying the process and reducing the administrative burden on local sporting clubs.....page 178

**Recommendation 18:** That local government give consideration to introducing a two-stage application process for Minor Facilities grants, whereby short listed applicants are given assistance to prepare detailed funding submissions where required.....page 178

**Recommendation 19a:** That when corresponding with applicants for Minor Facilities grants who have not been selected for consideration by Sport and Recreation Victoria, local government identify why the application was not successful and how the funding submission could be improved in the future.

**Recommendation 19b:** That when corresponding with local councils that have unsuccessfully applied for Minor Facilities grants, Sport and Recreation Victoria identify why the application was not successful and how the funding submission could be improved in the future.....page 180

**Recommendation 20:** That in continuing recognition of the reduced fundraising capacity in rural and regional areas, the current funding ratio for Minor Facilities grants, whereby the State Government contributes \$2 for every \$1 locally raised for projects in rural shires and \$1.50 for every \$1 locally raised for projects in regional cities, be retained.....page 182

**Recommendation 21:** That the State Government review the structure and maximum number of grants available through the Minor Facilities funding program to reduce inequities between smaller and larger shires and to ensure that grants are meeting local needs.....page 183

**Recommendation 22:** That the State Government establish a new multi-million dollar grants scheme for the upgrade of football and netball facilities in rural and regional Victoria, to be allocated over four years. Grants should be made available to rural shires on the basis of \$2 for every \$1 raised locally and to regional cities on the basis of \$1.50 for every \$1 raised locally, and the State Government should negotiate with the AFL for a matched funding contribution.....page 198

**Recommendation 23:** That in considering applications for grants for upgrading football and netball facilities, the State Government give priority to applications that seek to address particular areas of need, including:

- (i) appropriate netball facilities;

- (ii) appropriate facilities for umpires;
- (iii) shared community, club and social facilities;
- (iv) multi-use facilities;
- (v) lighting; and
- (vi) health and safety improvements.....page 198

**Recommendation 24:** That local sporting clubs and local government be encouraged to apply for funding through the *Planning Projects Funding Program* to develop strategic facilities plans and give consideration to sharing or co-locating sporting facilities and resources where appropriate.....page 199

**Recommendation 25:** That the State Government provide financial incentives to local councils and water authorities in rural and regional Victoria to develop and implement initiatives using recycled and grey water for sporting grounds, in consultation with sporting groups.....page 205

### ***Chapter Seven – Issues for consideration: youth and schools***

**Recommendation 26:** That the Australian Football League increase its involvement in, and support for, school football competitions.....page 231

**Recommendation 27:** That the Australian Football League ensure that Football Victoria Development and the Victorian Country Football League are adequately resourced to enable them to work in partnership with schools, country football clubs and community groups to encourage and promote football in schools, particularly in schools in rural and regional Victoria.....page 231

**Recommendation 28:** That physical education continues to be mandated as a compulsory part of the school curriculum, and that the physical education curriculum contains two components:

- (i) generalised movement; and
- (ii) modified games for skill acquisition.....page 233

**Recommendation 29:** That the State Government develop a generalised sports program, based on Auskick, to be offered through Victorian primary schools.....page 233

**Recommendation 30:** That the Department of Education and Training develop and implement a training program to encourage all teachers to obtain practical experience in physical education and selected sports, with the intention that:

- (i) most teachers acquire general physical education and sports coaching skills; and
- (ii) these programs be made available through regional centres to ensure all teachers are able to undertake physical education training programs where necessary...page 236

**Recommendation 31:** That the Department of Education and Training actively encourage all teachers, particularly those without a strong sporting background, to become involved in physical education and development programs for selected sports, including Australian rules football.....page 236

### ***Chapter Eight – Issues for consideration: peak bodies***

**Recommendation 32:** That the Australian Football League give consideration to the special needs of country football when allocating funding, similar to the way that consideration is currently given to the special needs of developing states such as the Northern Territory, Queensland and New South Wales.....page 243

**Recommendation 33:** That the Australian Football League examine ways of strengthening links between AFL clubs and rural and regional areas, so that AFL clubs provide clubs and players from those areas with support, assistance and mentorship; and  
that as an incentive for AFL clubs to provide such assistance, the Australian Football League consider introducing a mechanism to allow these AFL clubs preferential draft picks from their allocated rural and regional area, to be selected after the completion of round one of the draft, in exchange for their round three or four draft picks.....  
.....page 251

**Recommendation 34:** That Tattersall’s and the State Government undertake discussions with Football Victoria to consider ways in which the Tipstar football tipping competition could be modified to provide revenue to country football clubs by providing a mechanism for local football clubs to sell and promote Tipstar to their supporters and members.....page 264



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## Acronyms

AAV	Aboriginal Affairs Victoria
ACHPER	Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AFL	Australian Football League
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
DVC	Department for Victorian Communities
EFTPOS	Electronic Funds Transfer at Point Of Sale
ERASS	Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey
FVD	Football Victoria Development
GST	Goods and Services Tax
MCC	Melbourne Cricket Club
MCG	Melbourne Cricket Ground
MPNFL	Mornington Peninsula Nepean Football League
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
PASE	Physical and Sports Education
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SRV	Sport and Recreation Victoria
TAC	Transport Accident Commission
Tas	Tasmania
VAFA	Victorian Amateur Football Association
VCFL	Victorian Country Football League
VCFUA	Victorian Country Football Umpires Association
VFA	Victorian Football Association
VFL	Victorian Football League
Vic	Victoria
VPSSA	Victorian Primary Schools Sports Association
VSSSA	Victorian Secondary Schools Sports Association
VWFL	Victorian Women's Football League
WA	Western Australia



## Introduction

### ***Background to the Inquiry***

a.1 On 3 June 2003 the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee of the Parliament of Victoria received terms of reference by resolution of the Legislative Assembly, to inquire into the impact on life in rural and regional Victoria of Australian rules football. In conducting the Inquiry, the Committee was asked to:

- assess the current strength and long-term viability of Australian football competitions and clubs in rural and regional Victoria;
- assess the role Australian football plays in building community identity, social interaction and pride in rural towns, in conjunction with complementary long-term existing relationships with netball and cricket;
- investigate how demographic shifts, changes in sport and entertainment preferences and other social changes are impacting on participation in country based football;
- identify the effects of a decline in the number of Australian rules football clubs on country towns, and whether any other sport and recreations clubs or activities were meeting community needs;
- identify the impact of specific costs on football clubs, including insurance, local government charges, water costs and player payments; and
- recommend actions that peak football organisations might take to support the continued success of country football and participation in sport in rural and regional Victoria.

a.2 The Committee was asked to report to Parliament by 31 March 2004, later extended to 30 September 2004.

### ***The evidence gathering process***

a.3 In August 2003, the Committee was invited to attend a presentation by the Australian Football League (AFL), Football Victoria and the Victorian Country Football League (VCFL) at AFL House. This provided the Committee with a valuable overview of the structure and organisation of football across Victoria, as well as an insight into some of the major issues confronting grassroots football leagues and clubs.

a.4 The Committee appreciated the importance of Australian rules football to the lives of many people living in rural and regional Victoria, particularly those in smaller country towns. The Committee therefore sought to advertise the Inquiry as widely as possible and to obtain evidence from a broad range of interested individuals and organisations. In September 2003, the Committee advertised the terms of reference and its call for written submissions in *The Age*, *The Herald Sun*, *The Weekly Times*, *Stock and Land*, regional papers (such as *The Warrnambool Standard* and the *Shepparton News*) and local papers across rural Victoria (such as *The Leongatha Great Southern Star* and *The Swan Hill Guardian*). The Committee also wrote directly to peak bodies, State and local government agencies and key individuals, such as Tom Hafey, asking them to make a submission to the Inquiry. The VCFL assisted the Committee by e-mailing affiliated leagues and clubs and advising them of the call for submissions. The Committee received 67 submissions in total, which reflected the level of interest in country football and other sporting pursuits. A list of submissions is contained in Appendix 1.

a.5 After reviewing the submissions, the Committee undertook a series of public hearings across rural and regional Victoria between March and May 2004. In order to ensure that the entire state was represented, the Committee held hearings in the Barwon and South-West regions (Modewarre, Warrnambool and Horsham), the North and North-West (Kerang, Robinvale and Sea Lake), Gippsland (Lakes Entrance and Leongatha) and the North-East (Seymour, Shepparton and Wangaratta). Hearings were also held in Ballarat and Bendigo. These hearings enabled the Committee members to receive evidence and ask questions of people with interest and expertise in country football. In developing its public hearing program, the Committee sought to ensure that a wide range of interests were represented. Accordingly, the Committee received evidence from representatives of VCFL major and minor leagues, country football clubs, netball leagues and associations, umpires, VCFL Area and Regional Managers, local government sport and recreation officers, regional sporting assemblies and cricket clubs. As it was not always possible to include every interested person in the formal hearing program, the Committee also allocated time at the end of every hearing for ‘comments from the floor’. This was designed to enable members of the audience to make comments to the Committee if they wished.

a.6 During May 2004, the Committee also held public hearings in Melbourne, where organisations including the AFL, Football Victoria, the VCFL, Netball Victoria, Sport and Recreation Victoria and VicHealth presented to the Committee. In total, the Committee heard evidence from 160 witnesses. A list of witnesses is contained at Appendix 2.

a.7 The evidence received through submissions and public hearings was invaluable to the Committee in compiling its report. The Committee appreciates the considerable effort that everyone made in developing submissions, making presentations and attending public hearings. The Committee supplemented this evidence with its own research, which is also reflected in the report.

### ***Scope of the Inquiry***

a.8 The Committee recognises and acknowledges the important role that sport and recreation plays in the lives of all Victorians, including those living in rural and regional Victoria. Nevertheless, the Inquiry's terms of reference were strongly focussed on Australian rules football and, for this reason, the Committee was limited in its ability to consider other sports in detail. However, given the strong relationship between football and netball and the consolidation of this relationship through the establishment of football/netball clubs and leagues, the Committee did consider a range of issues that pertain to netball and netballers. Given the historical relationship between football and cricket and the traditional dominance of these two sports, the Committee also sought to identify issues affecting cricket associations and clubs. In its discussion of the role of football in building a sense of social identity and pride, the Committee also considered comments received from other sporting organisations, such as Basketball Victoria, about their role in connecting communities.

a.9 As the VCFL is the central and governing body for country football in Victoria, the Committee's Inquiry largely revolved around concerns expressed by VCFL affiliated football and football/netball leagues and clubs. The Committee recognised however that the VCFL does not necessarily have 'blanket coverage' of all football played in rural and regional Victoria, and that some metropolitan leagues, such as the Riddell District Football League, have member clubs based in country Victoria. The Committee did receive some evidence from leagues and clubs that are not affiliated with the VCFL and it appears to the Committee that many of their

concerns mirrored those expressed by VCFL clubs and leagues and the VCFL itself. The Committee heard considerable evidence about the TAC Cup elite competition, which has a strong regional presence, and discusses aspects of the TAC Cup program in the report.

### ***Report structure***

a.10 The report begins with a short discussion of the origins of Australian rules football and how it was embraced by people living in country Victoria. This discussion also includes mention of a number of issues that were prominent in the mid-1800s which still feature today. The report is then effectively divided into two halves: the current state of country football and issues for consideration.

a.11 The first half of the report, comprising chapters one to four, describes the current structure and operation of football in rural and regional Victoria and discusses the importance of Australian rules football to rural communities. The first chapter describes football's vital contribution to the development and maintenance of community connectedness, social interaction and pride. The important contribution that football makes to rural economies is also considered. The second chapter contains an overview of country football and describes programs and resources, organisation of competitions and key personnel, such as players, volunteers and umpires. The third chapter examines the positive and negative effects of wider social change on country football, including population shifts and changing sport and recreation preferences. Chapter four discusses the considerable financial challenges for football clubs and leagues in rural and regional Victoria, such as player and coach payments, rising administration expenses and facility and ground fees.

a.12 The second half of the report, comprising chapters five to eight, discusses some key issues in detail. These include issues affecting club and league personnel, the standard of football and netball facilities, junior football and football in schools and the performance of football's peak bodies. The Committee's recommendations, which are designed to support football in rural and regional Victoria, are largely contained in these chapters.



## Australian rules football in a historical context

### ***Introduction***

b.1 Australian rules football has captured the imagination and interest of Australians for more than 150 years, particularly those who live (and lived) in rural and regional Victoria. Football has a rich history and strong tradition which has a significant bearing on how the game is played today. Similarly, many of the concerns expressed about country football, such as player payments, have links to the past. The purpose of this discussion is to provide a brief overview of the development of Australian rules football in the mid-1800s and the way in which it was embraced and shaped by people living in country areas. Select historical issues that are relevant today are also reviewed.

### ***A brief overview of the origins of Australian rules football***

b.2 Although historians disagree as to the date upon which Australian rules football began, at least one source contends that Australian rules football began on 10 July 1858 when Tom Wills, a member of the Melbourne Cricket Club (MCC), wrote to the newspaper *Bell's Life* and suggested that cricketers should form a football team to keep fit over the winter.<sup>2</sup> Prospective players met at Yarra Park in Melbourne and created a game that included features from the various codes of football they had played at school in England. As Robin Grow explains however:

*The game was not 'invented' in some brilliant flash of insight, but basically derived from various football games that were played in English schools. Every former English public schoolboy regarded the variant played at his particular school as the 'true' game of football. There were many similarities between the games, but also significant differences....The game played in Victoria during the 1850s probably most closely resembled those played at Harrow and Rugby. But when players from different schools got together to play in Melbourne, they realised they would need to compromise if they were to devise a single game that they could all participate in and enjoy.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Melbourne Cricket Ground, 'Letter from Tom Wills', viewed 31 August 2004, <<http://www.mcg.org.au/default.asp?pg=historydisplay&articleid=37>>. Wills also suggested that they might form a rifle club instead.

<sup>3</sup> R Grow, 'From gum trees to goalposts', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 10.

b.3 Australian Aboriginals also played a form of football called marngrook.<sup>4</sup> Marngrook is played with a ball made “from an opossum skin filled with crushed charcoal and tied up with kangaroo sinews”.<sup>5</sup> Teams of 50 or 100 players a side kick and mark the ball high in the air in a form of ‘keepings off’ and there is no goal scoring.<sup>6</sup> Marngrook is still played today.<sup>7</sup>

b.4 It has been theorised that Australian rules football has its origins in marngrook. Connections between marngrook and Australian rules football include the fact that high marking is a spectacular element of both games, that Tom Wills, one of the ‘fathers of football’, grew up near Ararat with Aboriginal children who played marngrook and that Aboriginal champions have been so successful in playing Australian rules football.<sup>8</sup> However many football historians, including Rob Hess, Geoffrey Blainey and Robin Grow, discount such theories on the basis that there is little evidence for the game having Aboriginal origins while there is much evidence to suggest British/rugby origins.<sup>9</sup> Flanagan explains it best with his observation that Australian rules football is “a game which the Aboriginal people believe to be Aboriginal, which the Irish believe to be Irish and which British Australians believe to be British”.<sup>10</sup>

b.5 The first games of Australian rules football were ‘scratch matches’, where teams were selected from the young men who turned up on the day looking for a

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<sup>4</sup> Marngrook or ‘Marn Grook’ is an Aboriginal word for “Game Ball” – International Australian Football Council, ‘Marn Grook’, viewed 13 October 2004, <<http://www.iafc.com.au/marngrook.html>>.

<sup>5</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 203.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Broadcasting Corporation, ‘Rewind’, viewed 13 October 2004, <[www.abc.net.au/tv/rewind/txt/s1209463.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/tv/rewind/txt/s1209463.htm)>; G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 203; R Grow, ‘From gum trees to goalposts’, in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 13; R Pascoe, *The winter game: a complete history of Australian football*, The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 48-9.

<sup>7</sup> ABC Gippsland, ‘Indigenous Games brings people together to play’, viewed 13 October 2004, <<http://www.abc.net.au/gippsland/stories/s891436.htm>>; Australian Broadcasting Corporation, ‘Rewind’, viewed 13 October 2004, <[www.abc.net.au/tv/rewind/txt/s1209463.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/tv/rewind/txt/s1209463.htm)>.

<sup>8</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, pp. 203-4; M Flanagan, ‘Tom Wills: the original spirit’, *Australian Football*, no. 1, 2004, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Broadcasting Corporation, ‘Rewind’, viewed 13 October 2004, <[www.abc.net.au/tv/rewind/txt/s1209463.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/tv/rewind/txt/s1209463.htm)>; G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, pp. 203-4; R Grow, ‘From gum trees to goalposts’, in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> M Flanagan, ‘Tom Wills: the original spirit’, *Australian Football*, no. 1, 2004, p. 16.

game.<sup>11</sup> For example, on 31 July 1858 publican James ‘Jerry’ Bryant, who ran the Bryant Parade Hotel in East Melbourne, ran an advertisement in a leading newspaper seeking interested people to participate in a game of football in Yarra Park, promising to provide a football. These early matches were player, rather than club or spectator, oriented and gave players the freedom to make up their own game as they went along.

b.6 The first rules were written down in May 1859 and are believed to be the first set of written rules for any code of football anywhere in the world.<sup>12</sup> These are as follows:

**Rules of the Melbourne Football Club, May 1859<sup>13</sup>**

1. The distance between the goals and the goal posts shall be decided upon by the captains of the sides playing.
2. The captains on each side shall toss for choice of goal. The side losing the toss has the kick-off from the centre-point between the goals.
3. A goal must be kicked fairly between the posts without touching either of them or a portion of the person of any player of either side.
4. The game shall be played within the space of not more than 200 yards wide, the same to be measured equally upon each side of the line drawn through the centre of the two goals and two posts to be called the kick-off posts shall be erected at a distance of 20 yards on each side of the goal posts at both ends and in a straight line with them.
5. In case the ball is kicked behind the goals, anyone of the side behind whose goal it is kicked, may bring it 20 yards in front of any portion of the space between the kick-off posts and shall kick it as nearly as possible in the line of the opposite goal.
6. Any player catching the ball directly from the boot may call ‘mark’. He then has a free kick. No players from the opposite side being allowed to come into the spot marked.
7. Tripping and pushing are both allowed but no hacking when any player is in rapid motion or in possession of the ball except for the case provided by rule 6.
8. The ball may be taken in hand only when caught from the boot or on the hop. In no case shall it be lifted from the ground.
9. When a ball goes out of bounds (the same being indicated by a row of posts) it shall be brought back to the point where it crossed the boundary line and thrown in at right angles with that line.
10. The ball while in play may under no circumstances be thrown.

*Signed by: Tom Wills, William Hammersley, J. Sewell, J. B. Thompson, Alex Bruce, T. Butterworth and Thomas Smith.*

<sup>11</sup> R Grow, 'From gum trees to goalposts', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> R Grow, 'From gum trees to goalposts', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> R Grow, 'From gum trees to goalposts', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 8.

According to Grow, these rules did not rigidly codify the game.<sup>14</sup> For many years, Australian football rules were kept relatively simple and allowed a great deal of innovation on the part of players. The game developed incrementally during the years that followed, as rules surrounding aspects of the game such as running with the ball and marking continued to be perfected. A major distinction of the Australian game from other codes of football was the absence of an off-side rule, generally considered to be the “strongest of all impediments” to scoring.<sup>15</sup> These rules resulted in a game that could easily be understood and played by all people from all backgrounds and by all newcomers to the colony.<sup>16</sup> Different regions, towns and clubs often had different rules. Geelong and Ballarat, for example, each had their own sets of rules.

b.7 Spectators played a major role in the success of Australian rules football. While the first games might have involved a few mates having a kick in the park, spectators quickly became an important part of the game, adding to the game’s atmosphere and (eventually) cash flow, and also influencing how the game was played. Traditional forms of football, such as those played in European villages, tended to focus on the participation of entire communities. They would often be played for a very long time, with no set boundaries and frequently with no clear winner.<sup>17</sup> A notable feature of the development of football in Victoria, however, was that large crowds of spectators who had no intention of participating would often gather to watch football being played.

b.8 Crowd sizes began to increase throughout the 1860s and large crowds soon became characteristic of Australian rules football. In the 1860s between 5000 and 10,000 supporters were regularly reported at games. In 1876 Geelong attracted a crowd of 2000 to a home game against East Melbourne and 3000 spectators attended a game against Barwon.<sup>18</sup> During the 1880s, generally considered ‘football’s first

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<sup>14</sup> R Grow, 'From gum trees to goalposts', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 9-10.

<sup>15</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 63. Note however Blainey’s discussion of the off-side rule at pp. 63-4 and his proposition that the game began with a minor form of the offside rule, which was later dispensed with.

<sup>16</sup> R Grow, 'From gum trees to goalposts', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 10-11.

<sup>17</sup> L Sandercock & I Turner, *Up where, Cazaly?*, Granada Publishing, Netley, 1981, pp. 16-18.

<sup>18</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 107; R Grow, 'From gum trees to goalposts', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 40. As no admission fee

golden decade’, crowds averaged 3400 per match, with more than 10,000 attending ‘blockbuster’ games. The popularity of Australian rules football was arguably even greater away from Melbourne. According to Blainey, Ballarat was “engrossed in football and undoubtedly a larger proportion of the population attended football there than in Melbourne”.<sup>19</sup>

b.9 The popularity of Australian rules football as a spectator sport also affected the way the game was played. The spectators, like the players, champions and rule makers, played a role in the development of Australian rules. Blainey explains:

*They longed for the spectacular: they wanted to see the long run with the ball, the high mark, the clever dodging and the sudden physical clash. They shunned the slow-moving play and especially the scrummage.*<sup>20</sup>

By 1864 players with a rugby school background and fast runners wanted to be able to run the length of the field before kicking the ball, rather than follow the old habit of kicking as soon as possible. These innovations were encouraged by crowds who desired a more dynamic, ‘spectacular’ game. Consequently, these practices became an entrenched feature of the game, in no small part because a ‘fluid’ form of the game was more appealing to spectators. According to Blainey “[t]he spectators who stood near the boundary flags were therefore to be counted amongst the inventors of the new code of football, for their preferences influenced the rules which, for the most part, were slowly rewritten or reinterpreted to encourage open play.”<sup>21</sup>

b.10 Umpires have also played a central role to the development of Australian rules football. As the game changed and developed it became important to have someone on the ground to interpret and rule on the laws of the game. In the first years of the code’s development there were no umpires at all; rather the captains of the competing teams ruled on any infringements during play. Although this arrangement was adequate for informal ‘scratch matches’, the use of captains as umpires became increasingly problematic as the game was played for public entertainment and as

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was charged in these first decades exact attendances cannot be known for sure (G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 107.).

<sup>19</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 120.

<sup>20</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 201.

<sup>21</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 74.

spectators began to bet money on the outcome of matches. One such example occurred in 1862, when a game between Geelong and Melbourne was abandoned after Melbourne believed they had kicked a goal and the Geelong captain claimed it had been kicked unfairly and should not be counted.<sup>22</sup>

b.11 As a result of these and similar disputes, a rule allowing for specialist umpires was introduced in 1860. Initially, it appears that umpires were not regularly employed for football matches.<sup>23</sup> However, in 1866 the rules were altered to require an umpire to be appointed by each team. In practice this usually meant that a former player for the club was designated as umpire for the day, so allegations of bias were still common.<sup>24</sup> As Australian rules football grew in popularity, the need for accurate and fair umpiring became increasingly urgent. The formation of the Victorian Football Association (VFA) in 1877 also meant that football now had a governing body that could take charge of appointing independent umpires. As a consequence, Australian rules went from having two partisan umpires to one independent umpire in the 1880s.<sup>25</sup> At this time the VFA also decided to pay umpires. Umpires were paid £1 per match – one third of a skilled worker’s weekly wage.<sup>26</sup> Although each umpire could only referee one match per week (games were only played on Saturday afternoons), Blainey notes that this was “a high pay for a sport that was ostensibly amateur.”<sup>27</sup> While paying the umpire was no doubt intended to improve the standard of umpiring it had the unlooked-for effect of increasing “the public’s demands on his eyesight, commonsense and impartiality.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, pp. 58-9.

<sup>24</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 59.

<sup>26</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 60.

<sup>27</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 178.

<sup>28</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 178.

b.12 By the 1890s a different breed of umpire was refereeing Australian rules football games. Umpires were no longer drawn from former players because the intensity of play meant they had to be very fit. They “were expected to train regularly, attend lectures at a VFA umpires’ school, and earn their stripes in the ranks of the junior associations affiliated with the VFA.”<sup>29</sup> Umpires also formed their own association to look after their interests, which sometimes included arrangements for physical protection from angry spectators. The tension between umpires, spectators and players increased and in time some umpires “took direct action such as walking off the ground when abuse from players was out of control.”<sup>30</sup> The single central umpire remained in control until 1976, when the Victorian Football League (VFL) introduced a second central umpire and in 1994 the Australian Football League introduced a third field umpire in an attempt to improve the quality of umpiring.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Early football’s governing bodies***

b.13 Before the formation of the first Australian rules football association or league, clubs decided fixtures through direct negotiation and game rules were revised by delegates from the clubs.<sup>32</sup> The absence of a governing body or association created particular difficulties, including problems imposing discipline on clubs and individual players and lack of consistency in the rules – for example, when football rules required revision, decisions made by delegates from the main clubs were not always adopted by other football clubs and players. In 1877 the main clubs formed the VFA, with the intention that it function to promote and control the game in Victoria. According to Blainey, only senior metropolitan clubs were permitted to join the VFA, although this included Geelong and Barwon. VFA clubs could also play any other club during the season (including country clubs), whether or not they were members

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<sup>29</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 61.

<sup>30</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 61.

<sup>31</sup> R Pascoe, *The winter game: a complete history of Australian football*, The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, 1995, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 129.

of the VFA.<sup>33</sup> The rules also permitted country or provincial clubs to send one delegate to the VFA. Blainey reports that in the Association's first year, the four goldfield clubs of Ballarat, Beechworth, Castlemaine and Inglewood, and the rural town of Rochester, sent delegates to VFA meetings.<sup>34</sup> Blainey explains:

*The main task of the Association was the setting of the rules of the game, settling of disputes between member clubs, and above all the financing and conducting of matches against teams from other colonies. Indeed the formal constitution specified only one task: to control and manage all intercolonial matches.*<sup>35</sup>

b.14 Grow observes that by the end of the 1880s, the VFA was the major sporting body in Victoria.<sup>36</sup> Even after the elite and wealthy clubs broke away to form the VFL, the VFA was responsible for instituting new rules to “galvanise the game”,<sup>37</sup> including fielding fewer men (18 instead of the traditional 20), outlawing the little mark (ensuring the ball was kicked ten yards instead of the old two before ‘mark’ could be called) and counting ‘behinds’ as well as ‘goals’ when tallying scores. These new rules were quickly adopted throughout Australia and were used immediately, for example, in a match between Albury and Wodonga.<sup>38</sup>

b.15 The VFA was also responsible for a range of other advancements in Australian rules football, including:

- a well organised game;
- standardised and capably enforced rules;
- improved playing skills; and
- new methods of playing to increase the spectator appeal of football.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, pp. 130-1.

<sup>34</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 130.

<sup>35</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 74-5.

<sup>37</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 169.

<sup>38</sup> The new rules were not always approved of, but Blainey does point out that the complaints often came from the losing side!

<sup>39</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 75.



Somewhat ironically however, the success of the VFA was instrumental in the breakaway of the stronger teams (including Geelong) to form the VFL. Grow states that “the prosperity that flowed from the massive crowds had bitterly divided the VFA, sowing the seeds for a breakaway by the wealthier clubs.”<sup>40</sup> During the depression of the 1890s, the VFA administration proposed various schemes to ‘socialise’ football through a redistribution of revenue, but this proposal was resisted by the more popular clubs, who were the beneficiaries of higher gate takings.<sup>41</sup> According to Grow, in 1896 the VFA secretary proposed that each VFA club receive £5 per week, with remaining game revenue donated to charity. This has been said to be the “major factor leading to the creation of the Victorian Football League.”<sup>42</sup>

b.16 The VFL was formed in 1896, after years of “plotting and dissatisfaction.”<sup>43</sup> During 1894 there were suggestions that Ballarat and Bendigo might be allowed to join the VFL, and these proposals were supported by Geelong, which believed it was disadvantaged by having to travel so far to compete and wanted to have more regional representation. According to Blainey however, it is not clear whether a league with such scattered teams would have survived.<sup>44</sup> Apart from the ‘pulling power’ associated with the VFL, which comprised the wealthier teams that had ceded from the VFA (leaving with VFA with only five teams), its initial success was largely attributed to the development of a finals system. For the first time the top teams played a final series (as occurs in the modern game), rather than the team which finished top of the ladder claiming the premiership, as occurred in the VFA. This helped the VFL win increased support from the press and the crowds.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, Blainey contends that football probably gained from the two rival competitions in

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<sup>40</sup> R Grow, ‘The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896’, in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 75.

<sup>41</sup> R Grow, ‘The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896’, in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 75-6.

<sup>42</sup> R Grow, ‘The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896’, in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 83.

<sup>43</sup> R Grow, ‘The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896’, in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 83.

<sup>44</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, pp. 158-9.

<sup>45</sup> R Hess, ‘The Victorian Football League takes over, 1897-1914’, in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 90.

Victoria, with the VFL seen as “dominant but not unbeatable.”<sup>46</sup> Blainey notes that a combined VFL team played a combined Ballarat team in 1897 and was beaten decisively.

### ***The spread of football throughout Victoria***

b.17 The new game of Australian rules football was eagerly adopted in country Victoria from the 1860s onwards. Blainey maintains that the football code reached the Bendigo goldfields in 1861, when JB Thompson, who was secretary of the committee that drew up the first football rules in 1859, moved to Bendigo. He established the Sandhurst Football Club, which is still competing in the Bendigo Football League today.<sup>47</sup> Ballarat established a senior football club in 1862. Blainey states that the completion of a railway linking Ballarat and Geelong enabled Ballarat to play football against other cities for the first time. This, in turn, encouraged Ballarat to adopt the rules used by Geelong and Melbourne clubs. Blainey explains that Ballarat favoured a style of play known as ‘dodgings and capsizings’ and when Ballarat played Geelong it became apparent that this style of play was significantly more rugged than that favoured by Geelong, which favoured a long-kicking game. Interestingly, the high rate of injuries associated with Ballarat clubs’ playing style resulted in the development of the (now central) rule prohibiting pushes in the back.

b.18 Grow states that by the mid-1870s “[i]n every country town there was at least one club, and the game was thriving in major regional centres such as Geelong and Ballarat.”<sup>48</sup> Public transport, in the form of train and tram services, played a vital role in the spread of football throughout Melbourne’s suburbs in the mid- to late-1800s. This is also true of the spread of football in regional and rural Victoria, where train lines and shipping routes were the quickest means of long-distance transport. Blainey explains the significance of shipping and rail routes to the development of football in towns like Geelong and Warrnambool:

*Outside Melbourne the fever for football first infected Geelong. Linked to Melbourne by railway – the longest railway in the land – as well as by*

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<sup>46</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 172.

<sup>47</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 35.

<sup>48</sup> R Grow, ‘From gum trees to goalposts’, in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 43.

*steamships with cheap fares, Geelong's population of about 25,000 included enough athletic men on leisure to form a team.*<sup>49</sup>

*Warrnambool, a port town of about 1,500 people, was linked to Melbourne by small ships that were tossed about in Bass Strait in winter storms. By 1861 some of the young men of the town tried the new game...*<sup>50</sup>

Grow states that by 1870 the railways had reached Echuca and Colac as well as Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong, so rural clubs could play against the next town down the line without having to spend excessive amounts of time travelling to out-of-town games.<sup>51</sup>

b.19 Once Australian rules football reached regional Victoria it was adopted by many country communities:

*Far beyond the extending railway lines, other country towns tried the new game. Maryborough, a flourishing goldfield, played football in 1862. At the gold town of Heathcote...two hotels organised a team which on 15 June 1862 played the rest of the town. In some towns only two or three matches took place during the short season, which normally did not commence until June.*<sup>52</sup>

*In southwest Victoria...the inland town of Hamilton and the two ports of Warrnambool and Port Fairy occasionally played each other with teams ranging from 15 to 20 players.*<sup>53</sup>

Fierce inter-town rivalries existed as early as the 1880s. Champions were few and were jealously guarded, often resulting in rules requiring players to be permanent residents of the shire or to live within a certain distance from the post office.<sup>54</sup> Yet Grow explains that the survival of the game was ultimately more important than competitive rivalries, with rules often relaxed and players 'lent out' to keep the competition running and to ensure that lesser teams had a "fighting chance".<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 32.

<sup>50</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 38.

<sup>51</sup> R Grow, 'From gum trees to goalposts', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 29.

<sup>52</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 40.

<sup>53</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 90.

<sup>54</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 69.

<sup>55</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 69.

b.20 Melbourne clubs quickly started to take an interest in country Australian rules football. At first intrastate visits were prohibitively expensive:

*...a visit to Ballarat was too expensive an outing for most of the metropolitan clubs, and on the few such visits in the 1860s many members of the visiting clubs could not afford the fare or, if they could, failed to gain their employer's permission to be absent from work in order to catch the Friday evening train. To visit Bendigo was even more of an adventure...*<sup>56</sup>

Yet these visits did occur. One example is South Yarra, which visited Bendigo in 1872 in response to a challenge to compete against the Sandhurst Football Club.<sup>57</sup>

b.21 During the first 'boom time' of Australian rules, the 1880s, visits from Melbourne-based clubs to country Victoria became a regular feature of the football calendar. Blainey states that some Melbourne clubs established a pattern of annual visits to a favourite town. According to Blainey:

*Sometimes these visits brought the entire towns to a standstill. Shops and local businesses closed for the occasion, and most of the population made their way to their sports ground to watch the locals fight it out with the 'big boys' from the city.*<sup>58</sup>

### ***From past to present***

b.22 One of the purposes of this discussion is to identify issues that have been a historical feature of football and which remain issues today. As this section demonstrates, some features of community football that were prominent more than one hundred years ago continue to confront country football's peak bodies, administrators, leagues and clubs.

### **Player payments, transfers and administration**

b.23 Much of the evidence received by the Committee from country football clubs and leagues indicated that player payments and, to a lesser extent, player transfers are a common concern. The need to attract qualified club administrators to undertake a wide range of activities, many of which are associated with player payments, was also

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<sup>56</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 90.

<sup>57</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 90.

<sup>58</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 70-1.

discussed. This is not a new situation, as economic factors have been a significant issue since the very early days of Australian rules football.

b.24 In the 1870s money began to flow in to elite football clubs as sixpence admission was charged to the thousands of spectators who attended games. The large cash flows quickly associated with successful football clubs soon raised debates about how that money should be spent. Although money was spent on improving the facilities for paying customers and on game promotion in other colonies, there was still plenty left over.<sup>59</sup> Initially a percentage of the takings was donated to hospitals and charities.<sup>60</sup> Soon, however, money was used to pay players.

b.25 In 1886 the VFA passed a regulation decreeing that any player found receiving payment would be disqualified for the remainder of the season and the offending club would be fined and deemed to have lost the match in which the offence occurred. However such rules were almost impossible to enforce and many clubs found ways to pay their players. Blainey explains some of the ingenious ways in which the rules were eluded:

*Payments were banned under the rules, but who knew when a direct or indirect payment was made? Sometimes the payment was to the woman who ran the boarding house where the player lived. A champion player's weekly rent, in the football season, might be paid to his estate agent. Money was lawfully given to a player in the form of a silver watch, a valuable trophy or a diamond ring for his girlfriend. Rich local supporters gave money to the best players or employed them – in a local hotel or factory – when they were not very employable. The football club in its annual balance sheet might list some of these payments under the heading of 'training expenses'.<sup>61</sup>*

As discussed later in the report, similar tactics are still used today.

b.26 Historically, enforcement of player payments for Australian rules football was virtually impossible. While the VFA's rules stated that any player receiving payment would be suspended, no one was allocated responsibility to enforce the rule.<sup>62</sup> Other

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<sup>59</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 48.

<sup>60</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 48.

<sup>61</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, pp. 160-1.

<sup>62</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 161.

ways were also found to spend money on players. Blainey reports “[e]ven the poorer clubs spent money on their players. They could at least promise an end-of-season trip...to Bendigo. In an era when travel was expensive and a holiday trip was reserved only for the honeymoon, a players’ excursion was a delight.”<sup>63</sup>

b.27 The growing popularity and profitability of Australian rules football also influenced player recruitment. According to Blainey:

*The avalanche of silver coins was used to help charities, to pay existing players and to poach others from rival clubs. A few bank notes easily persuaded a young player...to join a wealthier club.*<sup>64</sup>

Transfer of players between clubs also has a long history in Australian rules football. Originally players “were drawn to the senior clubs by the desire to play in front of large crowds” but as soon as clubs started to earn money through gate takings, Grow speculates that “financial inducements” encouraged players to transfer to different clubs.<sup>65</sup>

b.28 Even before the formation of the VFA, club delegates attempted to control player transfers. The 1874 Victorian Rules of Football stated that:

*13. No player shall play with more than one Club during one season. For the purposes of this rule, schools be not considered clubs.*<sup>66</sup>

The VFA established a ‘Permit Committee’ to administer player transfers. Players were allowed to transfer if their club disbanded or if they changed address. However, it seems that the VFA was unsuccessful in controlling player transfers:

*Here, as elsewhere, the VFA’s processes were flawed, in that members of the Permit Committee were allowed to adjudicate on cases in which their club had a direct interest. Many VFA decisions reflected the delegates’ parochial interests...*<sup>67</sup>

b.29 Player transfers and increasing professionalism also changed the way clubs were run. Clubs became more businesslike in their off-field activities, such as fund-

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<sup>63</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 162.

<sup>64</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 161.

<sup>65</sup> R Grow, 'From gum trees to goalposts', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 32.

<sup>66</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 227.

<sup>67</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 47,81.

raising and social events.<sup>68</sup> In addition, club administrators assumed a central role in football clubs as they undertook increasingly complex activities. Grow maintains that office bearers acted in an unpaid capacity and were invariably men drawn from the middle classes. Such officials needed to be literate and numerate and know how to organise and make financial decisions and thus local businessmen often assumed these roles.<sup>69</sup>

b.30 Club administrators undertook a broad range of activities. Club treasurers, for example, were responsible for monitoring expenditure on training facilities, transport costs, levies to the VFA, payments to player funds, insurance, social events, testimonial funds, office materials and equipment, donations to charities and community groups and the issuing of debentures. Grow also notes that “[t]reasurers were also responsible for the all-important job of disguising player payments in the official accounts.”<sup>70</sup> Club secretaries were also increasingly vital, ensuring that their clubs complied with the bureaucratic requirements of the VFA, including notifying the VFA of players who were seeking permits to play elsewhere.<sup>71</sup> As will be seen throughout the report, issues associated with player payments, the complexities associated with club administrative activities and the need to support volunteer administrators were consistent themes during the Inquiry.

## Umpires

b.31 The Committee received evidence during the Inquiry concerning the role of umpires. Some of the issues raised included the importance of umpiring to the survival of country football and that umpires are often not accorded the respect they deserve. Umpires associations informed the Committee that it was not uncommon for their members to be subject to verbal abuse. Writing about umpiring in the 1880s, Grow states:

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<sup>68</sup> R Hess, 'The Victorian Football League takes over, 1897-1914', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 94.

<sup>69</sup> R Grow, 'From gum trees to goalposts', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 63.

<sup>71</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 62-3.

*Umpires had to put up with 'blackguard language' from players, threats of adverse reports from captains, interference in their appointments from bookmakers, protests to the VFA from aggrieved club officials, and complaints in all sectors of the press. On the ground they were subjected to continual abuse from the crowds and physical attacks as they left the arena, since there was no covered race or police escort. Off the ground, they shared dressing-rooms with the players, which often resulted in slanging matches with players and officials of the losing side.<sup>72</sup>*

Grow reports that in 1896, umpire Roberts was knocked to the ground by a violent crowd of spectators after their team had lost by a goal and was only saved from death or serious injury by the actions of a player, who shielded Roberts from the angry mob and carried him to safety.<sup>73</sup>

b.32 Evidence received during the Inquiry suggests that umpires are still being abused by some spectators, and that while violence is rarely directed toward umpires, this also occurs on occasion. The East Gippsland Umpires League, for example, told the Committee:

*[Umpires] run for the equivalent of a half marathon each day and they have to make decisions within 3 seconds. A player can make a decision, make the wrong one and not cop any abuse. If the umpires make the wrong decisions in the eyes of the spectators they get all sorts of personal abuse thrown at them.<sup>74</sup>*

The Geelong Football Umpires Association also told the Committee that spectator abuse is one of the main reasons that people retire from umpiring.<sup>75</sup>

b.33 Grow has suggested that the origins of Australian rules football's 'tradition' of umpire abuse may be attributed, in part, to the introduction of payment for umpires during the 1880s.<sup>76</sup> Grow explains "[s]ome newspaper critics had been reluctant to criticise umpires who were doing it for the love of the sport, but paid umpires were

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<sup>72</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 60.

<sup>73</sup> R Hess, 'The Victorian Football League takes over, 1897-1914', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 87.

<sup>74</sup> Peter Ward, Former Secretary, East Gippsland Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 28.

<sup>75</sup> Bendigo Umpires Association, *Submission*, no. 58, 20 May 2004, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 60.



generally considered as fair game.”<sup>77</sup> According to Grow, denigrating the umpire became “almost part of the experience of attending the football”.<sup>78</sup>

## Football grounds

b.34 As discussed in Chapter Six, the Committee has heard considerable evidence about football grounds and facilities, including ground quality, facility maintenance and resource sharing. Issues associated with hard grounds and the sometimes fraught relationship between football and cricket clubs while negotiating ground access have strong historical antecedents.

b.35 Compared with many other sports, Australian rules football grounds are very hard. Victoria’s mild and relatively dry winters not only contributed to the game’s popularity, as spectators were able to attend games without getting too cold or wet – they also resulted in hard grounds. According to a history of the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), ground hardness affected the development of the game in the sense that new rules concerning player contact were developed because grounds were too hard for rugby tackling.<sup>79</sup>

b.36 The first Australian rules footballers also had to endure many other difficulties with their grounds. The first football matches were played, not on cricket grounds, but rather in some nearby park or field:

*Football was a rough and ready game played on areas of unprepared ground wherever space could be found. Often the ball would become caught in the branches of a tree on the field of play, and the game would stop while the players stood below and threw stones at the ball to dislodge it.*<sup>80</sup>

In addition to the trees, players had to contend with “an odd-shaped field with a three-foot-deep ditch along the boundary” or “protruding roots, and the gutters across the ground [which] became small creeks in wet weather” or “swampy sections, protruding rocks, gravel, unyielding kerbstones, mud-holes and slopes” or grounds which

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<sup>77</sup> R Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 60.

<sup>78</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 177.

<sup>79</sup> K Dunstan, *The people's ground: the MCG*, Arcadia/Australia Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 2000, p. 19.

<sup>80</sup> R Grow, 'From gum trees to goalposts', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 14.

“resembled newly ploughed fields after being trampled by cattle all week.”<sup>81</sup> Each ground had its own idiosyncrasies, with which the home team was familiar, and so the phrase ‘home ground advantage’ was coined.<sup>82</sup>

b.37 Another issue raised with the Committee during the Inquiry was ground sharing between cricket and football clubs. This too has links with the past. While playing on makeshift football grounds, footballers coveted the pristine cricketing arenas. A few early games were played on the MCG, in 1859 and 1869. However, footballers were seen as a ‘nuisance’ by ground curators as they trampled on the grass, leaving potholes and muddy patches and often deliberately marking lines on the turf with their boots.<sup>83</sup> HCA Harrison, one of the ‘fathers of football’, recollected the 1869 match at the MCG in his memoirs:

*With reference to this match, I went down to inspect the ground next day, and found two or three members of the committee, all with very gloomy faces, who met me with the words, ‘Harrison! You have ruined our ground!’ Of course I laughed at the idea, but we were not allowed to play on the ground again for some time.<sup>84</sup>*

Davidson explains that “...the [MCC] did not tolerate football on the sacred turf of the MCG. Few seriously believed then that a ground could be a sea of football mud in August and a cricket playing wicket in September.”<sup>85</sup>

b.38 Slowly more and more football games were played on cricket grounds, although the wicket area was roped off. Country towns led the way. Blainey states that “[b]y 1877 such towns as Avoca, Port Fairy, Coleraine, Kilmore, Stawell, Inglewood and St Arnaud used their cricket grounds for football.”<sup>86</sup>

b.39 Cricket clubs were ultimately convinced that they should allow football to be played on their grounds when it became apparent that football matches generated

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<sup>81</sup> R Grow, ‘From gum trees to goalposts’, in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 34.

<sup>82</sup> R Grow, ‘The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877-1896’, in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 53.

<sup>83</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 51.

<sup>84</sup> A Mancini & G Hibbins, *Running with the ball*, Lynedoch Publications, Melbourne, 1987, p. 125.

<sup>85</sup> K Dunstan, *The people's ground: the MCG*, Arcadia/Australia Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 2000, p. 43.

<sup>86</sup> G Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, revised edn, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003, p. 114. See also R Grow, ‘From gum trees to goalposts’, in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 36.

significant revenue. Once football clubs began charging admission in the 1870s, money was available to provide grounds with fences, embankments, pavilions and grandstands.<sup>87</sup> Harrison recalled that even the MCC started allowing regular football games:

*But at last, after a Carlton v Melbourne match, which we were allowed to play as a great favour, it was found that the gate money was so much that the Committee began to think the risk to the ground was worth the while! Then we were permitted to play for half the season, namely to within six weeks of the cricket season.<sup>88</sup>*

## **Conclusion**

b.40 Although Australian rules football has changed dramatically from when it was first played in the 1850s, the proceeding discussion shows that some key concerns have been a recurrent feature of this game. Frustrations surrounding player payments, onerous administrative responsibilities, concerns over ground quality and umpire abuse have been a characteristic of grassroots Australian rules football for 150 years, and were all raised during the Inquiry as factors affecting country football today. However, a review of the history of Australian rules football also reveals that the game has a number of qualities, including resilience, adaptability and a responsiveness to local conditions, which have ensured its survival and success. It is for these reasons that the Committee is confident that country football will continue to prosper, albeit with additional support from peak bodies, government and local communities. In the following chapters, the Committee reviews evidence received concerning the place of football in rural and regional Victoria and the challenges currently faced by country football clubs and leagues. The report also identifies ways in which grassroots football can be supported to ensure its survival in the future.

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<sup>87</sup> R Grow, 'From gum trees to goalposts', in *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 37-8.

<sup>88</sup> A Mancini & G Hibbins, *Running with the ball*, Lynedoch Publications, Melbourne, 1987, p. 125.



## Chapter One

# The place of football in country communities

### *Introduction*

1.1 The Committee recognises that football/netball and other sporting clubs are important contributors to the development and maintenance of ‘social capital’ in rural and regional Victoria. ‘Social capital’ has been described as “features of social organisation, such as networks, norms and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.”<sup>89</sup> According to Driscoll and Wood’s report, *Sporting Capital*, social capital is developed by the leadership, initiative, club membership, participation, skill development and community development work of sporting clubs and organisations.<sup>90</sup> This view was reflected in evidence received during the Inquiry. Witnesses identified a range of positive outcomes arising from involvement in a local football, netball or other sporting club, including broader social benefits such as fostering a sense of local community and improved health for those involved with community sport, individual benefits including skill acquisition and greater connectedness within the community, and economic benefits such as increased revenue, tourism and well-maintained facilities. The spectrum of positive contributions that country football makes to the lives of people in rural and regional Victoria was captured by one witness, who told the Committee:

*Country football is more than a game; it is the biggest service club in many towns and communities. The football club provides a source of local pride, meaning and relevance to hundreds of thousands of Victorians. The footy club is a meeting place and provides a venue for fun and entertainment. It teaches family and community values...[i]t provides a continuity of tradition, history and a sense of belonging. It teaches specific skills and in turn self esteem and worth among individuals. It promotes participation which in turn promotes health and fitness and it provides an economic boost through direct and indirect spending.<sup>91</sup>*

1.2 This chapter discusses the importance of country football/netball through consideration of three main issues: contribution to community pride and identity,

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<sup>89</sup> Robert Putnam, 'The prosperous community: social capital and public life', *The American Prospect* (online), no. 13, 1993, viewed 22 October 2004,

<<http://www.prospect.org/web/page.ww?section=root&name=ViewPrint&articleId=5175>>, p. 1.

<sup>90</sup> K Driscoll & L Wood, *Sporting capital: changes and challenges for rural communities in Victoria*, Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT, 1999, p. 9.

<sup>91</sup> Rod Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Ballarat Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 4.

social interaction and economic benefits. While these issues are considered separately, the Committee recognises that all are vital to maintaining healthy, vibrant communities and thus there is substantial overlap between them. The chapter goes on to briefly discuss community pride and connectedness in the context of other sports, such as netball, cricket and basketball.

### ***Community identity and pride***

1.3 Evidence received during the Inquiry has overwhelmingly demonstrated that football/netball clubs are critical to the development and consolidation of community identity and pride. Wood and Driscoll's *Sporting Capital* report found that:

*People have a sense of history, a 'remembrance of things past' and an understanding of the hard work which is the cornerstone of sport and recreation in rural communities. The hard work and commitment generate a justifiable sense of pride and achievement.*<sup>92</sup>

Evidence to the Committee demonstrates that the presence of a football/netball club in local communities has a significant impact on how members of that community regard themselves. As Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East with the Victorian Country Football League (VCFL) told the Committee “[w]e must never underestimate the role a football club plays in the local community. The football club is the most important local identity in most country towns...[i]t gives local people a sense of identity, pride and ownership they cannot experience in any other community group.”<sup>93</sup> The contribution that football/netball clubs make to creating and maintaining a positive community identity appears to be most pronounced in what one witness referred to as “one club towns”,<sup>94</sup> namely small rural townships.

1.4 The importance of football and netball to maintaining a sense of community identity during times of adversity was exemplified for the Committee in the submission made by the Victorian Country Football Umpires Association. The Victorian Country Football Umpires Association told the Committee that a number of small local communities rallied together in the aftermath of the 2003 bushfires, which ravaged eastern Victoria, to ensure that the football and netball facilities damaged or

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<sup>92</sup> K Driscoll & L Wood, *Sporting capital: changes and challenges for rural communities in Victoria*, Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT, 1999, p. 75.

<sup>93</sup> Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> East Gippsland Football League, *Submission*, no. 44, 6 April 2004, p. 1.

destroyed by fire would be repaired in time for the start of the 2003 season.<sup>95</sup> It is testament to the importance of the football/netball clubs to those communities that facilities were repaired and players ready to take to the field/court within five weeks of the fires. A number of witnesses also told the committee about the importance of having a positive identification with a football/netball club in an environment where there are many challenges. The Lexton Plains Football and Netball Association said:

*Community spirit is developed through involvement and supporting your local team every Saturday, becoming invigorated, and that becomes the talking point for the coming week, giving everybody something in common and often allowing them to forget other depressing problems in the short term.*<sup>96</sup>

The Committee was also told “football... provides the actual opportunity for people to meet and to share these memories and to focus on a positive in their lives, where there may be many negatives.”<sup>97</sup>

1.5 Country football/netball clubs also actively contribute to a strong sense of community spirit through providing social support to people in need. Hindmarsh Shire Council told the Committee that “football and other sporting clubs often raise funds for the community and provide support for the community in difficult times”,<sup>98</sup> and Townsend, Moore and Mahoney’s study of the role of physical activity in sustaining health and wellbeing in small rural communities mentions community fundraising activities undertaken through a sporting club for a family who had suffered a house fire.<sup>99</sup>

1.6 Significantly, football’s contribution to maintaining community identity is not necessarily related to on-field success. One witness explained “[t]here are people out there who do not want their club to be the premiers every year; they just want them to be successful in their community based identity.”<sup>100</sup> The Huntly Football Netball Club is a case in point. Huntly Football Netball Club has been a member of the Heathcote

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<sup>95</sup> Victorian Country Football Umpires Association, *Submission*, no. 24, 8 December 2003, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Lexton Plains Football League and Netball Association, *Submission*, no. 51, 27 April 2004, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> Di Trotter, Executive Officer, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 21.

<sup>98</sup> Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 19, 5 December 2003, p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> M Townsend, J Moore & M Mahoney, 'Playing their part: the role of physical activity and sport in sustaining the health and well being of small rural communities', *Rural and Remote Health 2* (online), no. 109, 2002, viewed 15 October 2004, <<http://rrh.deakin.edu.au/articles/subviewnew.asp?ArticleID=109>>, p. 4.

<sup>100</sup> Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 3.

District Football League for more than 20 years and is yet to win a premiership, except for one under-17s flag. When Huntly Football Netball Club officials came to give evidence to the Inquiry in May 2004, it had been 23 months since Huntly had won a game. Nevertheless, Huntly Football Netball Club is strongly supported by the Huntly community, as evidenced by its on-line newsletter 'Hawk Talk', local sponsorship arrangements, and relationships with key local community organisations such as the Country Fire Authority, the Lions Club and the Huntly Primary School.<sup>101</sup>

1.7 For many people, watching or participating in sporting activity can create a sense of identity and 'communalism'.<sup>102</sup> Community identity through sport can therefore be an important tool in overcoming social, cultural or economic divisions. In his conclusion to *Smalltown*, a 17 year empirical study of a small Victorian rural community, Dempsey wrote "...participation in sporting and other organised recreational activities provides the basis for the development of a personal sense of identity with the community that transcends class and gender divisions."<sup>103</sup> The extent to which identification with local football can create an inclusive and positive community spirit has been apparent from the volume of evidence received during the Inquiry.

1.8 The Committee recognises that community identity and pride are inter-related and thus much of the preceding discussion is relevant to the role football/netball clubs play in creating a sense of pride in rural towns. Di Trotter, Executive Officer of the Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, told the Committee that "football in country areas has a proud tradition",<sup>104</sup> and this view is strongly shared by people living in rural and regional Victoria. Mardie Townsend explained that a study into the health and wellbeing benefits of sport in Hopetoun and Peshurst identified football as a means to increase community pride and loyalty on a collective and individual basis.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Allen Dillon, President, Huntly Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 27.

<sup>102</sup> R Lynch and A Veal, *Australian Leisure*, Longman, Melbourne, 1996, cited in M Townsend, J Moore & M Mahoney, 'Playing their part: the role of physical activity and sport in sustaining the health and well being of small rural communities', *Rural and Remote Health* 2 (online), no. 109, 2002, viewed 15 October 2004, <<http://rrh.deakin.edu.au/articles/subviewnew.asp?ArticleID=109>>, p. 3.

<sup>103</sup> K Dempsey, *Smalltown: a study of social inequality, cohesion and belonging*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990, p. 313.

<sup>104</sup> Di Trotter, Executive Officer, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 21.

<sup>105</sup> Mardie Townsend, Senior Lecturer, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 31.



According to Dr Townsend, when a local team is in a football final, this creates feelings of prestige for residents and “becomes a focus for the town and a sense of pride.”<sup>106</sup> This was confirmed by a number of witnesses, one of whom told the Committee “town pride comes in many forms...but it is especially noticed at finals.”<sup>107</sup>

1.9 One of the ways in which pride in local football/netball clubs is manifested is through the creativity that local communities bring to bear in support of their local team. According to research by Dr Townsend, rural people are “notoriously innovative” when it comes to finding solutions to problems confronting the viability of their sporting clubs.<sup>108</sup> An example cited in Townsend, Moore and Mahoney’s study was of the Hopetoun community, which purchased motor vehicles so that its young players who were studying in metropolitan areas could return home on the weekend to play football.<sup>109</sup>

1.10 In June 2004, the ABC’s *Stateline* program featured fundraising activity being undertaken by the residents of Nyah to support their local football team. The Nyah community was faced with the prospect of their football club, the Nyah Demons, retiring if they were unable to find a way to financially support the club. A local supporter donated a block of land to the club and a local couple purchased the house ‘off the plan’, giving the club enough money to buy materials and build a home, with any profit going to the football club. The ABC reported that Nyah residents have donated months of their time to build the home, even those who have no building experience.<sup>110</sup>

1.11 While they did not present to the Committee, members were most interested to learn of the Jerilderie Football Club, which for the past four years has used volunteer

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<sup>106</sup> Mardie Townsend, Senior Lecturer, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 31.

<sup>107</sup> Beverley Cummings, President, Mallee Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 10.

<sup>108</sup> M Townsend, J Moore & M Mahoney, 'Playing their part: the role of physical activity and sport in sustaining the health and well being of small rural communities', *Rural and Remote Health 2* (online), no. 109, 2002, viewed 15 October 2004, <<http://rrh.deakin.edu.au/articles/subviewnew.asp?ArticleID=109>>, p. 6.

<sup>109</sup> M Townsend, J Moore & M Mahoney, 'Playing their part: the role of physical activity and sport in sustaining the health and well being of small rural communities', *Rural and Remote Health 2* (online), no. 109, 2002, viewed 15 October 2004, <<http://rrh.deakin.edu.au/articles/subviewnew.asp?ArticleID=109>>, p. 6.

<sup>110</sup> K Ritchie, 'Country football clubs fight for their future', *ABC online*, viewed 22 October 2004, <<http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/vic/content/2003/s1130138.htm>>.

labour to sow a crop of wheat on Jerilderie Shire Council land to raise funds for the club. In 2004, the crop won the local crop competition and was expected to raise \$50,000 for the club once it had been harvested (again using volunteer labour).<sup>111</sup>

1.12 Dr Townsend also observed that even supporting a country football club can be a creative activity. She stated:

*In the late 1990s people in rural communities suffered some frustrations because of declines in markets for agricultural products, the amalgamation of local government – which was met with some resistance and the like – and people felt that being able to go to the football and cheer loudly and be part of it all was a way they could get through their frustrations creatively.*<sup>112</sup>

There is clearly significant overlap between individual and collective pride in the achievements of a football team. Individual members of a football, netball or other sporting team gain a sense of pride from their on-field achievements and those of the team, which is shared by the larger community. Those players who go on to participate in elite-level football are also a significant source of pride to country communities. Bruce Hartigan, Chairman of the Horsham Football and Netball Club, told the Committee “[o]ur major league wants our kids to go on to AFL, and we have had a fair few from our club who have done that. We are very proud of them.”<sup>113</sup> Similarly, Max Martin, Secretary of the Maryborough Castlemaine District Football League, told the Committee that the League is very proud of its junior development program, having three players (Troy Chaplin, Jed Adcock and Jeremy Humm) who have been drafted to the AFL in recent years.<sup>114</sup>

### ***Social interaction***

1.13 Sport plays an important role by linking members of a community with a common bond – their participation in a sporting club. Dempsey’s *Smalltown* study found that sport was “the great leveller”, facilitating contact between people of

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<sup>111</sup> F Myers, 'Wheat trophy to boot', *The Weekly Times*, 10 December 2003, p. 5.

<sup>112</sup> Mardie Townsend, Senior Lecturer, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 31.

<sup>113</sup> Bruce Hartigan, Chairman, Horsham Football and Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 28. Mr Hartigan also told the Committee he was proud of the club’s players who were not accepting player payments.

<sup>114</sup> Max Martin, Secretary, Maryborough Castlemaine District Football League, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 44.

different backgrounds and classes.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Townsend, Moore and Mahoney found that sport is a source of social interaction for communities that transcends barriers of age, length of residence, economic status and other factors.<sup>116</sup> Driscoll and Wood also found that sport and recreation participation facilitates the development of ‘community hubs’ – places and spaces which people use to develop webs of affiliation and maintain social networks.<sup>117</sup>

1.14 Evidence received by the Committee during public hearings suggests that country football is a particularly significant contributor to the development and maintenance of social networks, especially in small rural towns. Ian Kett, the Executive Director of the Victorian Council on Fitness and General Health (VicFit), stated that a distinction must be made between football as a public health priority and football as a contributor to social cohesion and connectedness. According to Mr Kett, although football is “down the list” in terms of (physical) public health priorities because of its relatively limited potential to influence mass participation in physical activity (compared with walking, for example), it has been a key factor in bringing groups together. Mr Kett told the Committee that the ‘bringing together’ of groups has not necessarily occurred on the field but is pronounced through interaction at the club, both through volunteer and social activities.<sup>118</sup>

1.15 People involved with football at grassroots level confirmed this position. The Secretary/Manager of the Central Highlands Football League, a district league in central Victoria, identified regular social interaction at games, regular social events at the club or conducted by the club, a general environment of hospitality, and the gathering of neighbouring communities in the social environment of football as major benefits of country football for residents of rural Victoria.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> K Dempsey, *Smalltown: a study of social inequality, cohesion and belonging*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990, p. 201.

<sup>116</sup> M Townsend, J Moore & M Mahoney, 'Playing their part: the role of physical activity and sport in sustaining the health and well being of small rural communities', *Rural and Remote Health 2* (online), no. 109, 2002, viewed 15 October 2004, <<http://rrh.deakin.edu.au/articles/subviewnew.asp?ArticleID=109>>, p. 4.

<sup>117</sup> K Driscoll & L Wood, *Sporting capital: changes and challenges for rural communities in Victoria*, Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT, 1999, p. 9.

<sup>118</sup> Ian Kett, Executive Director, Victorian Council on Fitness and General Health, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 41.

<sup>119</sup> Bill Storey-Smith, Secretary/Manager, Central Highlands Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 9.

1.16 The importance of ‘game day’ – Saturday – as an opportunity for families to get together and for people to meet was also raised with the Committee. Beverley Cummings, President of the Mallee Netball Association, said:

*With parents working and kids at school, Saturday is the main day when a family is in its unit. They all leave together and they all go home together. On the flip side of the family day out is that I personally do not have a family and I find that Saturday is an opportunity to see who else is out there that has no family.<sup>120</sup>*

Another witness expressed the importance of football for connecting people in and around rural communities when he told the Committee “[i]t is a well known fact that to strike up a conversation in any Victorian country town...you only have to be able to talk about Australian rules football.”<sup>121</sup>

### **Breaking down social and cultural barriers**

1.17 It appears that participation in country football/netball, whether on-field or off, has played an important part in overcoming social and cultural barriers. As Ken McLean, Chief Executive Officer of the Wimmera Football League explained:

*The sporting environment is the best place for communities to interact. People of differing backgrounds meet, intermingle, laugh, joke, debate and have a good time together. In the Wimmera the biggest meeting place is a football ground on a Saturday afternoon. Where else can so many people with so many different backgrounds meet and have fun in a relaxed atmosphere?<sup>122</sup>*

The Greater Shepparton City Council told the Committee that “there is no other sport or organisation that gathers such a cross-section of people together on a regular basis.”<sup>123</sup> For example, the Yinnar Football Netball Club informed the Committee that although the town’s population is 550 people, it has a membership base that extends beyond 500 people from all walks of life.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, the Central Highlands Football League told the Committee that it held a crisis meeting for the Springbank Football Club in response to the club’s form slump over the last two years. The

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<sup>120</sup> Beverley Cummings, President, Mallee Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 10.

<sup>121</sup> Ronald Schrader, individual, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 15.

<sup>122</sup> Kenneth McLean, Chief Commissioner, Wimmera Football League, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 20.

<sup>123</sup> Greater Geelong City Council, *Submission*, no. 7, 19 November 2003, p. 1.

<sup>124</sup> Yinnar Football and Netball Club, *Submission*, no. 45, 7 April 2004, p. 1.

meeting attracted several hundred participants although the ‘town’ population of Springbank is only 500-600 people.<sup>125</sup>

1.18 Studies such as Dempsey’s *Smalltown* have examined the relationship between length of residence, social marginalisation and belonging. Dempsey’s study found that many new arrivals experienced difficulty in ‘breaking in’ to a new community and integrating with personal networks and organisations.<sup>126</sup> The Committee heard evidence that developing an interest or involvement in country football and its broader social networks can be an important way for new residents to establish social connections. The Committee was told that country football creates an “instant topic of conversation” at local shops, schools and businesses on Mondays after a match and on Fridays in anticipation of the forthcoming match.<sup>127</sup> One person told the Committee that the best thing you can do upon moving to a country town is join the local football club, as you instantly know 200-300 people.<sup>128</sup> This was emphasised for the Committee by Tom Hafey, a well-known football identity, who said:

*I can remember I was doing a night at Beulah up in the Mallee, with a 300 population. An old fellow came rushing over. He said, ‘I used to collect your garbage down in St Kilda’. I said, ‘What are you doing in Beulah?’. He said, ‘I retired, bought a house — \$30,000. I’ve never been a football person, but I am now. I’ve got 50 new mates.’<sup>129</sup>*

1.19 On-field interaction through football may also assist in breaking down racial and cultural stereotypes. The Committee was pleased to hear evidence that participation in country football by Aboriginal people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is significant in some areas. The Robinvale Football Netball Club, for example, told the Committee:

*We have a very diverse ethnic range of people in this town, and we bring together a number of those ethnic backgrounds, including Caucasian, Italian, Aboriginal, Greek, Tongan, Maori, Fijian and Malaysian – we have people from all those communities who play in our sides.<sup>130</sup>*

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<sup>125</sup> Bill Storey-Smith, Secretary/Manager, Central Highlands Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 8.

<sup>126</sup> K Dempsey, *Smalltown: a study of social inequality, cohesion and belonging*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990, p. 60.

<sup>127</sup> Victorian Country Tennis Association, *Submission*, no. 2, 14 October 2003, p. 2.

<sup>128</sup> Paul Cox, President, Seymour Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 18.

<sup>129</sup> Tom Hafey, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 43.

<sup>130</sup> Wayne Shawcross, President, Robinvale Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 36.

The Committee also heard that Aboriginal people in particular have been actively involved in the Robinvale Football Netball Club, as players and coaches at junior and senior levels.<sup>131</sup> The Committee was also told that the Mathoura Football Netball Club appointed its first Koori president in 2004, the first time an Indigenous person has been appointed president in the 70-plus years of the Picola and District Football Netball League, and that the League is very proud of the appointment.<sup>132</sup>

1.20 Football/netball clubs can also contribute to the development of a more inclusive community through off-field activities. A particular example is the Rumbalara Football Netball Club in Shepparton, which has played an integral role in facilitating healthy dialogue and communication between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Goulburn Valley region. Paul Briggs, the President of the Rumbalara Football Netball Club, told the Committee that “the football club has ...been one of the main tools of social interaction and social connectedness, in a sense forcing the issue of communication – Indigenous people talking to non-Indigenous communities.”<sup>133</sup> The club has taken a leadership role in the Goulburn Valley in seeking to shift relationships between the Aboriginal community, the non-Aboriginal community and government agencies and to provide inspiration for young Aboriginal people to engage in public life.<sup>134</sup> The Committee heard that Rumbalara has entered into a partnership with a number of educational and employment institutions to increase opportunities for young Aboriginal people. The Rumbalara Football Netball Club has been highly successful in this regard, having placed approximately 121 Aboriginal people into private sector jobs.<sup>135</sup>

1.21 The Committee is aware that the Rumbalara Football Netball Club’s constitution encourages non-Aboriginal people to participate in the club as supporters, volunteers and committee members. However, the Committee notes that, in evidence to the Commonwealth Parliamentary *Inquiry into Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities* in 2003, Paul Briggs told the Inquiry that the Rumbalara Football

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<sup>131</sup> Wayne Shawcross, President, Robinvale Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 38.

<sup>132</sup> Bruce Tuhan, Senior Vice-President, Picola and District Football Netball League, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 61.

<sup>133</sup> Paul Briggs, President, Rumbalara Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Inquiry into Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities, Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, House of Representatives, 17 February 2003, p. 374.

<sup>134</sup> Paul Briggs, President, Rumbalara Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 44.

<sup>135</sup> Paul Briggs, President, Rumbalara Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 44.

Netball Club had experienced considerable difficulty encouraging non-Aboriginal people to become involved in the club and that the task of breaking down stereotypes which keep Indigenous people isolated was an ongoing challenge.<sup>136</sup> At that time, Mr Briggs also informed the Commonwealth Committee that Rumbalara was still experiencing difficulty in attracting sponsorship from non-Aboriginal businesses.<sup>137</sup>

1.22 Writing in the early 1990s about inequality between men and women in rural Australia, Dempsey found that country football served to reinforce gender-based social barriers and thus acted as an inhibitor to equality in social interaction between men and women.<sup>138</sup> He also stated that “[t]here are many mixed gender sporting clubs in Smalltown but I do not know of any instance where a woman is a president of a sporting club to which men belong.”<sup>139</sup> This is simply untrue today. After undertaking public hearings across Victoria, it appears to the Committee that country football clubs are now far more inclusive of women and children, both in organisational and social settings.

1.23 A survey undertaken by Sport and Recreation Victoria in 1999-2000 found that 10% of non-metropolitan participants were involved with football and, of those, approximately 35% had a male and female membership.<sup>140</sup> There also now appear to be more opportunities for women to engage in ‘non-traditional’ roles as office bearers at football clubs. One of the submissions received by the Committee was from the Cavendish Football Netball Club in the South West District. The submission proudly asserted that the club is unique in that it has had an all-female top executive for the past four years.<sup>141</sup> The Committee also received evidence from Marilyn Flett, Secretary of the Foster Football Club, who is a vocal advocate for country football, Marion Leslie, Secretary/Treasurer of the Robinvale Football Club and Denise

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<sup>136</sup> See discussion in Paul Briggs, President, Rumbalara Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Inquiry into Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities, Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, House of Representatives, 17 February 2003, p. 375.

<sup>137</sup> Paul Briggs, President, Rumbalara Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Inquiry into Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities, Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, House of Representatives, 17 February 2003, p. 375.

<sup>138</sup> K Dempsey, *A man's town: inequality between men and women in rural Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992, pp. 55-8.

<sup>139</sup> K Dempsey, *A man's town: inequality between men and women in rural Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992, pp. 54-5.

<sup>140</sup> Peter Hertan, Executive Director, Sport and Recreation Victoria, Department for Victorian Communities, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 21.

<sup>141</sup> Cavendish Football and Netball Club, *Submission*, no. 5, 6 November 2003, p. 1.

Trickey, Chief Executive Officer of the Colac and District Football League.<sup>142</sup> The Committee is aware that some football netball clubs, such as Swan Hill, are ensuring that the netball club is represented on the committee of management and that netball representatives are able to actively participate in decisions affecting the club as a whole, not merely those matters involving netball.<sup>143</sup>

1.24 The Committee recognises that while football clubs are no longer ‘male bastions’, women are not always viewed as equal partners with men. Netball Victoria is concerned that expectations of the role of women in some clubs and leagues have not kept pace with developments in other aspects of women’s lives. Kate Palmer, the Chief Executive of Netball Victoria, told the Committee that to some extent, there continue to be expectations placed on women that their role within a football/netball club is to wash the jumpers and serve in the canteen.<sup>144</sup> Netball Victoria has also informed the Committee that the majority of football/netball leagues do not have netball representatives on the governing body and therefore netball’s interests are unable to be adequately represented.<sup>145</sup>

1.25 In terms of acknowledging the contribution of netballers, Jo Dash, President of the Ballarat Netball Association, told the Committee:

*At one country football association dinner the women were thrilled that the next year they were allowed to sit up near the men’s committee rather than their table being at the back near the kitchen — so that was a big step forward. There were things like the trophies for the blokes who won best and fairest — every second one was huge and extremely expensive but the netballers’ trophies were very small.*<sup>146</sup>

The adequacy of facilities for netballers and women umpires is also an important issue, which is discussed further in Chapter Six. Although the Committee recognises that football/netball clubs and leagues have made significant inroads including women in club functions and activities, the Committee wishes to encourage football/netball

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<sup>142</sup> Marilyn Flett, Secretary, Foster Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Leongatha, 7 April 2004; Foster Football Club, *Submission*, no. 9, 20 November 2003; Marion Leslie, Secretary/Treasurer, Robinvale Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004; Denise Trickey, Chief Executive Officer, Colac and District Football Netball League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004.

<sup>143</sup> Peter Doig, Director of Football Operations, Swan Hill Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 16.

<sup>144</sup> Kate Palmer, Chief Executive, Netball Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 23.

<sup>145</sup> Netball Victoria, *Submission*, no. 22, 8 December 2003, p. 5.

<sup>146</sup> Jo Dash, President, Ballarat Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 25.



clubs and leagues to ensure that women are involved and acknowledged in all facets of club and league activities.

### **Encouraging interaction and friendly rivalries**

1.26 Country football and netball also provides a forum in which people from small towns can mix with people from other local communities in an atmosphere of friendly rivalry. According to the Northern Grampians Shire Council:

*The social activity and interaction for spectators, camaraderie of team-mates and (sometimes) friendly rivalry between towns provides a welcome release from day to day normalities and provides the much needed opportunity for interaction within and between communities.*<sup>147</sup>

Representatives of the Mid Gippsland Football League told the Committee that the majority of clubs in that league belong to towns that can be described as small or very small. In such towns, social interaction often revolves around the football club and club activities, with club functions and matches providing an opportunity for local residents to socialise with each other and mix with supporters from rival clubs from neighbouring towns and districts.<sup>148</sup> The Foster Football Club similarly described the Alberton Football League, of which it is a member, as a league characterised by a competitive rivalry between rural townships and their football supporters.<sup>149</sup> The Committee was further told by the Wimmera Football League that “football and netball are where everybody in this area meets, where they get to intermingle with others from nearby towns, and what they do for enjoyment and relaxation. In this area football and netball are not just games; they are part of life.”<sup>150</sup>

1.27 The Committee received evidence suggesting that club amalgamations, which have the effect of creating combined teams, can assist in breaking down rivalries and improving communication between communities.<sup>151</sup> Traditional rivals Orbost and the Snowy Rovers Football Clubs, both based in Orbost, merged in 2003. According to a report in ‘Inside Footy’, players from both clubs have gelled without any difficulties

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<sup>147</sup> Northern Grampians Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 37, 14 January 2004, p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> Rod Taylor, President, Mid Gippsland Football League, *Public Hearing*, Leongatha, 7 April 2004, p. 2.

<sup>149</sup> Foster Football Club, *Submission*, no. 9, 20 November 2003, p. 1. See also Loddon Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 18, 5 December 2003, p. 2.

<sup>150</sup> Kenneth McLean, Chief Commissioner, Wimmera Football League, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 11.

<sup>151</sup> Victorian Country Tennis Association, *Submission*, no. 2, 14 October 2003, p. 1.

and supporters of the two previous sides have worked together to ensure the success of the new Orbost Snowy Rovers Football Club. The report states:

*For most people in town, the definitive signal that the merger would work came at a recent function. Rita Baker, a Busters (Orbost) diehard, and Edna Towns, a passionate Rovers fan, were renowned for their vocal support for their clubs, without a good word about the opposition mob. But at a fashion parade last month to show off the merged club's new gear, Baker and Towns brought the house down when they proceeded on to the catwalk wearing matching blue polo shirts – and holding hands.<sup>152</sup>*

The Committee also heard from Greg Martin, President of the Sea Lake Nandaly Tigers (formed from the merger of four clubs over a number of years) that merging of clubs has benefits including building cooperative relationships between towns and encouraging unity and pride.<sup>153</sup>

### **Developing young people's social skills**

1.28 Football/netball clubs in rural and regional Victoria are a site at which young people can develop social skills, be influenced by positive role models, and be mentored by senior club members and officials. This point was strongly made to the Committee by the VCFL, which cited 'the teaching of life skills to impressionable young people' as an indirect social benefit of country football.<sup>154</sup> The VCFL submission referred to a range of life skills that are developed through football participation, such as learning to practice and prepare, working as a team, understanding and building respect, and developing loyalty and trust.

1.29 Townsend, Moore and Mahoney's research into the role of sport in rural communities found that sporting organisations act as a mentoring system for young children and adolescents through demonstrations of unity and solidarity and by encouraging greater respect for property and people.<sup>155</sup> These findings are consistent with the considerable amount of international theoretical and empirical research identifying risk factors for youth offending, which has found that environmental supports outside the family (such as the development of informal relationships with

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<sup>152</sup> 'Riverside rivals to forge united future', *The Age*, 6 April 2003, viewed 30 March 2004, <<http://realfooty.theage.com.au/cgi-bin/common/printArticle.pl?path=articles/2003/04>>.

<sup>153</sup> Greg Martin, Secretary, Sea Lake Nandaly Football/Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 19.

<sup>154</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 35.

<sup>155</sup> M Townsend, J Moore & M Mahoney, 'Playing their part: the role of physical activity and sport in sustaining the health and well being of small rural communities', *Rural and Remote Health 2* (online), no. 109, 2002, viewed 15 October 2004, <<http://rrh.deakin.edu.au/articles/subviewnew.asp?ArticleID=109>>, p. 4.

adults) and successful participation in activities and hobbies can moderate problem behaviour.<sup>156</sup> According to Rob Moodie, Chief Executive Officer of VicHealth, research from the United States has shown that involvement in regular team sports and after-school activities is also a protective factor against tobacco use, binge drinking, marijuana use, self-harm, and harming others.<sup>157</sup>

1.30 A number of witnesses told the Committee that the mentoring and support function of football/netball clubs in rural and regional Victoria is becoming increasingly important in the context of changing family structures.<sup>158</sup> Garry Squires, President of the Orbost Snowy Rovers Football Club, said:

*We reckon there are a few younger guys in our club for whom being involved in our football club might make the difference between whether they become solid citizens or finish up in jail because they have very few role models at home and they come down to the footy club and see the coaches and other players in the club, they mix with committee people, and they actually get some different role models. They get to be part of a team structure and start to rely on each other...*<sup>159</sup>

1.31 The Committee recognises that benefits arising from the ‘mentoring’ role of country football and sporting clubs can extend beyond immediate team members. The Rumbalara Football Netball Club has run dedicated leadership and mentoring programs, such as the Leadership and Personal Development Program and the Mentoring and Buddy Program. These and other programs provide leadership and mentoring skills to coaches, senior players and captains to assist them to identify signs of distress amongst club members, people who are coming into contact with the club and young people on the street.<sup>160</sup>

## Contributing to physical and mental health

1.32 The Committee understands that rural populations are no different to urban populations in terms of the importance of engaging in physical activity. Evidence

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<sup>156</sup> See the review of relevant literature contained in M Carr & T Vandiver, 'Risk and protective factors among youth offenders', *Adolescence* (online), 2001, viewed 7 July 2004, <[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2248/is\\_143\\_36/ai\\_82535314](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2248/is_143_36/ai_82535314)>. See also the discussion of sport and juvenile crime in AJ Veal & R Lynch, *Australian leisure*, 2nd edn, Pearson Education Australia Pty Ltd, Sydney, 2001, pp. 301-2.

<sup>157</sup> Robert Moodie, Chief Executive Officer, VicHealth, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 16.

<sup>158</sup> Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 19, 5 December 2003, p. 5; Brendan Ryan, individual, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 6.

<sup>159</sup> Garry Squires, President, Orbost Snowy Rovers Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 21.

<sup>160</sup> Paul Briggs, President, Rumbalara Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 21.

shows that people who are physically active are much less likely to die prematurely or develop cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, Type 2 diabetes, some cancers (such as colon cancer and breast cancer) and to become overweight or obese.<sup>161</sup> Inactivity is the second leading contributor to disease in Australia and the leading cause of disease in women.<sup>162</sup> In 2000, the annual direct health care cost attributable to physical inactivity was estimated at around \$377 million per year in Australia. For each disease, health system costs have been estimated at \$161 million for coronary heart disease, \$28 million for non-insulin dependent diabetes, \$16 million for colon cancer, \$101 million for stroke, \$16 million for breast cancer, and up to \$56 million for depressive disorders.<sup>163</sup>

1.33 Dr Moodie informed the Committee that community sporting associations, including football/netball clubs, are vitally important to the health and wellbeing of young people. VicHealth is “fundamentally interested” in increasing levels of participation in all sports for two purposes: the physical activity benefits from competing and being involved in sport regularly, and the emotional and mental health benefits to young people and adults who are involved in sports participation. According to VicSport, research has consistently demonstrated that children who are physically active are more likely than non-active children to benefit from improved self-esteem, better motor skills and an increased capacity to learn.<sup>164</sup>

1.34 Community sporting associations, including football/netball clubs, play a critical role in encouraging and supporting young people to engage in physical activity. This is confirmed by Australian Bureau of Statistics data, which shows that 14% of Australian boys aged between 5 and 14 years participated in Australian rules football outside of school hours and 18% of girls in the same age group participated in netball outside of school hours between April 2002 and April 2003. Australian rules

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<sup>161</sup> Jo Salmon, School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 29.

<sup>162</sup> Jo Salmon, School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 29.

<sup>163</sup> J Stephenson, *The costs of illness attributable to physical inactivity in Australia: a preliminary study*, report prepared for the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care and the Australian Sports Commission, 2000.

<sup>164</sup> VicSport, *Submission*, no. 57, 10 May 2004, p. 3.

football has the third highest participation rate of all organised sports among boys and netball has the highest participation rate of all organised sports for girls.<sup>165</sup>

1.35 Some witnesses drew an explicit connection between mental health, suicide, and the health of country football. Brendan Ryan, a school principal from Horsham, asked the Committee:

*Why do we have suicides? The contributing factors are listed there for you, but think about it: loss of identity, social isolation, connectedness to the community — all related to the football club. Then they say, 'How do we prevent suicide?' ...connectedness, social contact, role models, relationship building, feeling valued and participation. They are all directly related to our football community and the impact that football communities have particularly in the small, isolated areas of the state.<sup>166</sup>*

### **Creating a safe environment**

1.36 Increasingly, football/netball clubs are becoming aware that in order for clubs to continue to act as a focus of social interaction, they need to create a 'family friendly' and safe environment before, during and after matches. Historically, football clubs have been associated with a culture of excessive and unsafe drinking. Research undertaken by the Australian Drug Foundation in 1999 on 13 football clubs from four different leagues in the Gippsland region found that 51% of drinkers were consuming harmful/hazardous amounts of alcohol each time they drank at the club, and that young male players accounted for most of the heavy drinking.<sup>167</sup> Seventy-four per cent of respondents stated that drinking at the club was an important tradition. A survey undertaken amongst metropolitan leagues in 2000 found that 13% of 18-20-year-olds drank 13 or more standard drinks each time they visited the club and 83% left the club as the driver of a vehicle.<sup>168</sup> One witness who appeared before the Committee described the 'old' environment at his local football club, which was then the Swan Hill Football Club:

*When I first came to Swan Hill it was very much a men's club, and alcohol was the top end of it; there was football first and then alcohol. Alcohol made all the money. You would go to training on a Thursday night and there would be beer there, on Friday night you would have a beer there, and certainly on*

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<sup>165</sup> Outdoor soccer and swimming were the two most popular sports for boys – see Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Children's participation in cultural and leisure activities*, no. 4901.0, April 2003, p. 5.

<sup>166</sup> Brendan Ryan, individual, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 5.

<sup>167</sup> P Snow, *Gippsland sporting clubs alcohol survey*, Australian Drug Foundation, 1999.

<sup>168</sup> Australian Drug Foundation, *Alcohol use in metropolitan sporting clubs survey*, Australian Drug Foundation, 2000.

*Saturdays after the game there would be beer well into the night, and then on Sunday the barrel. It would roll on and on.*<sup>169</sup>

The Committee appreciates that the club, which is now the Swan Hill Football Netball Club, has successfully sought greater family involvement and has created a club environment that is now very different to that illustrated above. The Committee heard that netball representatives have equal say in every facet of running the club and that women and children are now a major focus of Swan Hill's on-field and off-field activities.<sup>170</sup>

1.37 The Committee recognises that many football/netball clubs now have extensive family-based social programs and encourage families to use the club as a social base.<sup>171</sup> The Australian Drug Foundation's 'Good Sports' Program, through which participating clubs undertake 'Good Sports' accreditation, has been instrumental in encouraging and supporting football/netball clubs to decrease their reliance on alcohol sales and to create safe and inclusive environments, particularly for women, young people and children.<sup>172</sup> The experience of the Yinnar Football Netball Club illustrates how 'Good Sports' can assist football clubs to change their culture and image in their local community. Approximately 15 years ago the club had experienced a range of incidents, including alcohol consumption at junior functions. Yinnar's club committee developed a number of aims for the club, one being to provide an enjoyable, comfortable, safe and rewarding environment for all people involved. Through a range of initiatives, including the development of an alcohol policy, the creation of a smoke-free environment and the provision of significant discounts on family memberships, Yinnar has significantly increased membership (especially amongst juniors) as its standing in the community has risen. Yinnar's on-field performance has also been outstanding, with Yinnar's senior team winning the 2004 Mid Gippsland Football League grand final.

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<sup>169</sup> Peter Doig, Director of Football Operations, Swan Hill Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, pp. 16-7.

<sup>170</sup> Peter Doig, Director of Football Operations, Swan Hill Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 17.

<sup>171</sup> These include the Horsham Football Netball Club, the Huntly Football Netball Club, the Swan Hill Football Netball Club, the Rumbalara Football Netball Club and the Heywood Football Club.

<sup>172</sup> John Rogerson, Director, Good Sports, Australian Drug Foundation, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 53; Bill Stronach, Chief Executive, Australian Drug Foundation, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 53.

## ***Economic impact***

1.38 Australian rules football has a significant economic impact. In December 2003, Street Ryan & Associates produced a report entitled *Economic Impact 2003 of Australian Football*. The report found that the total economic contribution of Australian rules football to the Victorian economy was \$1.46 billion dollars in 2003. The report identified individual economic contributions by football organisations, participants and businesses in Victoria, including the VCFL, players and members of major and district league VCFL clubs, and spectators of major and district league games. The estimated economic contribution of Australian rules football to the Victorian economy follows:

**Table 1: Contribution of Australian Rules Football to the Victorian Economy, 2003<sup>173</sup>**

<b>Organisation, participant or business</b>	<b>Economic Contribution (\$)</b>
Peak bodies and leagues	230,103,000
Clubs	373,850,000
Players and members	269,702,000
Spectators	152,452,000
Business and multiplier effects*	438,398,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,464,505,000,000</b>

\*including food, sports goods, construction, media, community services, transport and travel, accommodation, and business services including printing, sports management and legal services.

The Committee recognises that the above figures include elite level football, including the AFL competition, and do not distinguish between metropolitan, regional and local economies (see Chapter Four for further discussion). This level of analysis is not included in the Street Ryan report. Nevertheless, it is clear that football and football related activity generates hundreds of millions of dollars directly and has a significant economic flow on to other industry sectors.

1.39 Regionally, the economic impact of sport is profound. Driscoll and Wood described the relationship between economic well-being and community sport as

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<sup>173</sup> Street Ryan and Associates, *Economic impact 2003 of Australian Football*, Street Ryan and Associates, 2003, p. 4.

“complex and multidimensional” and note that the fortunes of sporting clubs and small town economies are tied.<sup>174</sup> This relationship is based on sponsorship of sporting clubs by local businesses and reciprocal support from football clubs for local businesses, especially hotels. Driscoll and Wood maintained that “often the members of sport and recreation clubs are the key customers supporting hotels, in some instances ensuring their survival.”<sup>175</sup> Driscoll and Wood also identified fundraising activities as raising significant amounts of capital, representing a high level of local investment in community sporting clubs.

1.40 The VCFL’s submission distinguishes between the direct and indirect commercial effects that football/netball clubs have on their local communities.<sup>176</sup> According to the VCFL, ‘direct commercial effects’ include the purchase of core football/netball club products and services, including canteen supplies, bar supplies, player apparel, medical supplies, printing, stationery, computers, and health services. The VCFL has advised that the direct football driven impact of country football was \$83,465,000 in 2001 (see further discussion in Chapter Four).<sup>177</sup>

1.41 The VCFL also provided evidence to the Committee about the economic benefit of the ‘indirect effects’ of football on rural and regional Victoria. The VCFL defined this as comprised of spending on apparel not paid for by the club, spending on apparel to wear to football/netball club functions, spending on communications (telephones and computers) to maintain an interest in football, and spending on meals and refreshments outside of direct football involvement but as a consequence of that involvement.<sup>178</sup> The VCFL informed the Committee that, in 2001, the indirect impact of country football was valued at \$47,825,000.<sup>179</sup>

1.42 The economic value of football/netball leagues and clubs is considerable. Rod Ward, the President of the Ballarat Football League, informed the Committee that its average senior club has 200 to 300 members and is comprised of 30 volunteers. The

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<sup>174</sup> K Driscoll & L Wood, *Sporting capital: changes and challenges for rural communities in Victoria*, Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT, 1999, p. 77.

<sup>175</sup> K Driscoll & L Wood, *Sporting capital: changes and challenges for rural communities in Victoria*, Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT, 1999, p. 78.

<sup>176</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 36.

<sup>177</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 57.

<sup>178</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 57.

<sup>179</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 57.



average turnover for a senior club in the Ballarat Football League is around \$220,000. Junior clubs have 150 to 200 members and 30 volunteers and the average turnover for junior clubs is approximately \$100,000. Mr Ward estimated the economic value of the Ballarat Football League, based on club turnover, at approximately \$3.3 million. When indirect spending was included, Mr Ward estimated the Ballarat Football League's total economic value at \$4.5 million to \$5 million per annum.<sup>180</sup> Leigh Elder, General Manager of the Ovens and Murray Football League, informed the Committee that the League's turnover in 2003 was over \$500,000, with marketing and finals revenue contributing \$250,000.<sup>181</sup> Eric Bott, General Manager of the Goulburn Valley Football League, told the Committee that the business of football in the Goulburn Valley has a cash value of \$3 million per annum, exclusive of volunteer labour.<sup>182</sup>

1.43 It appears that the economic significance of football/netball clubs is particularly pronounced in small rural towns. This is not only a product of direct expenditure, such as gate and bar takings, but also of a significant multiplier effect – a 'chain reaction' of additional income and purchases resulting from football and netball activity. According to Townsend, Moore and Mahoney's research:

*When home matches are played in rural communities, the local milk bar sells more pies and more milk and supports the football club by supplying ingredients for the afternoon teas. And so these were days of high turnover for those local businesses. Local newspapers were recognised as being dependent on the sport, and particularly the football during the winter season, to have material to print in the paper.*<sup>183</sup>

The highly interdependent relationship between rural football/netball clubs and local business was illustrated for the Committee by representatives from the Huntly Football Netball Club, who told the Committee that the Lions Club and Country Fire Authority perform tasks for the club in return for financial donations, and that one of

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<sup>180</sup> Rod Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Ballarat Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 2.

<sup>181</sup> Leigh Elder, General Manager, Ovens and Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 5.

<sup>182</sup> Eric Bott, General Manager, Goulburn Valley Football League, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, pp. 49-50.

<sup>183</sup> Mardie Townsend, Senior Lecturer, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 31.

the philosophies of the Huntly Football Netball Club is to support local businesses, such as the bakery, the hotel and the supermarket.<sup>184</sup>

1.44 While the presence of a football club can make a significant difference to the financial fortunes of a small town, the loss of a football club can have dramatic economic consequences. The role of football in maintaining the vitality of local businesses was starkly illustrated to the Committee by Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East, VCFL, who stated:

*To me, the loss of a local football club is usually the start of the decline in a small country town. It usually affects the local hotel, the local hall and several shops. You then generally see the youth of the town spending their free time in a neighbouring town that they now play football for. At weekends the lack of young people congregating in the main street has a tendency to give a small country town a dead appearance. And there is always the loss of money that would normally be spent by these young ones in the local shops.<sup>185</sup>*

The Committee also heard similar evidence from Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South West, VCFL. Mr Anderson told the Committee that the Ararat United Football Club disbanded in 2004 and now none of the nine teams in the Mininera District Football League travel to Ararat for their away games. Mr Anderson explained that:

*When we multiply the effect through the number of teams each club brings to the town for both football and netball, plus the supporters, volunteers, administrators and family that travel with them, we see that the financial and economic impact can be quite dramatic.<sup>186</sup>*

1.45 When utilising sporting reserves, clubrooms and associated amenities, football/netball clubs make a significant contribution to the maintenance of valuable community assets. Volunteer labour is a particularly vital factor in this regard. The economic contribution made by sporting club volunteers who maintain grounds and facilities was acknowledged by Craig Niemann, Chief Executive Officer of the Loddon Shire Council. Mr Niemann informed the Committee that the Loddon Shire Council does not charge sporting clubs for the use of reserves, and in fact administers a modest community grants scheme to assist clubs with the upkeep of shared facilities. According to Mr Niemann, the council would not be able to maintain those

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<sup>184</sup> Allen Dillon, President, Huntly Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 27.

<sup>185</sup> Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, pp. 15-6.

<sup>186</sup> Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 20.

<sup>186</sup> Mardie Townsend, Senior Lecturer, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 31.

facilities to the same standard as they are currently maintained by hall committees. Mr Niemann explained “[a]s a municipality we have 38 public halls and each of those halls is in some instances the last standing major asset in the community, and they [sporting clubs] want to hang onto that for as long as they possibly can; and they are voluntarily working hard to do that.”<sup>187</sup>

1.46 Football and netball clubs are of profound importance to small towns in particular because of their role in maintaining and improving vital community facilities, such as football pavilions and social club rooms. The Committee heard of numerous examples where this had occurred across country Victoria. The Huntly Football Netball Club spent \$8000 to run power across its ground to install lights, as well as painting and carpeting the clubrooms and building a multi-purpose storage area.<sup>188</sup> Another example is the Robinvale Football Club, which received a \$75,000 loan from the Swan Hill Rural City Council to install women’s change rooms with toilet and shower facilities. The Committee understands that the Robinvale Football Club is required to repay the loan and to finance the balance of the cost of the renovations.<sup>189</sup> The importance of well-maintained facilities to local communities was emphasised by the Hindmarsh Shire Council, which advised the Committee that football pavilions are often in better condition than local halls. The Dimboola pavilion, for example, is used in preference to other community facilities to stage theatrical performances and attracts thousands of visitors each year.<sup>190</sup> Chapter Six discusses facilities in more detail.

1.47 The potential for regional football tourism to raise revenue for major and district leagues and contribute to the economic prosperity of regional Victoria was also an issue raised with the Committee. Major leagues with resources to employ chief executive officers or general managers have considerable potential to engage in marketing and promotion of league finals, which boost local revenue through tourist spending. Leigh Elder, the General Manager of the Ovens and Murray League told the Committee that 15,000 people attended the League’s grand final in 2003. Mr

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<sup>187</sup> Craig Niemann, Chief Executive Officer, Loddon Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 16.

<sup>188</sup> Allen Dillon, President, Huntly Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 28.

<sup>189</sup> Geoff Jones, Administration Manager, Sunraysia Football League, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 29.

<sup>190</sup> Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 19, 5 December 2003, p. 5.

Elder informed the Committee that grand final gate takings have increased by 27% between 2001 and 2003, which is particularly significant in the context of the severe drought during this period. According to a report in *The Age* in September 2004, a crowd of 12,500 was anticipated for the 2004 Goulburn Valley League grand final. The acting Shepparton mayor, Kevin Ryan, was reported as saying “[w]e’ll be having people coming from everywhere. It has an enormous impact on the Goulburn Valley area.”<sup>191</sup>

### ***Relationship with netball, cricket and other sports***

1.48 One of the issues the Committee has been asked to consider in the context of social interaction and community pride is the complementary long-term existing relationships between football, netball and cricket. Much of the preceding discussion has addressed this issue, particularly relationships between football and netball. The importance of the partnership between football and netball was impressed upon the Committee by a number of witnesses, most notably Kate Palmer, Chief Executive of Netball Victoria. Ms Palmer told the Inquiry:

*We believe the partnership between football and netball in rural and regional Victoria is important to the long-term viability and success of Australian football competitions. The viability of netball doesn’t depend on this structure continuing. However, this structure increases opportunities and choices for females living in rural and regional Victoria to play their sport. The structure fosters community connectedness in that it strengthens communities that work and play together. It provides an opportunity for families to share and benefit from this sport, and creates a positive and healthy environment for young people to meet. Importantly, the family environment creates a more positive football culture.*<sup>192</sup>

1.49 The Committee also received specific evidence concerning the relationship between football, cricket and other sports such as basketball and hockey. In general, this evidence suggested that cricket clubs do not necessarily have the same standing as football/netball clubs in terms of their ability to act as a ‘community hub’, facilitate broad-based social interaction and engender a sense of collective, locally-based pride.<sup>193</sup> According to a submission made by the Shepparton City Council, for

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<sup>191</sup> A Webster, 'Now for the real Victorian footy final', *The Age*, 25 September 2004, viewed 22 October 2004, <<http://www.realfooty.theage.com.au/realfooty/articles/2004/09/24/1095961862246.html?from=storyrhs&oneclick=true>>.

<sup>192</sup> Kate Palmer, Chief Executive, Netball Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 19.

<sup>193</sup> Note however that Driscoll and Wood identified sport and recreation hubs in general, rather than hubs generated through participation in football, as contributing to community and cultural development in regional

example, relationships in cricket are not comparable to those in football because cricket “never or rarely attracts a crowd of any significance – it is generally only the competitors and their families who congregate and involve themselves in this sport.”<sup>194</sup> Dr Townsend also expressed some reservations about the ability of ‘newer sports’ such as basketball and squash to “act as the social womb” in the same way that football and netball have.<sup>195</sup> Dr Townsend identified factors such as the need for specialised facilities for newer sports and the consequent focus on regional centres rather than smaller towns, combined with older residents’ lack of familiarity with newer sports, as working against their ability to galvanise small communities in the same way as traditional sports.

1.50 A number of submissions did, however, recognise that there is often a high level of interdependence between football/netball clubs and other sporting clubs. The Glenelg Shire Council informed the Committee that there needs to be year round sporting opportunities to maintain participation levels and strength of community spirit. If one sporting club folds, it will create voids in participation and social interaction which will weaken the strength of remaining sports.<sup>196</sup> This relationship was acknowledged by the Yinnar Football Netball Club, which has close associations with local cricket and tennis clubs. Russell Cheffers, the President of Yinnar Football Netball Club, told the Committee that the loss of the football/netball club would severely affect these sporting clubs in terms of maintenance of sporting facilities, loss of volunteer support, reduced funding and contraction of player numbers.<sup>197</sup>

1.51 The Committee also acknowledges the views of Basketball Victoria, which has submitted that football’s “privileged position” is hurting other sports. While conceding that the need to play in stadiums necessarily focuses the sport in larger regional centres, Basketball Victoria emphasises that basketball has 27,000 registered participants in rural and regional Victoria, playing association basketball in smaller towns like Boort and Rochester as well as large regional centres. In discussing the

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Victoria – K Driscoll & L Wood, *Sporting capital: changes and challenges for rural communities in Victoria*, Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT, 1999, p. 76.

<sup>194</sup> Greater Shepparton City Council, *Submission*, no. 25, 9 December 2003, p. 2. See also Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 13.

<sup>195</sup> Mardie Townsend, Senior Lecturer, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 31.

<sup>196</sup> Glenelg Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 29, 11 December 2003, p. 2.

<sup>197</sup> Yinnar Football and Netball Club, *Submission*, no. 45, 7 April 2004, p. 1.

role of the Warrnambool basketball team in fostering a sense of community identity and pride, Basketball Victoria stated:

*This team is just as important to this community as a country football club. They develop people, they develop skills, and they provide a strong emotional link for their supporters. They represent Warrnambool with pride and with class throughout Victoria. Our point in this is that no individual sport has a monopoly on community values.*<sup>198</sup>

This sentiment was reinforced in a submission received from the Warrnambool City Council, which stated that all sporting clubs – not just football clubs – contribute to the development of social capital and community wellbeing.<sup>199</sup>

### **Conclusion**

1.52 Evidence presented to the Inquiry has shown that football/netball clubs are, to a significant degree, the ‘glue’ holding many small rural communities together. Support for a country football/netball club, in whatever form, appears to make an important contribution to a community’s sense of identity and facilitates social cohesion. The Committee has also heard that many people living in rural and regional Victoria are enormously proud of their football/netball club, often irrespective of on-field performance, and will work together to ensure that the football/netball club remains a viable concern. Fundraising activities, maintenance of sporting reserves and facilities and the development of reciprocal relationships with local businesses also make a vital contribution to the economic health of rural and regional Victoria, particularly in smaller towns. The importance of country football to local communities has been enhanced by the development of stronger links between football and netball clubs and by the growing awareness by club and league officials of the need to create a more inclusive club environment that caters to the needs of all community members. The Committee believes that there are opportunities for country football/netball leagues and clubs to be better supported, which will enhance their contribution to social, economic and cultural wellbeing in rural and regional Victoria. These are discussed throughout the report.

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<sup>198</sup> Basketball Victoria, *Submission*, no. 60, 3 June 2004, p. 8.

<sup>199</sup> Warrnambool City Council, *Submission*, no. 11, 28 November 2003, pp. 1-2.

## Chapter Two

### An overview of country football in Victoria

#### *Introduction*

2.1 This chapter describes the current organisation of country football, including issues surrounding the structure of country football, programs that are already in place to support country football, and participation in country football (by players, umpires, and other volunteers). It is intended as a brief overview of country football in Victoria, as all of the issues discussed in the following pages are examined in detail throughout the course of this report.

#### *The organisation of country football*

2.2 The peak bodies for Australian rules football in country Victoria are Football Victoria and the Victorian Country Football League (VCFL). Football bodies in Victoria are structured hierarchically, with the Australian Football League (AFL), the overarching national organisation, Football Victoria representing football interests in the state of Victoria, and various other affiliated organisations subsidiary to Football Victoria. The VCFL, metropolitan football leagues, Victorian Amateur Football Association and other Victorian football organisations are affiliated to Football Victoria.<sup>200</sup>

#### **Australian Football League**

2.3 The AFL is the peak national body for Australian rules football in Australia. It was formed after a restructure of the Victorian Football League (VFL) in 1989-1990.<sup>201</sup> As the code's national body, its affiliates include all of Australia's peak organisations for state football, including the Western Australian Football League, the South Australian National Football League, AFL Tasmania, AFL New South

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<sup>200</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004.

<sup>201</sup> D Nadel, 'The league goes national, 1986-1997', in *More than a game*, R Hess & B Stewart (eds), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 234.

Wales/Australian Capital Territory, AFL Queensland, AFL Northern Territory and Football Victoria.<sup>202</sup>

2.4 As well as running the national Australian rules competition, the AFL is also responsible for implementation of its National Development Plan and the distribution of financial grants to state and territory peak football organisations. The AFL has defined four key strategic priorities in its operations, which are to:

- manage the national competition;
- develop the game to be the number one team participant sport in Australia;
- build the national AFL brand; and
- enhance the financial standing of the game in Australia.<sup>203</sup>

2.5 The AFL and AFL clubs disperse funds to state football organisations by means of direct grants and ‘indirect’ financial assistance.<sup>204</sup> These funds include AFL transfer fees, licence fees (Western Australia and South Australia), and funds allocated to specific programs by the AFL (such as Auskick), as well as untied grants provided to state football organisations.<sup>205</sup>

### ***AFL programs***

2.6 The AFL supports and/or conducts a number of programs in country Victoria, mostly through its affiliated body, Football Victoria, and often with the assistance of the VCFL. The Committee was informed by Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer of the AFL, that the AFL contributes \$5.5 million to country football annually by means of programs and grants through Football Victoria.<sup>206</sup> The Committee notes that some \$2 million of these funds is dedicated to implementation of the TAC Cup in

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<sup>202</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004.

<sup>203</sup> Australian Football League, *AFL strategic plan 2001-2003*, Australian Football League, Melbourne, 2001, p. 6.

<sup>204</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>205</sup> Australian Football League, *Personal Communication*, 15 August 2003.

<sup>206</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 2. See also Chapters Four and Eight.



regional Victoria, an elite level competition for young footballers.<sup>207</sup> Some of the programs supported or implemented by the AFL in country Victoria include:

- AFL Community Camps, where AFL club representatives visit selected country centres and conduct seminars and training sessions for local coaches, players, administrators and volunteers. The AFL estimates the annual cost of this program at \$200,000;
- regional practice matches, which according to Mr Demetriou provide country football with average revenues of \$10,000 per match;
- the new AFL players agreement, which the AFL informed the Committee requires players from AFL clubs based in Victoria to spend one full day in country Victoria to “participate in bona fide appearances for development of the game.”<sup>208</sup>; and
- national risk management programs, introduced by the AFL in 2004, which extend on insurance arrangements pioneered by the VCFL in previous years, and provide substantial savings on insurance across Australian rules football.<sup>209</sup>

## Football Victoria

2.7 Football Victoria has oversight of its own competitions: the Victorian Football League (VFL) and the TAC Cup. The VFL is a state-based premier football competition, with a Tasmanian-based team admitted in 2001. Thirteen teams currently compete in the VFL.<sup>210</sup> The TAC Cup is an elite competition for talented young players, and has a team representing each of 12 Victorian regions.<sup>211</sup> Each TAC Cup team (except the Murray Bushrangers) is also aligned to a VFL club.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004.

<sup>208</sup> Australian Football League & Australian Football League Players' Association Incorporated, *Collective bargaining agreement*, Australian Football League, Melbourne, 2004, p. 26.

<sup>209</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004.

<sup>210</sup> Football Victoria, 'History of the Victorian Football League', viewed 28 July 2004, <<http://vfl.footballvic.com.au/default.aspx?pg=history&spg=display&articleid=24551>>.

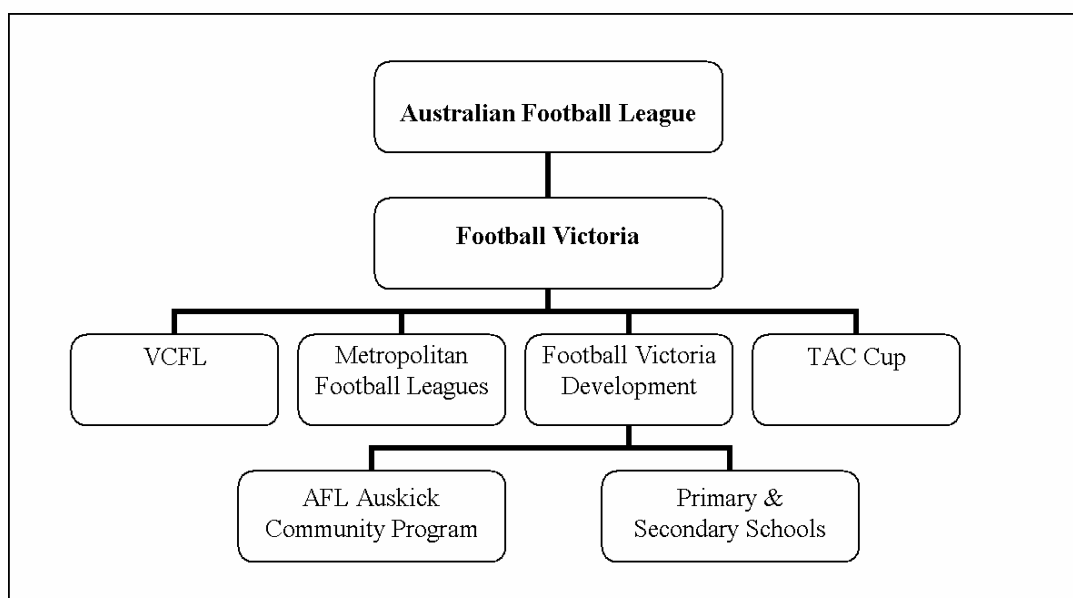
<sup>211</sup> Football Victoria, 'TAC Cup history', viewed 28 July 2004, <<http://taccup.footballvic.com.au/default.aspx?pg=history&spg=display&articleid=22261>>.

<sup>212</sup> Football Victoria, 'History of the Victorian Football League', viewed 28 July 2004, <<http://vfl.footballvic.com.au/default.aspx?pg=history&spg=display&articleid=24551>>.

Football Victoria's role is also to oversee, support and guide football bodies including the VCFL, the Victorian Amateur Football Association, and Victorian metropolitan football leagues.<sup>213</sup> It is responsible for implementation of the Auskick program and school football programs in Victoria through Football Victoria Development.

2.8 The majority of Football Victoria's revenue is provided by the AFL and AFL clubs based in Victoria (61.5% in 2003).<sup>214</sup> AFL and AFL club contributions to Football Victoria are comprised of transfer fees, general grants, contributions to the TAC Cup competition, and VFL licence fees. Remaining Football Victoria revenue is obtained from sponsorship, fundraising and marketing, participation and development activities, government, and Victorian administered leagues.<sup>215</sup>

**Figure 1: The structure of Australian rules football in Victoria**<sup>216</sup>



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<sup>213</sup> Dandenong and Districts Football League, Diamond Valley Football League, Eastern Football League, Essendon District Football League, Moorabbin Saints Junior Football League, Riddell District Football League, Riddell District Junior Football League, Southern Football League, Waverley Junior Football League, Western Region Football League and Yarra Junior Football League.

<sup>214</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004.

<sup>215</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004. See also Chapter Four.

<sup>216</sup> Source: Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004.

2.9 Football Victoria informed the Committee that its expenditure on country football was \$5,575,000 in 2003, comprised of the following:

**Table 2: Country football expenditure, Football Victoria, 2003<sup>217</sup>**

Expenditure	\$m
Auskick / Junior	1.040
Club transfer fees & development	0.401
Coach & sports trainer education	0.525
KickStart	0.020
State squads	0.165
Umpire education	0.417
Youth	0.375
Talent (TAC Cup)	2.000
Staff	0.252
VCFL grants & transfer fees	0.380

2.10 The Committee notes that the division of Football Victoria’s ‘country’ and ‘metropolitan’ regions does not coincide with Victorian local government area boundaries, nor with the VCFL’s distribution of clubs and leagues, or other leagues with clubs that span the ‘metro/country’ divide.<sup>218</sup> Consequently, it is difficult to accurately compare services and resources provided to ‘country’ football by Football Victoria with those provided by other peak football bodies (such as the VCFL), or with ‘country’ programs initiated by state agencies (such as Sport and Recreation Victoria). The Committee notes that due to the different definitions of ‘country’ areas employed by peak bodies in Victorian football, demographic and resource analyses of Victorian football presented in the following pages should be interpreted as *indicative* of current trends in country football.

***Football Victoria programs and resources***

2.11 Football Victoria provides resources and support across Victoria, including programs for Auskick, football programs for schools, umpiring development and support, club development, and coaching development.

<sup>217</sup> Source: Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004.

<sup>218</sup> Football Victoria, *Football Victoria annual review*, Football Victoria, Melbourne, 2004, p. 33.

### **Football Victoria Development**

2.12 Football Victoria Development (FVD) is the development arm of Football Victoria and is responsible for the promotion and development of football in communities and schools across the State. FVD works in cooperation with the VCFL, the Victorian Amateur Football Association, the Victorian metropolitan football leagues and other sports agencies and government departments. FVD is also responsible for coordination and implementation of the AFL Auskick program, which offers young people an opportunity to play and develop skills for Australian rules football under modified rules.<sup>219</sup>

2.13 In 2003, Football Victoria employed twelve Country Development Managers to support Australian rules football in country Victoria, including organisation and coordination of the Auskick program.<sup>220</sup> Umpiring development is also coordinated through Football Victoria, with a dedicated country Umpiring Development Manager attached to the VCFL.<sup>221</sup>

2.14 FVD also conducts coach accreditation courses across Victoria for senior, youth and Auskick/junior football coaches. Coach Education is conducted by FVD under the auspices of the AFL and the National Coaching Accreditation Scheme. Twelve Regional Development Managers are employed by FVD to deliver these courses in rural and regional Victoria. In Victoria, FVD manages branches of the Australian Football Coaches Association, which coordinates coaching education programs for Level 1 coach accreditation, and provides information and other resources to its members.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Football Victoria Development, 'An overview of Football Victoria Development', viewed 28 July 2004, <<http://svc227.bne117v.server-web.com/vfdf/fvdopt.pdf>>.

<sup>220</sup> Football Victoria Development, 'An overview of Football Victoria Development', viewed 28 July 2004, <<http://svc227.bne117v.server-web.com/vfdf/fvdopt.pdf>>; Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 4. See also Chapter Seven.

<sup>221</sup> Football Victoria Development, 'An overview of Football Victoria Development', viewed 28 July 2004, <<http://svc227.bne117v.server-web.com/vfdf/fvdopt.pdf>>, p. 7. See also Chapter Five.

<sup>222</sup> Football Victoria Development, 'Coaching', viewed 28 July 2004, <<http://svc227.bne117v.server-web.com/vfdf/vdfcoaching.htm>>. Level 1 NCAS Accreditation is a basic course for coaching, involving around 10 hours of coursework for senior and youth coaching accreditation, and 9 hours for junior and Auskick accreditation. See also Chapter Five.

2.15 In primary schools FVD coordinates the SmokeFree Footy Activity Pack, AFL Player SuperClinics, the SofNET Footy Show, and Level 1 Primary Teachers Coaching Courses, as well as PASE (Physical and Sports Education) Courses and Professional Development sessions.<sup>223</sup> The FVD ‘fostership’ program also addresses junior club development through examination of issues surrounding league and club administration structures, recruitment and retention of volunteers, rules and regulations, and implementation of codes of conduct for coaches, players, parents, officials, supporters and administrators.<sup>224</sup>

2.16 In secondary schools, FVD conducts the ‘G Footy’ program, through which senior and girls football competitions are organised, primary and secondary school coach education courses are delivered to teachers and students, and education resources are provided to schools. G Footy also coordinates a role model program, where high profile players educate secondary school students in various life skills (self-esteem, goal setting, understanding consequences of various actions, work ethic, and individual and team responsibilities).<sup>225</sup> Issues concerning junior and youth football are discussed further in Chapter Seven.

### **TAC Cup**

2.17 Twelve TAC Cup Region Managers are also employed by Football Victoria across country Victoria with primary responsibility for the TAC Cup.<sup>226</sup> Football Victoria Development’s twelve Country Development Managers also assist TAC Cup Region Managers with the “operations of the TAC Cup under-18 team and related Talented Player Development Programs.”<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Football Victoria Development, 'An overview of Football Victoria Development', viewed 28 July 2004, <<http://svc227.bne117v.server-web.com/vfdf/fvdopt.pdf>>, p. 5. See also Chapter Seven.

<sup>224</sup> Football Victoria Development, 'FVD school promotions and development fostership program', viewed 28 July 2004, <<http://svc227.bne117v.server-web.com/vfdf/vfdschools.htm>>.

<sup>225</sup> Football Victoria Development, 'An overview of Football Victoria Development', viewed 28 July 2004, <<http://svc227.bne117v.server-web.com/vfdf/fvdopt.pdf>>, p. 5.

<sup>226</sup> Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 4. See also Chapter Seven.

<sup>227</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004, p. 2.

## **Victorian Country Football League**

2.18 The VCFL was formed in 1927. Originally, the purpose of the league was to provide a means to control the flow of players to VFL clubs from country leagues and clubs.<sup>228</sup> While the VCFL represents the majority of football leagues and clubs in country Victoria, there are a number of clubs in country Victoria that are not affiliated to the VCFL, including affiliates to one of the Victorian metropolitan football leagues, the Victorian Amateur Football Association and the TAC Cup. The President of the Kilmore Football Club, for example, told the Committee:

*The Kilmore Football Club is affiliated with the Riddell District Football League.... We are betwixt and between, I suppose you could say. We are part of metro Melbourne football [but].... we are in the same sort of situation as country football. We are finding it extremely hard.*<sup>229</sup>

The VCFL also represents clubs from leagues that traverse the Victorian border into New South Wales and South Australia. For example, the Western Border Football League includes clubs in South Australia and the Ovens and Murray Football League includes clubs based in New South Wales.

2.19 In 2003-04, 83 leagues and 870 clubs were affiliated to the VCFL.<sup>230</sup> The VCFL is governed by a board of eight members, with an administrative team based in Melbourne. Territories encompassed by the VCFL are divided into four areas, each of which have one full-time Area Manager to assist clubs, leagues, and local VCFL representatives. The VCFL is further sub-divided into ten regions, each of which has a Regional Board, comprised of representatives from senior leagues from within the region. Each Regional Board elects a Regional Manager, who works to guide strategic planning for leagues and clubs, and coordinate and facilitate football within the region, along with the Regional Board.

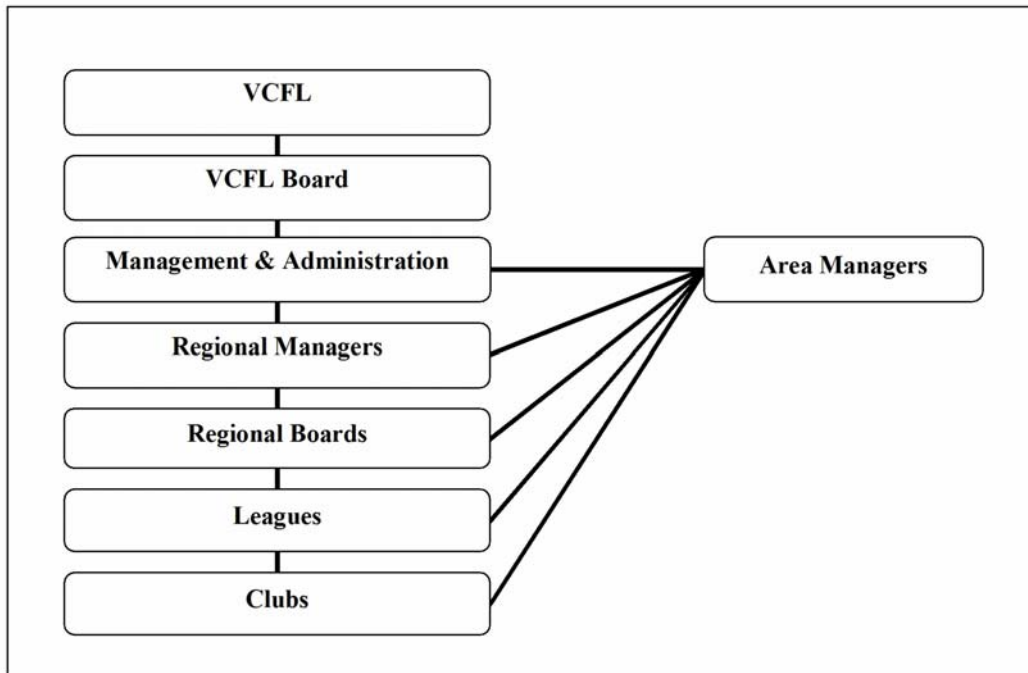
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<sup>228</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 19.

<sup>229</sup> Graeme Kurzman, Vice-President, Kilmore Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 25.

<sup>230</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 16.

Figure 2: Organisation of the VCFL<sup>231</sup>



2.20 VCFL affiliated clubs and leagues are required to adhere to VCFL rules and regulations, which are formed with the intention to:

- ensure sufficient stability in the membership of club teams to enable team spirit and public support to be maintained;
- prevent stronger clubs from obtaining an unfair proportion of the best players at the expense of the weaker clubs;
- provide opportunities for players to enter competitions conducted by leagues and for an orderly system to:
  - facilitate the movement of players between clubs; and
  - facilitate the movement of clubs between leagues; and
- provide clubs with an incentive to expend time, effort and resources in the development of Australian rules football.<sup>232</sup>

2.21 These objectives are accomplished primarily through the regulation of player movement between clubs, and club movement between leagues, by means of

<sup>231</sup> Source: Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 16.

<sup>232</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Handbook*, Victorian Country Football League, Melbourne, 2004, p. 39.

clearance procedures. All players that participate in VCFL competitions are required to individually register with the VCFL by means of legal contracts.<sup>233</sup>

2.22 As discussed above, the Committee notes that zoning used by Football Victoria to distinguish Melbourne from country Victoria categorises the Mornington Peninsula and Yarra Ranges local government areas as part of its metropolitan region.<sup>234</sup> The VCFL, however, incorporates leagues that operate in this region (Mornington Peninsula Nepean Football League and Yarra Valley Mountain District Football League).

### ***VCFL leagues***

2.23 Leagues within the VCFL are responsible for providing administrative and promotional services for clubs, training and education, the organisation of finals series, and the enforcement of various regulations and procedures determined by the VCFL. This includes the management of hearings and tribunals, lodgement of player registration details with the VCFL, and oversight of club administrative matters (such as salary cap adherence in 2004). Club and league secretaries are also responsible for the ordinary administration of player clearances. Leagues are also responsible for the development and implementation of league constitutions, and other rules and regulations determined by a league to be appropriate for its clubs.<sup>235</sup>

2.24 VCFL senior leagues are separated into two groups – major and district leagues. There are currently 16 major leagues and 32 district leagues in the VCFL, with major leagues forming the ‘elite’ VCFL competition.

2.25 Netball and football have been integrated in many senior VCFL leagues over the past 25 years, and in 2004, 47 of 48 senior football leagues had incorporated netball competitions. Clubs that belong to these football/netball leagues are required to enter netball and football teams to gain entry to league competitions.

Football/Netball leagues are affiliated to Netball Victoria, as well as to the VCFL.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Victorian Country Football League, 'VCFL player clearance/registration form', viewed 28 July 2004, <[http://www.vcfl.com.au/\\_uploads/res/2\\_2254.pdf](http://www.vcfl.com.au/_uploads/res/2_2254.pdf)>.

<sup>234</sup> Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 8.

<sup>235</sup> Goulburn Valley Football League, *Submission*, no. 56, 5 May 2004, pp. 3-4; Victorian Country Football League, *Handbook*, Victorian Country Football League, Melbourne, 2004. See also Chapter Eight.

<sup>236</sup> Netball Victoria, *Submission*, no. 22, 8 December 2003, p. 3. See also Chapters One and Five.



During the course of its public hearings, the Committee heard that this association has produced benefits for both football and netball in country communities, particularly as the co-location of these sports has, in many cases, made it easier for partners and families to participate in organised sport.

2.26 Currently ten leagues in the VCFL have appointed full-time paid administrators (or general managers) to coordinate various administrative, promotional, and organisational duties.<sup>237</sup> Leigh Elder, General Manager of the Ovens and Murray and Yarra Valley Football Leagues, told the Committee that leagues with general managers were “leaders in supporting their member clubs with financial distributions, cost cutting programs, marketing and promotional initiatives, educational programs for the clubs and the volunteers, and development programs for funding for umpires.”<sup>238</sup> The Committee notes that, while these administrators have been of great benefit to their respective leagues, most leagues in country Victoria are unlikely to be in a financial position to employ people in similar roles.

2.27 In 2004, the salary cap for major leagues was \$50,000 (excluding payments to one player and one coach), and the salary cap for district leagues was \$30,000.<sup>239</sup> Leagues within the VCFL were able to apply for permission to vary the salary cap. Each league in the VCFL was also required to appoint a Salary Cap Officer, who was responsible for investigation of alleged salary cap breaches. There were no specified penalties for breach of the salary cap in the VCFL regulations, except that proven breaches be referred to the relevant league tribunal for appropriate disciplinary action.

2.28 In May 2004, the VCFL initiated an investigation into the effectiveness of the salary cap. On 16 July 2004, the VCFL announced it had received a recommendation from a sub-committee formed for this investigation that the salary cap be removed.<sup>240</sup> Consequently, the salary cap will no longer operate from 2005. The VCFL has subsequently appointed a Commercial/Business Manager, who is responsible for developing training programs in “financial management, financial planning and

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<sup>237</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 55.

<sup>238</sup> Leigh Elder, General Manager, Ovens and Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 5.

<sup>239</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Handbook*, Victorian Country Football League, Melbourne, 2004, p. 59.

<sup>240</sup> Victorian Country Football League, 'Strong move to abolish the country cap', viewed 27 October 2004, <<http://www.vcfl.com.au/newsitem.asp?id=9725&orgID=2&Oname=WorkSafe+VCFL&O1c=7&O10c=6>>.

budgeting and the presentation of a range of optional player payment systems.”<sup>241</sup> The Committee also notes that the Mornington Peninsula Nepean Football League (MPNFL) will trial a “player points system” in 2005 as an alternative to the salary cap program, and that the VCFL Board has made a commitment to monitor a player points system currently operating in two Queensland and New South Wales football leagues.<sup>242</sup> The player points system to be trialled by the MPNFL allocates a point value to players in senior teams, based on their experience at various levels of Australian rules football, and their relationship to their MPNFL club. In 2005, each senior MPNFL team will be allowed a maximum of 38 ‘points’. Each player is ‘worth’ at least 1 point, with selected players worth additional points (for example, a person who has played more than 50 senior games at AFL level is worth an additional six points). Players who are ‘worth’ additional points may have a proportion of those points deducted if they are returning to a MPNFL club they had previously played for, or if they play at one MPNFL club for more than three years. For example, any player, regardless of experience, who has played for one MPNFL club for five or more years will be rated as a ‘one point’ player for that club.<sup>243</sup>

### ***VCFL clubs***

2.29 Clubs are responsible for the everyday management and logistics of putting various teams on the field for local competition. This requires a large number of participants, including players, board or committee members, coaches, trainers, gate keepers, grounds keepers, and volunteers for various other duties (such as catering, bar tending, etc.).

2.30 According to the VCFL, the average number of volunteers active in each of its affiliated clubs is between 25 and 35 persons (not including players).<sup>244</sup> The VCFL also argue that this number is not sufficient for most clubs, and that ideally between 40 and 55 volunteers are required for each club. Club administrators are responsible for the day to day running of clubs, which includes responsibilities for fundraising,

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<sup>241</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 26 October 2004.

<sup>242</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 26 October 2004. See also Chapter Four.

<sup>243</sup> Mornington Peninsula Nepean Football League, 'Mornington Peninsula Nepean Football League player points system', viewed 27 October 2004, <<http://www.mpnfl.com.au/pps2005.pdf>>.

<sup>244</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 38.

player registrations (and bookkeeping, where those players are paid), various account keeping duties, and player and volunteer recruitment.<sup>245</sup>

### *VCFL programs and resources*

2.31 The Committee notes that the VCFL provides a wide range of programs and resources for its leagues, clubs and players, including:

- the VCFL Annual Handbook, which is distributed to all clubs, leagues, administrators and umpires affiliated to the VCFL;
- training and education programs on a range of topics, including club administration; football operations; information technology; marketing; volunteer management and recruitment; legal procedures and requirements; risk management; and racial and religious vilification;
- four full-time Area Managers that operate within designated areas of Victoria, and receive support from head office staff;
- funding, grants and subsidies for the following programs: training and education programs; computer subsidies; coach accreditation course subsidies; trainers course subsidies; apparel subsidies for new or amalgamated clubs; representative programs; annual league and club seminars; and a subsidy for the annual premiers dinner;
- benefits obtained through negotiations with third parties for leagues, clubs and players, either through sponsorship or endorsement arrangements, or by negotiating favourable commercial arrangements with third parties;
- an online competition and player management system, as well as a website for each league and club, provided to all affiliated leagues and clubs free of charge;
- annual seminars on various issues including player registration, the mutual discretionary fund, public liability, risk management, information technology, licensing, and marketing opportunities. Seminars for leagues are convened in December and seminars for clubs are held in early February;
- in 2004, the inaugural country football conference for club and league officials and administrators; and

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<sup>245</sup> Glenelg Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 29, 11 December 2003, p. 5.

- Participation Pathway programs, including various championship and representative events and competitions held periodically by the VCFL to provide talented individuals, and outstanding leagues and clubs, with an opportunity to participate in elite competition.<sup>246</sup>

### ***Government support for country football***

#### **State Government programs**

2.32 Various levels of government provide a number of programs and resources that football clubs are able to access or apply to receive. Some organisations, such as the Australian Drug Foundation and the Australian Sports Commission, offer programs that support sports organisations throughout Australia, including football and netball clubs (such as through the ‘Good Sports’ program).

2.33 State Government funding is provided largely by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) through Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV), Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV), and the Community Support Fund. During the period 2000-01 to 2003-04, country football, netball and cricket received the following direct or indirect funding from these organisations:

**Table 3: Country football, netball and cricket funding, DVC, SRV, AAV and Community Support Fund, 2000-01 to 2003-04<sup>247</sup>**

<b>Funding Program</b>	<b>Rural Funding Allocation</b>
State Level Facility Development	\$13,500,00
Community Facilities Program	\$7,442,040
State Sporting Association Development Program (includes Cricket and Netball)	\$291,225
Country Action Grants Scheme (includes Cricket and Netball)	\$127,155
Aboriginal Affairs Victoria	\$600,000
Community Support Fund	\$757,000
Non-Program Specific Funding*	\$357,500

2.34 The following descriptions of this country football, netball and cricket funding listed in Table 3 were provided to the Committee by the Department for Victorian Communities:

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<sup>246</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, pp. 23-9. See also Chapter Eight.

<sup>247</sup> Source: Department for Victorian Communities, *Factual information to support the parliamentary inquiry into country football*, 2004, p. 9. See also Chapter Six.

- State Level Facility Development: funding from the State Government for the redevelopment of Kardinia Park in Geelong. Funds for this project have been allocated from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (\$6.75 million) and the Community Support Fund (\$6.75 million);<sup>248</sup>
- Community Facility Development: funding provided by Sport and Recreation Victoria through the Community Facility Funding Program, and allocated for the provision of high-quality and accessible community sport and recreation facilities (football/netball club facilities and maintenance is discussed further in Chapter Six);
- State Sporting Association Development Program: assistance to recognised state sporting associations for the delivery of specific projects and the development of state sporting infrastructure. Recognised state sporting associations in Victoria include Football Victoria, Netball Victoria and Cricket Victoria;
- Country Action Grant Scheme: funding provided under four categories, comprised of small grants for personal development, management training, projects to improve community participation in sport, and travel;
- Indigenous Sport Development Program: funding jointly provided by Sport and Recreation Victoria and the Australian Sports Commission to develop access and opportunities for Indigenous Victorians to participate in structured sport;
- Aboriginal Affairs Victoria: funds provided for facility renovations at the Rumbalara Football Netball Club, and for a Diversionary Support Education Program in association with the Enmaraleek Association. The latter program used sport as a diversionary and preventative tool for Indigenous youth in Broadmeadows; and
- Community Support Fund: funding for an update of the Buninyong Community Facility and the publication of two football and netball club histories.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Department for Victorian Communities, *Factual information to support the parliamentary inquiry into country football*, 2004, p. 9.

<sup>249</sup> Department for Victorian Communities, *Factual information to support the parliamentary inquiry into country football*, 2004.

2.35 Other organisations based in Victoria, such as VicHealth, support football through direct grants to peak organisations (such as Football Victoria), and through smaller grants to individual clubs for specific programs.

2.36 The Committee also notes that in 2004, the State Government's Country Football Grounds Assistance Program allocated \$1 million to assist country football clubs to maintain football grounds affected by drought, and to implement strategies for sustainable water use on football grounds.<sup>250</sup>

### **Local Government**

2.37 In addition to these programs, local government throughout rural and regional Victoria offers substantial assistance to football/netball clubs. The type and scale of assistance offered by shires and councils is variable across the state, but can include ground maintenance and watering services, facilities maintenance and/or development, and other forms of support.<sup>251</sup>

### ***Participation***

2.38 In its submission to the Inquiry, the VCFL told the Committee that approximately 340,000 people participated in country football and netball during the 2002-2003 football season as players, club members, and supporters of VCFL clubs.<sup>252</sup> The VCFL also told the Committee that VCFL clubs admitted 2.2 million spectators in 2002-03 and that 18,500 businesses were "directly involved" with the VCFL and its affiliated clubs and leagues as sponsors and suppliers.<sup>253</sup>

### **Players**

2.39 In 2003, there were over 69,000 players registered to the VCFL, including 28,800 players aged 19 years or over.<sup>254</sup> According to Netball Victoria, there were also 12,933 registered netballers playing in football/netball leagues in 2003, as well as

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<sup>250</sup> Issues surrounding water are discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

<sup>251</sup> Glenelg Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 29, 11 December 2003, p. 6; Greater Geelong City Council, *Submission*, no. 7, 19 November 2003; Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 19, 5 December 2003, p. 7; Jack Huxtable, *Submission*, no. 31, 15 December 2003, p. 3; Loddon Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 18, 5 December 2003, p. 4; Murrindindi Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 6, 7 November 2003; Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Submission*, no. 32, 16 December 2003, p. 3; VicSport, *Submission*, no. 57, 10 May 2004, p. 9. See also Chapters Six and Eight.

<sup>252</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 22.

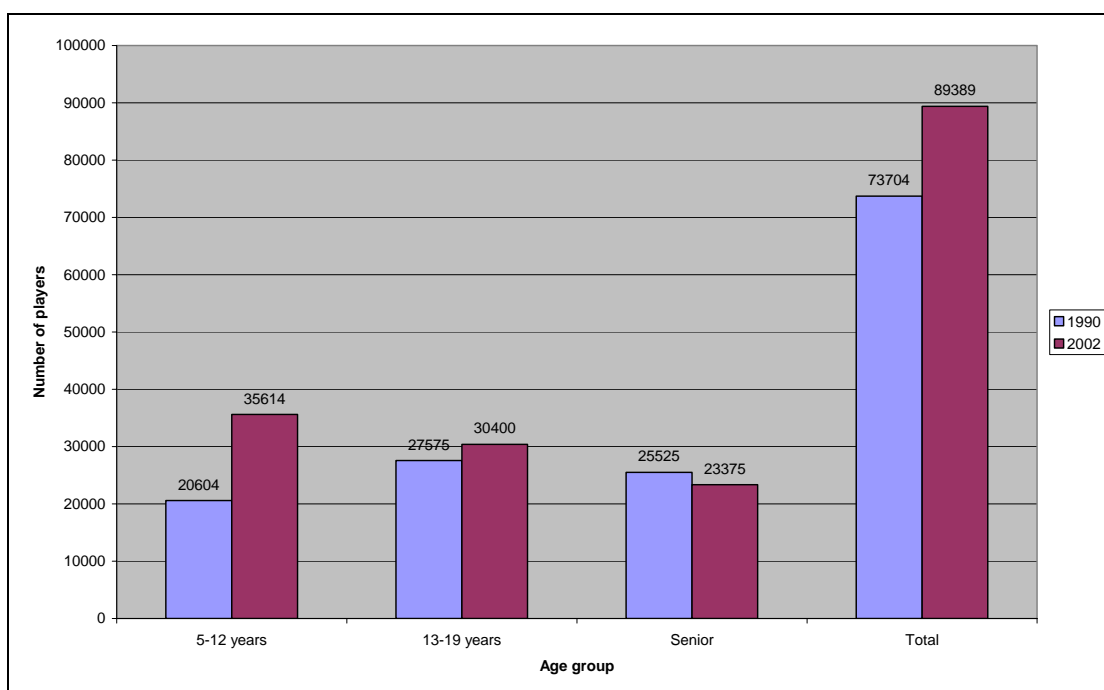
<sup>253</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 22.

<sup>254</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 17 May 2004.

an estimated 3,500 netballers registered to town netball that also played in football/netball leagues (16,433 total).<sup>255</sup>

2.40 Overall, player participation in rural and regional Victoria has increased in junior age groups, and decreased in senior age groups. Between 1990 and 2002, the number of people playing football in rural and regional areas increased by 21% (15,685 players). This was primarily due to increased participation by young players – between 1990 and 2002, the number of players aged 5-12 years increased by 73% (15,010), and the number of players aged 13-19 years increased by 10% (2825). Participation by senior players decreased by 8% (2150) during this period.<sup>256</sup>

**Figure 3: Junior and senior football players in country Victoria, 1990 and 2002**<sup>257</sup>



2.41 Football participation rates in country Victoria are substantially higher than metropolitan Melbourne. The participation rates for males in country local government areas are 36% for juniors (5 to 18 years) and 12% for seniors (19 to 39 years), compared to 23% for juniors and 3% for seniors in metropolitan LGAs.<sup>258</sup>

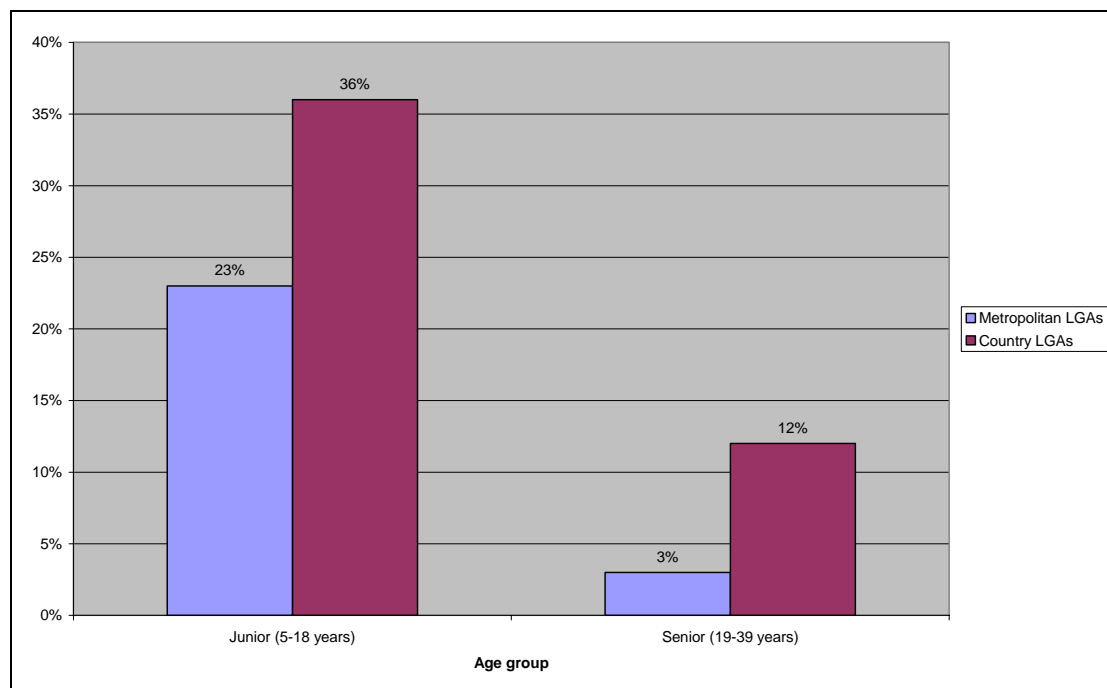
<sup>255</sup> Netball Victoria, *Submission*, no. 22, 8 December 2003, p. 4.

<sup>256</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 75.

<sup>257</sup> Source: Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 75.

<sup>258</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004.

**Figure 4: Junior and senior football participation rates, metropolitan and country local government areas, 2002<sup>259</sup>**



2.42 Demographic data suggests that the increase in young football players has been disproportionate to population changes – between 1991 and 2001 the number of children aged 5 to 17 years (both sexes) in regional areas remained stable, whereas participation in football by children aged 5 to 19 years increased 37%. In senior football, an 8% decline in player numbers was less than the regional decline of people (both sexes) aged 18 to 34 (15% decline), but more than the decline in people aged 18 to 49 years (3% decline).<sup>260</sup>

*[Players are] less prepared to commit beyond the junior years. Once they do get beyond their junior years we generally find that there are a lot of other things going on around them that makes them less prepared to commit. That is accessibility to other activities, Melbourne is much more accessible these days, the beach is a bit more accessible — all those sorts of things work against a club that really needs a player, once he has decided to play football, to make that commitment for the full six months of the year. Compounded with that is the fact that their peers leave the region as well. More and more*

<sup>259</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004.

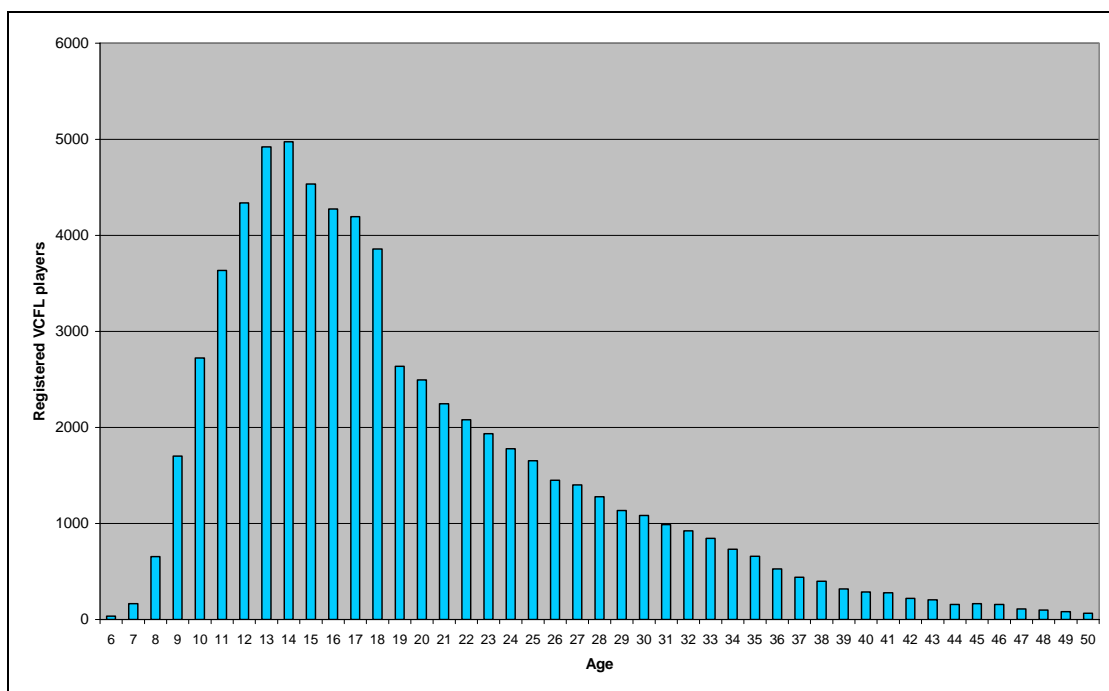
<sup>260</sup> Department of Planning and Development, *Regional Victoria in fact: 1991 Census statistics for regional Victoria's new Local Government Areas*, Government of Victoria, Melbourne, 1995, p. 96; Department of Sustainability and Environment, *Regional Victoria in fact: 2001 Census statistics for Local Government Areas*, Government of Victoria, Melbourne, 2003, p. 46; Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 75.



*of their peers are away, so they will follow them on weekend exploits if they are still living here.*<sup>261</sup>

2.43 While high participation rates among junior players is encouraging for the future of country football, a number of witnesses noted a significant drop in player participation from ages 19 years and over. They observed that there were significant challenges translating high rates of junior football participation into high senior football participation. This is particularly evident in the following graph (Figure 5), which shows the age structure of player participation across the VCFL.

**Figure 5: Player registrations by age, 2003**<sup>262</sup>



### *Means of recruiting senior players*

2.44 Many country football clubs and leagues have maintained player numbers through various means, such as encouraging young people to return ‘home’ to play football (and netball),<sup>263</sup> by recruiting players from other areas by means of various inducements (such as player payments)<sup>264</sup> and by encouraging men who otherwise might have considered retiring from football to remain active as players in their club.

<sup>261</sup> Mark Williams, Secretary/Treasurer, Horsham Football and Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, pp. 26-7.

<sup>262</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 17 May 2004.

<sup>263</sup> Loddon Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 18, 5 December 2003, p. 4.

<sup>264</sup> Loddon Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 18, 5 December 2003, p. 4.

Howard Rosewarne, the Administration Manager of the Central Highlands Football League said:

*In our part of Victoria you would have to pay pretty high money to get a reasonable footballer up here. A lot of them would come, but there is the pressure of getting them jobs.... Our club is finding it increasingly difficult to attract players.<sup>265</sup>*

2.45 These means of recruiting players have often been effective, but not for all clubs, and not in all parts of rural and regional Victoria. In some cases, witnesses suggested that these strategies may not be sustainable, as the additional costs associated with some of those initiatives (such as player payments) may place an unworkable burden on clubs and communities.<sup>266</sup>

### ***Players who commute to play football***

*I only have to look to my own son, who is now 23, to see the reasons for the lack of youth in our club over the past 10 years. As a junior he played in successful fourths and thirds premierships and still retains this group of friends today. After VCE he went to Melbourne for further studies and travelled back each week for four years, as a senior player. In his first year away we had 10 of his age group returning each week to play football -- we now have only one of those players remaining. Travel expenses, wear and tear on old vehicles, study requirements and lack of success on the football field are all contributing factors.<sup>267</sup>*

2.46 A number of witnesses and submissions to the Committee commented on the difficulty of retaining young people in country football, particularly as many had moved to Melbourne or major regional centres for work or education. A number of clubs encouraged young men to return 'home' for football, which appears to have been a successful strategy, although the Committee heard that individuals would rarely continue to do this for more than a few years.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Howard Rosewarne, Administration Manager, Central Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 4.

<sup>266</sup> Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 20; Peter Doig, Director of Football Operations, Swan Hill Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 14; Geoff Jones, Administration Manager, Sunraysia Football League, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 32; Luke Robinson, President, East Gippsland Football League, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 11; Howard Rosewarne, Administration Manager, Central Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 4; Ronald Schrader, individual, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 16; Neill Sharpe, General Manager, Riddell District Football League, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 41. See also Chapter Five.

<sup>267</sup> M Flett, 'To survive, we need jobs for the boys', *Weekly Times*, 2 June 2004, p. 17.

<sup>268</sup> Loddon Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 18, 5 December 2003, p. 3.

### *Player payments*

2.47 In an unpublished report by Sport and Recreation Victoria, 68% of non-metropolitan football organisations reported offering “payment or other incentives to attract or secure participants, members or customers”.<sup>269</sup> By comparison, 22% of all metropolitan and non-metropolitan organisations reported the use of payments or other incentives for this purpose (‘incentives’ could include, for example, shopping discount cards for club members).<sup>270</sup> While the report does not allow the Committee to determine the prevalence of player payment in country football it is likely that the high reported rate of payments and incentives in country football reflects a high rate of player remuneration.

2.48 In 2003, the VCFL estimated that the total expenditure of senior clubs was \$56.304 million per annum.<sup>271</sup> The VCFL also estimated that 30% of senior club expenditure was on player payments, which indicates that payments to footballers in a typical year may exceed \$16.9 million for country Victoria.<sup>272</sup>

2.49 Player payments appear to be a successful means to attract players to football clubs, and the practice of paying players appears to be wide-spread in the VCFL, with witnesses acknowledging that payment of players took place within their league or club. While payment for senior players appears to be a relatively common feature of VCFL clubs, it appears not to be so common among reserves players.<sup>273</sup>

### *Older players*

2.50 The Committee heard evidence during its public hearings that football clubs were ‘making up the numbers’ by supplementing teams with older men.<sup>274</sup> VCFL data on player registrations shows that older players make up a significant proportion of country football teams (particularly away from the regional cities), although

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<sup>269</sup> Department for Victorian Communities, *Factual information to support the parliamentary inquiry into country football*, 2004, p. 8.

<sup>270</sup> Department for Victorian Communities, *Factual information to support the parliamentary inquiry into country football*, 2004, p. 8. See also Chapter Five.

<sup>271</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, pp. 51,6.

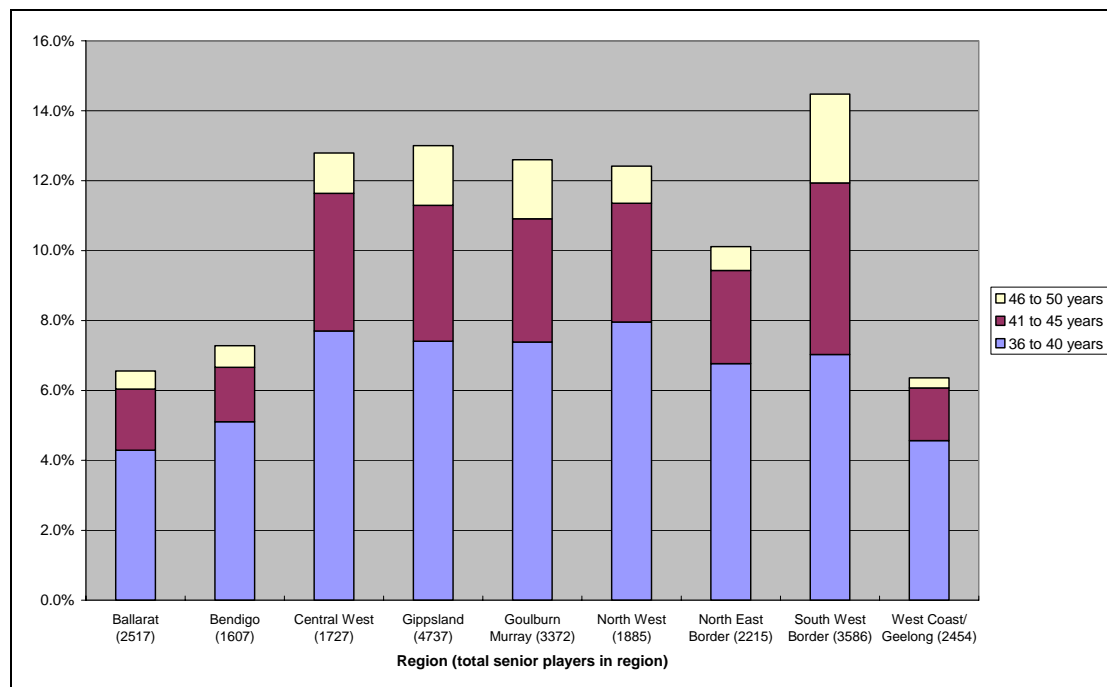
<sup>272</sup> Source: Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, pp. 51-2. See also Chapter Four.

<sup>273</sup> Bill McCarthy, *Submission*, no. 3, 22 October 2003, p. 1.

<sup>274</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Submission*, no. 27, 9 December 2003, p. 4. See also Chapter Five.

unfortunately historical registration data was not available to back the claim that a greater number of older players were being recruited than in the past.

**Figure 6: Older country football players as a proportion of senior VCFL football players, by VCFL region, 2003<sup>275</sup>**



## Volunteers

2.51 While finding and retaining players was a concern of many football clubs, particularly those in comparatively remote communities in Victoria, most clubs and leagues experienced difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteers. Administrative volunteers were particularly concerned at the amount of time they were required to devote to football.<sup>276</sup> For administrators of various kinds, much of their time was consumed by various forms of paperwork, such as player registration management, recording and maintaining financial records for the club (including GST and tax

<sup>275</sup> Source: Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 17 May 2004.

<sup>276</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Submission*, no. 27, 9 December 2003, p. 2; Gannawarra Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 23, 8 December 2003, p. 1; Greater Geelong City Council, *Submission*, no. 7, 19 November 2003, p. 2; Bill McCarthy, *Submission*, no. 3, 22 October 2003, p. 4; Mildura Rural City Council, *Submission*, no. 13, 3 December 2003, p. 2; Victorian Country Football Umpires Association, *Submission*, no. 24, 8 December 2003, p. 3; Warrnambool City Council, *Submission*, no. 11, 28 November 2003, p. 3; Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Submission*, no. 30, 12 December 2003, p. 2. See also Chapter Five.

requirements) and obtaining appropriate certification as required by peak football bodies and by local, state and federal governments.<sup>277</sup>

2.52 Volunteers at all levels of football often devoted some time apart from Saturday mornings or afternoons to fulfil various requirements for their positions – such as obtaining certification for serving alcohol, food preparation, minimum requirements for coaching and/or training, etc.<sup>278</sup> Apart from these responsibilities, volunteers were also asked to perform other duties traditionally associated with supporting a football club – fundraising, selling tickets for raffles, various match-day duties, and maintaining grounds, equipment and facilities.<sup>279</sup>

2.53 The Committee heard evidence that football clubs were experiencing the same or greater problems recruiting volunteers as players.<sup>280</sup> Multiple reasons for this situation were offered by witnesses, such as fear of litigation in the wake of recent publicity about insurance and public liability,<sup>281</sup> and the more general movement of people into regional centres, along with reduced employment opportunities in many smaller Victorian communities.<sup>282</sup>

2.54 Another area of concern expressed by the VCFL was the increasing age of ‘off-field’ volunteers. According to the VCFL, the average age of ‘off-field’ volunteers at most clubs exceeds 50 years of age.<sup>283</sup> The Committee notes that clubs

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<sup>277</sup> Foster Football Club, *Submission*, no. 9, 20 November 2003, p. 1; Gannawarra Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 23, 8 December 2003, p. 1; Glenelg Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 29, 11 December 2003, p. 7; Goulburn Valley Football League, *Submission*, no. 16, 2 December 2003, p. 1; Greater Geelong City Council, *Submission*, no. 7, 19 November 2003, p. 2; Loddon Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 18, 5 December 2003, p. 4; Mildura Rural City Council, *Submission*, no. 13, 3 December 2003, p. 2; Murrindindi Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 6, 7 November 2003, p. 2; Orbost Snowy Rovers Football Club, *Submission*, no. 42, 6 April 2004, p. 3; Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Submission*, no. 32, 16 December 2003, p. 4; VicHealth, *Submission*, no. 17, 4 December 2003, p. 1.

<sup>278</sup> Central Highlands Football League, *Submission*, no. 53, 27 April 2004, p. 6; Murray Football League, *Submission*, no. 48, 14 April 2004, p. 2.

<sup>279</sup> Loddon Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 18, 5 December 2003, p. 4; Bill McCarthy, *Submission*, no. 3, 22 October 2003, p. 6.

<sup>280</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Submission*, no. 27, 9 December 2003, p. 4.

<sup>281</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Submission*, no. 27, 9 December 2003, p. 8; Northern Grampians Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 37, 14 January 2004, p. 1; Orbost Snowy Rovers Football Club, *Submission*, no. 42, 6 April 2004, p. 3; Picola and District Football Netball League, *Submission*, no. 49, 14 April 2004, p. 3; VicSport, *Submission*, no. 57, 10 May 2004, p. 7.

<sup>282</sup> Northern Grampians Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 37, 14 January 2004, p. 3; Yinnar Football and Netball Club, *Submission*, no. 45, 7 April 2004, p. 2.

<sup>283</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 40; Victorian Country Football Umpires Association, *Submission*, no. 24, 8 December 2003, p. 2.

are finding recruitment of younger people for volunteer roles increasingly difficult.<sup>284</sup> Issues associated with volunteers are discussed further in Chapter Five.

### **Umpires**

2.55 Accredited umpires who belong to umpires associations are the preferred referees of senior matches (and all matches if available). Accredited members of umpires associations receive match fees specified by the VCFL. Typically, these match fees are paid to various umpires associations by leagues and clubs, and are then dispersed to umpires after training and other expenses are deducted.<sup>285</sup>

2.56 In the VCFL, umpires associations are affiliated to the Victorian Country Football Umpires Association (VCFUA). Currently there are 27 umpiring associations affiliated with the VCFUA throughout regional and rural Victoria.<sup>286</sup> Another two groups are located interstate, one at Albury in New South Wales and one at Mount Gambier in South Australia. The VCFUA is the largest umpiring body in Australia and currently has in excess of 2500 affiliated umpires.

2.57 The VCFUA was formed to:

- further advance Australian rules football by the improvement of umpiring;
- promote the welfare of affiliated associations and their members;
- obtain uniformity in the interpretation of the laws and rules of Australian rules football;
- maintain and conduct an association which provides an effective means of communication to all affiliated umpiring associations; and
- perform other activities which are conducive to achieving the purposes of the association.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Orbest Snowy Rovers Football Club, *Submission*, no. 42, 6 April 2004, p. 2.

<sup>285</sup> Geelong Football Umpires League, *Submission*, no. 40, 9 March 2004, p. 1; Victorian Country Football Umpires Association, *Submission*, no. 24, 8 December 2003, p. 4.

<sup>286</sup> Victorian Country Football Umpires Association, 'Victorian Country Football Umpires Association', viewed 1 November 2004, <<http://www.umpires.vcfl.com.au/extra.asp?id=1399&OrgID=1136>>.

<sup>287</sup> Victorian Country Football Umpires Association, 'Victorian Country Football Umpires Association', viewed 1 November 2004, <<http://www.umpires.vcfl.com.au/extra.asp?id=1399&OrgID=1136>>.

2.58 The Committee was told that there is a shortage of adequately skilled umpires for senior (and other) competitions, so that in many cases clubs are forced to provide their own umpires for junior, under-18s and reserves football.<sup>288</sup> The Committee was also told about a range of other issues affecting umpires, such as recruitment and retention, abuse, the adequacy of facilities and the necessity for umpires to be covered under the WorkCover scheme. These and other issues are discussed in Chapter Seven.

### ***Amalgamation, recess and disbandment***

#### **Amalgamation**

2.59 A number of league and club amalgamations and disbandments have occurred throughout country Victoria in past decades, predominantly in western Victoria, the Wimmera and the Mallee, and in Gippsland. Amalgamations and disbandments appear to be associated with demographic changes and amalgamations were employed as a way to keep local football representation when insufficient players remained to maintain two clubs (or insufficient clubs remain to maintain two leagues).

2.60 The Committee was provided with information on amalgamations and mergers of VCFL leagues and clubs between the 1990 and 2003 football seasons by Philip Gluyas, which showed that 36 clubs and six leagues disbanded, 66 clubs and ten leagues amalgamated, and six clubs and one league were formed during that period (see Table 4 below).<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Gannawarra Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 23, 8 December 2003, p. 1; Bill McCarthy, *Submission*, no. 3, 22 October 2003, p. 2.

<sup>289</sup> On the Committee's request, Mr Gluyas obtained information on club and league disbandments and amalgamations through an exhaustive analysis of newspaper reports from 1990 through 2003. The Committee would like to thank Mr Gluyas for this contribution to the report.

**Table 4: VCFL club and league amalgamations and disbandments, 1990 to 2003<sup>290</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Club disbandments</b>	<b>Club mergers [clubs involved]</b>	<b>League disbandments</b>	<b>League mergers [leagues involved]</b>
1990	3	1 [2]	0	0 [0]
1991	3	0 [0]	0	1 [2]
1992	4	0 [0]	0	0 [0]
1993	2	2 [4]	0	0 [0]
1994	1	3 [6]	1	0 [0]
1995	2	8 [16]	2	0 [0]
1996	1	7 [14]	0	2 [4]
1997	2	0 [0]	0	0 [0]
1998	7	2 [4]	0	1 [2]
1999	4	3 [6]	1	0 [0]
2000	0	3 [6]	0	0 [0]
2001	3	0 [0]	0	1 [2]
2002	2	2 [4]	1	0 [0]
2003	2	2 [4]	1	0 [0]
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>33 [66]</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5 [10]</b>

2.61 New and amalgamated clubs receive support from the VCFL in the form of subsidies for guernseys, and through advice and guidance provided by the VCFL’s Area Managers. Amalgamated clubs are often forced to consider a number of issues surrounding the ‘rationalisation’ of the new club. One consequence of amalgamation is that a newly formed club will often have more players than it needs – but many of the excess players also ‘drop off’ over time. Team members may often have to travel greater distances to play in local competitions,<sup>291</sup> and the new club will also often have two (or more) ‘home’ grounds requiring maintenance.<sup>292</sup> Travel distances are similarly affected by the amalgamation of leagues.<sup>293</sup> Member and community loyalties to former clubs sometimes mean that the process of rationalising resources of the new club does not proceed quickly, because communities can be reluctant to give up familiar icons of their community – such as the local football oval, for example.

2.62 The process of amalgamation can also mean that a new club is covered by more than one local government authority (particularly where two ‘home’ grounds are

<sup>290</sup> Source: Philip Gluyas, email, 10 September 2004.

<sup>291</sup> Glenelg Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 29, 11 December 2003, p. 2; Glenda Hirth, *Submission*, no. 1, 7 October 2003, p. 1; Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Submission*, no. 30, 12 December 2003, p. 1.

<sup>292</sup> Greg Martin, Secretary, Sea Lake Nandaly Football/Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 19.

<sup>293</sup> Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 19, 5 December 2003, p. 1.



maintained), which may complicate the various tasks and functions of club administrators. In some cases, amalgamated clubs may also cross state borders (for example, in the case of Corowa-Rutherglen Football Club). However, club amalgamations can also provide communities with an opportunity to examine the structure of local football and potentially reorganise and reinvigorate junior and senior participation.

## Recess and disbandment

*Towns where the football club has disbanded or amalgamated have now virtually lost their identity and in some cases virtually have died.*<sup>294</sup>

2.63 Information provided by Mr Gluyas indicates that 36 clubs and six leagues disbanded between 1990 and 2003.<sup>295</sup> The event of a club going into recess, or disbanding, can affect the way a country community identifies itself, as an icon of that community, and more practically, a regular opportunity for that community to meet and socialise, is often lost along with the football team.<sup>296</sup> The importance of football teams to country communities is discussed in Chapter One.

2.64 Clubs are permitted to go into recess for a period of time. According to VCFL regulations, a club that opts to go into recess is permitted to remain registered with the VCFL for two years, and if it is not then able to re-enter competition it is disbanded. The two-year time limit can be extended by permission of the VCFL.<sup>297</sup> Clubs in recess are required to pay the VCFL affiliation fee and maintain public liability insurance to the level of one senior team rate.<sup>298</sup>

2.65 Players from disbanded clubs and clubs in recess are required to obtain clearance from their respective leagues if they wish to play for other clubs. In cases

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<sup>294</sup> Terry Kiley, President, Mallee Football League, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 3.

<sup>295</sup> Philip Gluyas, email, 10 September 2004.

<sup>296</sup> Central Highlands Football League, *Submission*, no. 53, 27 April 2004, p. 4; East Gippsland Football League, *Submission*, no. 44, 6 April 2004, p. 1; Glenelg Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 29, 11 December 2003, p. 2; Omeo District Football League, *Submission*, no. 55, 29 April 2004, p. 1; Panmure Football/Netball Club, *Submission*, no. 35, 18 December 2003, p. 2; Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Submission*, no. 32, 16 December 2003, p. 2; Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 43, 6 April 2004, p. 1; Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 52, 27 April 2004, p. 3.

<sup>297</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Handbook*, Victorian Country Football League, Melbourne, 2004, p. 59.

<sup>298</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Handbook*, Victorian Country Football League, Melbourne, 2004, p. 58.

where the league has also disbanded, players must receive clearances from their VCFL regional manager.<sup>299</sup>

## ***Conclusion***

2.66 This chapter has provided a brief profile of some of the main issues and peak organisations concerned with Australian rules football in Victoria. These issues are addressed in detail in following chapters, where a comprehensive discussion of evidence received by the Committee is presented.

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<sup>299</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Handbook*, Victorian Country Football League, Melbourne, 2004, p. 46.

## Chapter Three

# The effect of wider social change on country football

### *Introduction*

3.1 Chapter Two discusses the structure of country football. In that chapter, it is noted that, according to the Victorian Country Football League (VCFL), more than 300,000 people participate in football across rural and regional Victoria as players, supporters, members and volunteers. Despite high levels of participation in country football, the Committee also heard evidence from numerous witnesses that local football/netball clubs are facing significant challenges in recruitment, both for on-field and off-field activities. These are largely related to broader demographic, economic and social changes that have occurred on state and national levels. Dr Mardie Townsend from Deakin University's School of Health and Social Development told the Committee that these changes can be grouped into three categories:

*Thinking about the impact of the demographic shifts and the changes in sport and entertainment preferences and other social changes, it seems to me from the studies that we've done that there were three key sources of change. One was demographic, with declining rural populations and the ageing, the structural ageing of rural populations as young people move away. The second set of changes were the economic changes, such as downturns in some agricultural markets, changes in tariff barriers and developments in agricultural technology, which resulted in fewer but larger farms with fewer people running them. The third set of changes were policy changes such as local government amalgamations, rationalisation and regionalisation of services – and public liability insurance changes and associated culture changes such as the threat of litigation.<sup>300</sup>*

3.2 Evidence received by the Committee during its public hearings indicates that, in addition to the issues identified above, broader societal changes have affected participation in country football. These include changing sport and leisure preferences, expectations about the extent to which sport should be inclusive of women and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and the perceived risk and consequences of injury from playing football. This chapter considers the impact of population and demographic shifts, industry and employment related changes, and broad social change on football in rural and regional Victoria. The purpose of this discussion is to gain a better understanding of how factors

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<sup>300</sup> Mardie Townsend, Senior Lecturer, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 31.

external to the game of football affect participation rates, which are in turn integral to the survival of country football.

### ***Population and demographic changes***

3.3 As of June 2003, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated that the total resident population of Victoria was 4,917,394 people, an increase of 60,200 people since June 2002.<sup>301</sup> The population of metropolitan Melbourne was 3,560,226, which was an increase of 1.3% from 2002. The population of regional Victoria was 1,357,168, an increase of 1% from June 2002. This growth was slightly above the Victorian average annual growth rate for the previous five years.<sup>302</sup> Regional local government areas with the largest growth for the year ending 20 June 2003 were Greater Geelong, Greater Bendigo, Ballarat, Mitchell and Bass Coast Shires. Mitchell Shire experienced the fastest growth in regional Victoria during this period, and was the 17<sup>th</sup> fastest growing local government area in Australia.

3.4 Although the population of regional Victoria in total is growing, trends suggest that population growth is not uniform across Victoria. Some parts of regional Victoria are experiencing strong population growth whereas others, primarily in the north-west of the state, appear to be experiencing population decline. As the Department of Sustainability and Environment has stated, changes in the structure and composition of country football largely mirror population changes.<sup>303</sup> Thus, the viability of country football clubs depends, in part, upon their location in Victoria.

### **Population increases**

3.5 During the period 1991 to 2000, areas within commuting distance of Melbourne and the nearby regional centres of Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo experienced strong and steady population growth. Areas of 'high natural amenity',

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<sup>301</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Regional Population Growth, Australia and New Zealand*, no. 3218.0, 2002-2003, p. 18.

<sup>302</sup> From 20 June 1998 to 20 June 2002, the average annual growth rate was 0.9%.

<sup>303</sup> Department of Sustainability and Environment, *Regional matters: an atlas of regional Victoria*, 2nd edn, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Melbourne, 2002, p. 13.

such as those along the coast or in alpine areas, also attracted population growth through retirement and tourism.<sup>304</sup> These trends continued between 2000 and 2003.

3.6 Evidence received by the Committee during regional hearings drew a stark comparison between the fortunes of football leagues and clubs located in and around regional centres, and those football leagues and clubs in less populous and more remote parts of the state. Paul Daffey, a journalist with considerable experience writing about country football, told the Committee:

*The drain from the farms with people going to the cities is also evident in the regional cities such as Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong. In those cities it seems to be that while there are not many new clubs, the numbers attending the old clubs are growing. In Geelong they had seven junior teams 20 years ago; now they have nine. Ocean Grove is an example where there is a huge swell. There's only one club still, but there's a huge swell of young fellas playing footy within that club. And that's just people that have moved to the coast, so there's more people who filter through footy through the local footy club. And as a consequence Ocean Grove is very strong.*<sup>305</sup>

Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South West with the VCFL, told the Committee that “population increase around the coastal regions in the west of the state has seen football flourish with large numbers of juniors coming through the ranks, especially in the Geelong area.”<sup>306</sup> This was confirmed by the Chief Executive Officer of Football Geelong, Michael McMahon, who said that one of the major issues confronting Football Geelong is that there are not enough teams to cater for the number of players emerging from the under-16s age group.<sup>307</sup>

### **Population decreases**

3.7 The Municipal Association of Victoria told the Committee that the impact of demographic shifts is most apparent in the west of Victoria, and particularly in the north-west.<sup>308</sup> Similarly, Brett Anderson told the Committee that population loss is widespread in the western part of the state and has a huge impact on football

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<sup>304</sup> See Department of Sustainability and Environment, *Regional matters: an atlas of regional Victoria*, 2nd edn, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Melbourne, 2002, p. 10.

<sup>305</sup> Paul Daffey, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 35.

<sup>306</sup> Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 19.

<sup>307</sup> Michael McMahon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 8. See also Rod Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Ballarat Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 2., where he discusses the composition and strength of the Ballarat Football League.

<sup>308</sup> Rob Spence, Chief Executive Officer, Municipal Association of Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 44.

participation rates.<sup>309</sup> The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated resident population comparisons for regional Victoria show that the five local government areas that experienced a 1% or greater population decrease between June 2002 and June 2003 are based in the west of Victoria, predominantly in the Wimmera and north-west.<sup>310</sup> In its submission to the Inquiry, Hindmarsh Shire Council informed the Committee that the viability of football is “a numbers issue” and that the strength of local football is dependent on the strength of local communities.<sup>311</sup> According to Hindmarsh Shire Council, in previous years there were teams in each locality of the Shire, as well as the Lowan Star League, which fielded twelve teams. In 2004, only three football clubs remain in the Shire. The Committee was also informed that there used to be ten football teams in a 25 mile radius around Nhill and, with the collapse of the Gerang/Kiata Football Club in 2000, there is now only one football team.

3.8 Although regional population statistics show a general increase in the population of non-metropolitan Victoria, these statistics mask the fact that populations in regional centres have tended to increase at the expense of surrounding areas and small regional towns. For this reason some commentators have referred to regional centres as ‘sponge cities’.<sup>312</sup> The Committee notes that this ‘regional drain’ is likely to affect the viability of football/netball clubs in small rural towns, and may have already contributed to some football club closures and amalgamations in those towns. During its regional hearings the Committee heard evidence from the Secretary of the Sea Lake Nandaly Football Netball Club, Greg Martin, who said that the club is “classic example of the current situation in country football”.<sup>313</sup> Sea Lake Nandaly is comprised of four teams: Sea Lake, Nandaly, Berriwillock and Culgoa. Berriwillock and Culgoa merged in 1975 and Sea Lake and Nandaly merged in 1994. As a result of diminishing player numbers, the four teams merged in 2002. Mr Martin informed the Committee that “[a]lthough we have embraced merging with other clubs as a

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<sup>309</sup> Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 19.

<sup>310</sup> The five local government areas are Buloke Shire (-1.3%), Hindmarsh Shire (-1.1%), Yarriambiack Shire (-1.1%), Northern Grampians Shire (-1.0%) and Corangamite Shire (-1.0%): see Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Regional Population Growth, Australia and New Zealand*, no. 3218.0, 2002-2003, pp. 34-5.

<sup>311</sup> Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 19, 5 December 2003, p. 2.

<sup>312</sup> For a discussion of ‘sponge cities’ and ‘conduit cities’ see B Salt, *The big shift*, 2nd edn, Hardie Grant Books, Melbourne, 2004, pp. 64-6.

<sup>313</sup> Greg Martin, Secretary, Sea Lake Nandaly Football/Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 18.

survival option”, Sea Lake Nandaly’s main problems continue to be caused by declining population.<sup>314</sup> Statistics produced by the Department of Sustainability and Environment show that Sea Lake’s population declined by an average of 1.9% every year between 1981 and 2001. The populations of Culgoa and Berriwillock also consistently declined between 1981 and 2001.<sup>315</sup>

3.9 The Committee also considered football participation rates in relation to rural and regional local government areas between 1991 and 2001. While sufficient data was not available to make definitive observations on the effect of population decline on football participation, the Committee was interested to note that there was an apparent tendency for local government areas with substantial population loss in the 18-35 age group to have high football participation rates in 2002.<sup>316</sup> This indicates that one response to population pressures by people from rural and regional communities may be to align themselves more closely to icons of that community – and, as the Committee noted in Chapter One, football clubs are an important source of identity, particularly in small Victorian towns.

### **Internal migration**

3.10 At a national level, changes in population are affected by three primary factors: fertility levels, mortality and net overseas migration. At state and regional level, internal migration – the movement of young people from rural Victoria to metropolitan Victoria (or large regional centres) – and ageing have had a significant impact upon the size and distribution of populations. Although the Committee received some evidence about the impact of population ageing on the viability of country football, it is of the view that the loss of young people has been a far more significant factor for the ongoing viability of football in rural and regional Victoria, particularly in small towns. It is true that Victoria’s population distribution is changing (in the sense that the proportion of older people to younger people is

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<sup>314</sup> Greg Martin, Secretary, Sea Lake Nandaly Football/Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 18.

<sup>315</sup> Department of Sustainability and Environment, *Towns in Time – Data 2001*, 2003.

<sup>316</sup> Source: Department of Planning and Development, *Regional Victoria in fact: 1991 Census statistics for regional Victoria's new Local Government Areas*, Government of Victoria, Melbourne, 1995; Department of Sustainability and Environment, *Regional Victoria in fact: 2001 Census statistics for Local Government Areas*, Government of Victoria, Melbourne, 2003; Football Victoria, *Football participation rates for Local Government Areas*, Presentation to the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee, 24 May 2004.

increasing at a greater rate in regional Victoria than in metropolitan Melbourne) but this does not necessarily affect actual numbers of young people living in rural Victoria. As the Committee has heard, the ability of a town or region to field a football team depends upon having enough young people available to play football. It therefore appears that internal migration, rather than population ageing, has had a major impact on the ability of football/netball clubs to attract and retain players and umpires and on the availability of volunteers to assist in the administration of football clubs into the future.

3.11 In 2004, the Department of Sustainability and Environment examined the net ‘internal migration’ of each age group from the last five inter-censal periods: 1976 to 2001. The Department of Sustainability and Environment found a consistent pattern of movement, in which there was a strong loss of school leavers and other young adults to Melbourne in search of higher education, careers and the “bright lights”.<sup>317</sup> In a report published in 2000, the Centre for Population and Urban Research analysed population movement by age group between Melbourne and regional Victoria for the period 1991-1996.<sup>318</sup> This analysis showed that “...of all the young people aged 15-24 in 1996 who were living in regional Victoria in 1991, there was a net loss of 12.8% of the males and 15.5% of the females by 1996.”<sup>319</sup> Further analysis of data indicated that most of this population loss was to Melbourne.<sup>320</sup>

3.12 It should be noted, however, that large regional centres are also beneficiaries of regional migration. Young people are likely to relocate to regional centres for education and employment purposes, particularly as seven universities now have regional campuses (such as Monash University’s Gippsland campus and La Trobe University’s Bendigo campus). This means that population loss is most strongly felt in smaller rural towns and more remote areas in rural Victoria and has contributed to

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<sup>317</sup> C White & A Barlow, *Regional Demographic Update*, Department of Sustainability and Environment, 9 July 2004.

<sup>318</sup> Population movement between rural and regional Victoria and Melbourne was based on self-reported data from the 1996 census, where people indicated where they lived in 1996, and where they were living in 1991.

<sup>319</sup> B Birrell, J Dibden & J Wainer, *Regional Victoria: why the bush is hurting*, Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University, January 2000, pp. 13-4.

<sup>320</sup> B Birrell, J Dibden & J Wainer, *Regional Victoria: why the bush is hurting*, Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University, January 2000, p. 14.



declining numbers of youth available to play football. As the President of the Lexton Plains Football and Netball League told the Committee:

*There is a constant stream of young adults in the 17 to 23 age group gravitating to the large provincial cities or Melbourne for further education and/or increased employment opportunities. This is where the downward spiral begins in trying to maintain the local football and netball teams.*<sup>321</sup>

3.13 The 'Atlas of Higher Education' shows that the Mallee and Wimmera regions were particularly affected by the combination of high numbers of young people moving away to study and low numbers of young people moving into the area for study purposes.<sup>322</sup> Geoff Jones, Administration Manager of the Sunraysia Football League, told the Committee:

*I suppose if someone is leaving Bendigo to go to Melbourne, maybe someone is leaving Mildura to go to Bendigo, that may balance out. However, Mildura is a very small branch of the university, and hopefully it will increase, but 50 per cent is about the level of the young ones leaving. Unfortunately, up there we breed clever children that can go to university, and they also happen to play football.*<sup>323</sup>

The difference between the experience of football leagues and clubs in regional centres, which offer a range of educational options, and that of leagues and clubs in smaller rural towns and geographically remote areas was emphasised by Damian Drum, a Board Member of the Bendigo Football League:

*Places like Bendigo are exceptionally fortunate to have a vibrant TAFE institution, a vibrant university, a fantastic senior secondary college, in fact a large urban city which attracts so many young people for education. Therefore football in Bendigo is the beneficiary of that relocation, but not so for some of our outlying areas.*<sup>324</sup>

3.14 Figure 7 below shows the number of players registered to the VCFL (excluding Mornington) as a proportion of all males living in rural and regional Victoria, by age group.

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<sup>321</sup> Graeme Pigdon, President, Lexton Plains Football League and Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 14.

<sup>322</sup> Science and Training Commonwealth Department of Education, *Atlas of higher education: a community focus*, occasional paper 01/A, 2001.

<sup>323</sup> Geoff Jones, Administration Manager, Sunraysia Football League, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 32.

<sup>324</sup> Damian Drum, Board Member, Bendigo Football League, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 2.

**Figure 7: Proportion of males living in rural and regional Victoria that participate in VCFL football by age, 2003**

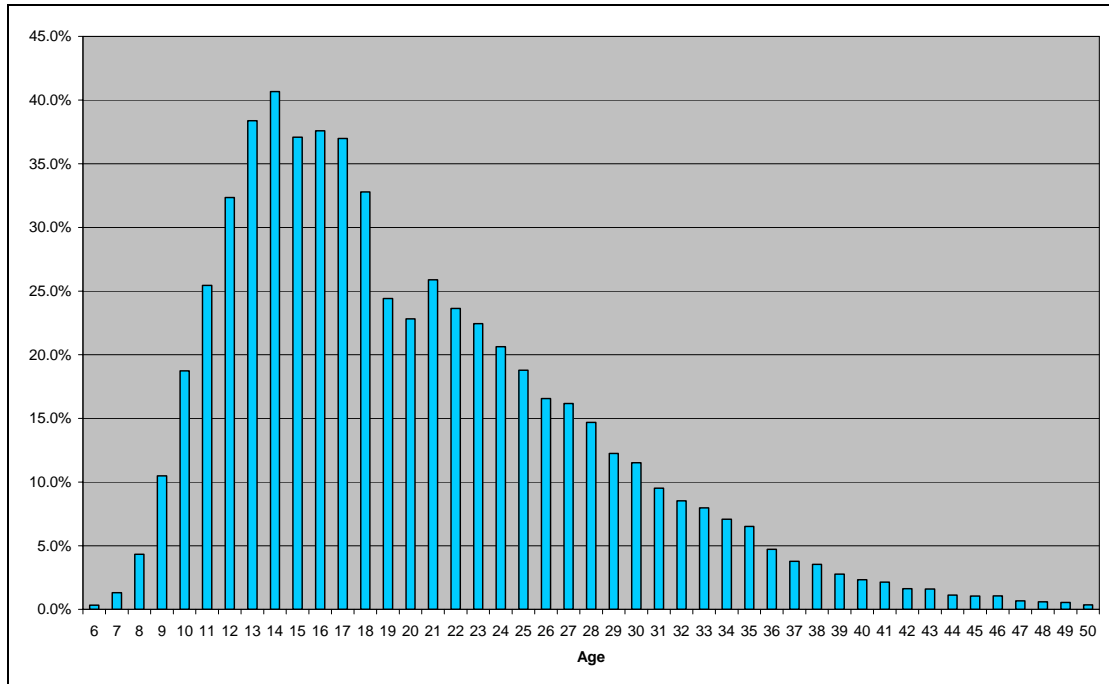


Figure 7 shows that participation rates in football drop after age 18, even for those males who remain in rural and regional Victoria upon leaving school. It also shows that participation in football begins to drop off after boys reach 15 years of age throughout country Victoria. Thus, the Committee notes that declining participation in country football by young adults is not solely due to migration of those men to Melbourne or to larger regional centres. The influence of social factors on football participation, such as changing recreation and leisure preferences and concerns about injury, are discussed later in this chapter.

3.15 People involved with country football also spoke to the Committee about the impact of reduced numbers of young people in rural and regional Victoria on off-field activities, such as providing volunteer support to local sporting clubs. The Committee understands that there are a number of issues associated with the recruitment and support of volunteers, which are discussed further in Chapter Five. The Committee heard that an important way to maintain volunteer numbers is to ensure that young people become involved in volunteer activities and that programs be developed to nurture young people in volunteer roles, in sporting clubs and in the broader

community.<sup>325</sup> The ability of local communities to attract young people to volunteer roles is clearly linked to the numbers of young people in those communities. The Committee was also told that the unavailability of young footballers means that “players are playing until they are older to bolster team numbers, and as a consequence they are not following on into administrative roles where volunteers are becoming older and becoming less positive in their outlook.”<sup>326</sup>

3.16 The Committee understands that low numbers of volunteers can have a direct financial impact on country football clubs. This is because fundraising is crucial to the livelihood of sporting clubs and a lack of volunteers to assist in fundraising reduces the income available to clubs.<sup>327</sup> More broadly, the Committee heard that the financial sustainability of country football clubs and leagues is associated with keeping young people in local communities. Luke Robinson, President of the East Gippsland Football League, told the Committee that the retention of young players was vital for East Gippsland, as “[t]hese players earn their money locally and spend it at the football club and within the community, and this is vital for the survival of not only the clubs but small rural communities.”<sup>328</sup>

3.17 Population movements have had a significant impact on the fortunes of country football. The loss of young people to Melbourne and regional centres has affected the ability of football clubs to recruit and retain players and volunteers. Evidence received by the Committee also demonstrates that this has had flow-on effects for local economies, particularly in small rural towns. It is evident, however, that population trends will continue. Recent estimates suggest that population growth in regional Victoria will slow until 2026, after which there will be negative population growth in the 18-34 year age group.<sup>329</sup> The Committee is aware, however, that local clubs and leagues have already begun to respond to challenges presented by Victoria’s changing demographic profile by introducing greater flexibility into their

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<sup>325</sup> Ken Oberin, Recreation Coordinator, Shire of Campaspe, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 48.

<sup>326</sup> Kenneth McLean, Chief Commissioner, Wimmera Football League, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 11.

<sup>327</sup> Greg Martin, Secretary, Sea Lake Nandaly Football/Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 18.

<sup>328</sup> Luke Robinson, President, East Gippsland Football League, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 10.

<sup>329</sup> Department of Sustainability and Environment, 'VIF 2004 Population Projections', viewed 22 October 2004, <<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/dsenres.nsf/LinkView/B9023E3BAACA5A6ACA256EF60019E55806C7DF80826B65674A256DEA002C0DCA>>.

competitions. These innovations, and opportunities for the government and peak bodies to provide greater support to local competitions, are discussed later in the report.

### ***Structural change***

3.18 According to the Productivity Commission, structural change is “changes in the overall size and make-up of an economy in terms of the distribution of activity and resources among firms, industries and regions.”<sup>330</sup> A variety of market-related influences (including technological advances and changes in spending patterns and trade) and government-related influences (such as reforms to infrastructure services) contribute to structural change. The Committee also notes that many changes in rural and regional Victoria result from innovative and entrepreneurial activities initiated by country Victorians.

3.19 The Committee notes that change has been a key characteristic of Victorian rural and regional industry practices, technology and markets ever since those industries and markets were established. In discussing changes in the composition of country towns, one researcher observed that “[v]iewed from a historical perspective it becomes clear that what may appear as a recent and worrying trend has been in fact an intrinsic feature of regional development.”<sup>331</sup>

3.20 Evidence to the Committee indicates that changes in the agricultural sector have affected participation in country football. Rob Spence of the Municipal Association of Victoria told the Committee:

*...farm activities are probably shrinking in terms of the numbers of people who are involved with them. They are highly mechanised, it is big business and all of those structural shifts are affecting the way our rural communities operate and that reflects itself in sport and what happens in the local towns, in shopping and in a whole range of things.*<sup>332</sup>

In a 2000 report, the Centre for Population and Urban Research stated that the real return on commodities has been falling since the 1950s, whereas costs for most farm

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<sup>330</sup> Productivity Commission, *Aspects of structural change in Australia*, Research Report, AusInfo, Canberra, 1998, p. xiii.

<sup>331</sup> M Keneley, *A dying town syndrome: a survey of urban development in the Western District of Victoria 1890-1930*, Working Paper no. 2105, Faculty of Business and Law, Deakin University, May 2001, p. 1.

<sup>332</sup> Rob Spence, Chief Executive Officer, Municipal Association of Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 44.

inputs have been rising. This has created pressures to increase efficiency, which have tended to translate into larger farm sizes and fewer farm workers.<sup>333</sup> The effects of these global and domestic developments in farming technology, as well as the markets serviced by the farming industry, are clear in rural and regional Victoria. Neil Jacobs, Chief Executive Officer of Hindmarsh Shire, told the Committee “in our area [north-west Victoria] – along with many other areas of Victoria – the era has changed from the time where a family could make a living on a 1 square mile, 640 acre farm. Now your average farming enterprise in our area needs 2000 or 3000 acres to survive. So there has been a great loss of rural population...”<sup>334</sup>

3.21 In Sea Lake, the Committee was told by Terry Kiley, President of the Mallee Football League, that the reason for the reduction in playing numbers in the region was the number of farm sales and the rationalisation of farming enterprises.<sup>335</sup> The Committee also heard that reduced numbers of broadacre farming families were having a deleterious effect on player numbers. Chris Brown, a former president of the Underbool Football Club and current Director of the Victorian Country Football League, explained:

*When it comes down to it, I saw my main topic as population shift. The area where I live is halfway between Ouyen and the South Australian border. When I was a kid there were three leagues in that area, and now there are three clubs. I believe it has been brought about by the diminishing value of the broadacre agricultural products, mainly wheat and barley. Locals are buying out their neighbours in order to expand their acreage and allow the bigger machinery to become cost effective per acre. With less families to serve we find that government services are cut back or moved to larger service centres. With all of these families moving out, we have small businesses, shops and hoteliers struggling to maintain profitability, and they inevitably close their doors, so football and netball clubs in our area do struggle to survive as part of that.*<sup>336</sup>

Mr Brown went on to tell the Committee that every time land has come up for auction around Underbool over the past 56 years it has been purchased by neighbours, resulting in a loss of more than half of landowners and families in the area.

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<sup>333</sup> B Birrell, J Dibden & J Wainer, *Regional Victoria: why the bush is hurting*, Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University, January 2000, p. 4.

<sup>334</sup> Neil Jacobs, Chief Executive Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 16.

<sup>335</sup> Terry Kiley, President, Mallee Football League, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 2.

<sup>336</sup> Chris Brown, individual, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 23. See also Neil Jacobs, Chief Executive Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, concerning the size of farm enterprises and the development of new industries in Nhill.

3.22 Changes similar to those described above for the agricultural sector have also occurred in a range of industries in rural and regional Victoria, such as the timber and fishing industries. At the same time there have been numerous changes in all sectors of the economy, including the growing popularity of supermarkets over local groceries, the introduction of seven-day a week shopping, and the increased use of automatic teller machines, electronic banking and EFTPOS. Longer term changes include the introduction of modern modes of transportation (such as rail and motor vehicles), the creation of a national roads system and the development of telecommunications technologies. All of these changes have affected the structure of rural communities, and so the availability of young men to play football.

3.23 A number of witnesses told the Committee that changes to the structure of government departments, local government, service agencies and local authorities during past decades have also reduced the number of players and administrators available for local football. It was suggested to the Committee that these changes particularly affected smaller rural communities as services were often relocated to larger regional centres.

3.24 The Committee notes, however, that population growth has also occurred in many areas throughout rural and regional Victoria and that, as a consequence, the pool of potential football players has increased in some parts of country Victoria. Changes that have contributed to the emergence of these ‘growth areas’ include the population shift to coastal areas, the development of Albury-Wodonga, irrigation-based agriculture, skiing and high-country tourism, and growth in many regional cities and communities on the outskirts of large cities.

### ***Societal changes***

3.25 The following quote from Rob Moodie, Chief Executive Officer of VicHealth, captures a range of issues facing football, netball and other sporting clubs as a result of social and cultural change. Dr Moodie asked the Committee:

*How do you welcome football in terms of a culture? How do you actually do that? How do you get to Indigenous kids? How do you get to new populations that have never been exposed to the game and to people who have never heard of Australian rules football? How do you get to them, and how do you include them? How do you include the parents? And then there is the stage of looking at new forms of recreational football. If you play soccer, you can have a scratch match of soccer with a ball, and that's all you need. Same with rugby; there's never actually been one, apart from if you*

*kicked an Australian rules football. How do you get a new form of a footy that actually enables people to have scratch matches?*<sup>337</sup>

In this section, the Committee focuses on specific challenges presented to country football by the process of social change. These include new recreational and leisure preferences, concerns about the risk and consequence of injury through playing football, and responding to the needs of women and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

### **Participation in sport and leisure activities**

3.26 Current participation rates for country football are described in Chapter Two. As discussed in that chapter, player participation has increased overall in the junior age groups and decreased in senior age groups, with a pronounced drop in player participation from age 19 onwards. The Committee understands that a range of factors are likely to influence young people's decision to play and continue to play football, some of which have been discussed in earlier chapters. An increasing preference for unstructured and individualistic forms of exercise and a rise in passive leisure activities, such as playing computer games, may also play a role. Ian Kett, the Executive Director of VicFit, told the Committee:

*We know the trends lean very strongly towards unstructured, unorganised flexible time-efficient sorts of activities, too. So there are some issues there. I think it's moved away from where it used to be with football – where football, cricket, netball and maybe a couple of others such as tennis would have been the main staples of the physical activity diet. Now that is certainly not the case. We see kids moving on to skateboarding – which is very popular with the young kids and growing – soccer, and a whole range of things.*<sup>338</sup>

3.27 The National Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey (ERASS) 2003 found that the top five physical activities across Australia are primarily unstructured and non-team based recreation activities: walking, swimming, aerobics/fitness, cycling and tennis. For people in the 15-24 year old age group, the three most popular activities are also unstructured forms of recreation (aerobics, swimming and walking), followed by outdoor soccer and basketball.<sup>339</sup> Whilst recognising the limitations of a twelve month time period, comparison of the 2002 and 2003 ERASS surveys shows a 1.0%

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<sup>337</sup> Robert Moodie, Chief Executive Officer, VicHealth, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 15.

<sup>338</sup> Ian Kett, Executive Director, Victorian Council on Fitness and General Health, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 41.

<sup>339</sup> Standing Committee on Exercise Sport and Recreation, *Participation in exercise, recreation and sport*, Annual report, 2003, pp. 32-3.

decrease in the organised participation rate for people aged 15-24 years and a 1.9% increase in the non-organised participation rate.<sup>340</sup> During public hearings, Chris Lewis, Manager, Recreation and Open Space with the Greater Geelong City Council, informed the Committee that it conducted a study on walking in the municipality, which indicated that the majority of people's physical activities were not organised by a club or association. In addition, the Greater Geelong City Council found that the top six participation activities were individual pursuits, and that team based sports such as football, netball and cricket ranked far lower in comparison.<sup>341</sup>

3.28 Of greater concern to the Committee was the suggestion that young people were choosing passive entertainment over active engagement in sport and recreation. In 2003, the Australian Bureau of Statistics undertook a statistical survey of children's participation in cultural and leisure activities and found that although children's participation in organised sport increased by 2% between 2000 and 2003, 38% of children did not participate in any organised sport outside of school hours. Of all cultural and sporting activities, time spent watching television or videos was the most popular activity for children (98% of children watched television or videos). On average, children spent 22 hours a fortnight watching television and videos. Reading for pleasure and playing electronic or computer games were also popular activities (75% and 71%).<sup>342</sup> Concern was expressed by a number of witnesses about the health effects of the trend towards sedentary leisure activities, particularly regarding children.<sup>343</sup> Dr Moodie told the Committee "[o]bviously from our point of view, we're not supporting football over cricket over anything else. From our point of view, it's actually how do you fit in the sense that the enemy is not either sport, it's

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<sup>340</sup> Standing Committee on Exercise Sport and Recreation, *Participation in exercise, recreation and sport*, Annual report, 2002, p. 16; Standing Committee on Exercise Sport and Recreation, *Participation in exercise, recreation and sport*, Annual report, 2003, p. 35.

<sup>341</sup> Greater Geelong City Council, *Submission*, no. 7, 19 November 2003, p. 3.

<sup>342</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Children's participation in cultural and leisure activities*, no. 4901.0, April 2003.

<sup>343</sup> See for example Geoff Burdett, individual, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 33; Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 4; Ian Kett, Executive Director, Victorian Council on Fitness and General Health, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 43; Robert Moodie, Chief Executive Officer, VicHealth, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 16; Frank Pyke, Executive Director, Victorian Institute of Sport, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 62; Jo Salmon, School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 30; Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 3.



television as an alternative form of entertainment.”<sup>344</sup> David Parkin, an ex-AFL player and coach and current Lecturer in Health, Physical Education and Recreation, reminded the Committee that there was a linear relationship between declining engagement in physical activity and increasing obesity among children.<sup>345</sup> Mr Parkin warned the Committee:

*Soon we won't have any reason to get off our backsides at all if we're not playing sports. Sport will be one of the few things that will demand that we actually become active, otherwise we won't do anything – buy, eat, be entertained without getting off our backsides – push the button and turn on the television.*<sup>346</sup>

3.29 In 1999-2000 Sport and Recreation Victoria commissioned a survey of sport and recreation organisations. It found that 25% of Australian rules football organisations surveyed regarded their main competitors as other outdoor ball games (eg cricket, soccer, tennis, etc.); that 8% indicated concerns about competition from electronic pastimes (computers, video games) or other passive activities (television, reading); and 6% thought that other non-sport issues were of concern (e.g. lifestyle).<sup>347</sup> However, evidence received by the Committee during public hearings generally agreed that the increasing popularity of sports such as soccer did not have an impact on the number of people playing football. There was less agreement about the impact of other leisure and entertainment options, such as playing video and computer games.

3.30 As discussed in Chapter Two, participation rates in country football remain high and, on that basis, some witnesses argued that the increasing popularity of sports such as soccer were not affecting the number of people playing country football. For example, Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South West, VCFL told the Committee:

*Other sporting preferences do not appear to be a major contributing factor to loss of teams, as very few clubs have been lost in the larger regional centres, and Auskick numbers are constantly increasing. It is in the larger regional centres, where other sporting and entertainment preferences are readily available, and this is borne out by the fact that participation rates in Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong are towards the lower end of the scale in the 19 to 39 year age bracket.*<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Robert Moodie, Chief Executive Officer, VicHealth, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 16.

<sup>345</sup> David Parkin, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 23.

<sup>346</sup> David Parkin, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 23.

<sup>347</sup> Department for Victorian Communities, *Factual information to support the parliamentary inquiry into country football*, 2004, p. 7.

<sup>348</sup> Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 20.

Other witnesses, such as Paul Daffey, felt that the increasing popularity of sports such as soccer and rugby were “real threats” but nevertheless felt that “[t]he innate appeal of the game, with its requirements of athleticism and courage, should ensure that Australian football remains the most popular sport in Victorian country regions.”<sup>349</sup>

3.31 Most witnesses who are actively engaged with local football/netball clubs identified new entertainment preferences, and in particular activities such as watching television and playing computer or video games, as a significant threat to country football. Mark Williams, Secretary-Treasurer with the Horsham Football Netball Club, told the Committee that the small local soccer competition was not competing with football “but it does not stop the fact that we are competing with the likes of computer games and the digital age, and the fact that a child is equally happy sitting behind a computer desk and playing interactively with a computer as opposed to actually getting out and actively participating in a sport.”<sup>350</sup> The President of the Orbost Snowy Rovers Football Club, Garry Squires, told the Committee that now “[t]here are other things for kids to do. Football used to be the only thing you would get in a town. When I and many of the other people were young, if you did not play football you did not do anything in the town. That is certainly not the case any more.” The Committee notes, however, that Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East, with the VCFL, rejected the suggestion that sport or entertainment changes have had any major effect on participation in football.<sup>351</sup> The Loddon Shire Council also informed the Committee that the loss of young adults to Melbourne and regional centres has had a far more significant impact on football clubs than the availability of other sporting options or entertainment preferences.<sup>352</sup>

### **Inclusion of women and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**

3.32 The Committee heard evidence that one of the challenges for football in general, including country football, is ensuring that the game is reflective of

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<sup>349</sup> Paul Daffey, *Submission*, no. 67, 5 May 2004, p. 4.

<sup>350</sup> Mark Williams, Secretary/Treasurer, Horsham Football and Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 28.

<sup>351</sup> Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 2.

<sup>352</sup> Loddon Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 18, 5 December 2003, p. 3.

developments in broader society and that it is inclusive of women and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Some of the issues associated with the participation of women, Indigenous Australians and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are discussed in Chapter One.

3.33 In *Sport and Recreation 2005-2010*, Sport and Recreation Victoria identified a number of emerging issues for government and the sport and recreation sector. These include a growing emphasis on the cultural diversity of the Victorian community.<sup>353</sup> Victorians come from over 200 countries, speak over 175 languages and dialects and follow more than 100 religious faiths.<sup>354</sup> In 2001, 23.4% of Victorian residents were born in a country other than Australia and a further 20.1% of the population had a parent born in a country other than Australia. In regional Victoria, 15.2% of residents in Greater Geelong area were born overseas, as were 14.1% of Latrobe residents. The Greater Shepparton, Mildura, Wellington and Wodonga local government areas also had close to 10% of their populations born in a country other than Australia.<sup>355</sup> Veal and Lynch, in their review of Australian leisure activity, argue that sport has been used by “minority ethnic groupings” in many ways to assist the passage into a new social and cultural environment. Sport is one medium through which cultural identity is expressed, formed and maintained. Veal and Lynch conclude that sport has played a part in the development of a multicultural Australia.<sup>356</sup>

3.34 As discussed in Chapter One, the Committee heard evidence that some country football clubs, such as the Robinvale Football Netball Club, have a player profile that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of their community. However, the Committee was also told that people involved in all sporting activities in rural and regional Victoria should look beyond their individual sports to ensure that the needs of increasingly diverse communities are catered for. For example, Andrew Crowden, a university lecturer and person with an interest in junior soccer, told the Committee:

*Some rural communities, as you say, are dropping in population. Some are blowing out with different interest groups, with an aged population, or a group of refugees, or whatever...we need to look outside our individual sports*

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<sup>353</sup> Department for Victorian Communities, *Sport and recreation 2005-2010: a discussion paper*, Department for Victorian Communities, 2004, p. 7.

<sup>354</sup> *Victoria – Our Diversity*, information sheet, Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs, [www.voma.vic.gov.au](http://www.voma.vic.gov.au).

<sup>355</sup> *Victoria – Our Diversity*, information sheet, Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs, [www.voma.vic.gov.au](http://www.voma.vic.gov.au).

<sup>356</sup> AJ Veal & R Lynch, *Australian leisure*, 2nd edn, Pearson Education Australia Pty Ltd, Sydney, 2001, p. 297.

*and look at what is best for our diverse communities. Our diverse communities are changing. Sport could pull it all together.*<sup>357</sup>

Mr Crowden suggested to the Committee that the major challenge in Victorian sport is to ensure the survival of Australian rules football and other “flourishing sports”.<sup>358</sup> He argued that the development of stronger collaborative relationships between football codes will better cater for culturally and ethnically diverse communities.

3.35 However, it appears to the Committee that football’s peak bodies are responding to the challenge of ensuring that they cater to all Victorians, regardless of their ethnic background or place of birth. The Committee heard from Rob Moodie, Chief Executive Officer of VicHealth, that Football Victoria is “ten points ahead in the way they do business”, particularly in encouraging new populations to play football.<sup>359</sup> Football Victoria is to be commended on initiatives like the appointment of Kwok Fai Choi, a Taiwanese expatriate student from Victoria University, to conduct a research study outlining strategies that may assist Football Victoria to increase Asian participation in junior Australian rules football.

3.36 The Committee is also aware that football’s peak bodies, and particularly the Australian Football League (AFL), have been active in seeking to combat racism and religious vilification.<sup>360</sup> The AFL responded to racism in elite football by introducing a player code of conduct, a racial vilification code and education programs for its players and officials, as well as a conciliation and penalty process for players found guilty of using racial or religious vilification. The Committee was pleased to note that Football Victoria has also been proactive in this area and, in partnership with the Department for Victorian Communities, has developed *Bouncing Racism Out of Sport: a racial and religious tolerance program for Australian football*. The purpose of the program is to:

- encourage leagues and clubs to look at ways of attracting higher levels of participation from Victoria’s diverse population; and

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<sup>357</sup> Andrew Crowden, individual, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 24.

<sup>358</sup> Andrew Crowden, individual, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 20.

<sup>359</sup> Robert Moodie, Chief Executive Officer, VicHealth, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 17.

<sup>360</sup> For a discussion of racism in football, particularly against Aboriginal players, see R Hess & B Stewart (eds), *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 242-5.

- minimise the impact of racial and religious vilification on people participating in sport.

The program includes sample league and club racial and religious tolerance policies, which have been circulated to all leagues in Victoria (including the VCFL) for distribution. A presenter's guide is available to assist league and club officials to communicate the aims of *Bouncing Racism Out of Sport*. The Committee is also aware that other resources are available to assist sporting clubs to deal with inappropriate behaviour, including *Play by the Rules*, a free online training and information resource for coaches, administrators, umpires, players and volunteers.<sup>361</sup> The VCFL has codes of conduct for junior players, parents and spectators of junior players, junior coaches, senior players and senior coaches, all of which state that the use of derogatory language based on gender or race should be avoided.

3.37 In addition, it appears to the Committee that there has been significant recognition by country football/netball clubs and leagues that their viability is dependent on their ability to actively include women as participants, spectators and volunteers. Chapter One discussed the development of family friendly policies by many football clubs and highlighted how the implementation of such policies has had a positive effect on the social and economic environment at local football clubs. However, Di Trotter, Executive Officer of the Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, told the Committee that football is still a game that “caters to half the participant population – men.”<sup>362</sup>

3.38 While country football leagues and clubs have created a more inclusive off-field environment for women, the Committee was told that women participating in football are sometimes subject to discrimination. Women's participation as football players is very low, with an estimated 0.9% of women playing Australian rules football in Victoria.<sup>363</sup> Nevertheless, the Victorian Women's Football League (VWFL) has been in existence since 1981 and currently has 24 teams and 20 clubs, with 700 registered players. In 2004, the VWFL affiliated with Football Victoria.

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<sup>361</sup> See 'Play by the rules', viewed 28 September 2004, <<http://www.playbytherules.net.au/>>.

<sup>362</sup> Di Trotter, Executive Officer, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 22.

<sup>363</sup> Standing Committee on Exercise Sport and Recreation, *Participation in exercise, recreation and sport*, Annual report, 2003, p. 49. Note that the estimate has a relative standard error of between 25% and 50% and should be used with caution.

The President of the VWFL, Debbie Lee, estimates that there has been an 83% growth in participation in women's football since 2000.<sup>364</sup> The VWFL does not yet have a strong rural presence but does encompass teams from East Geelong, Corio and North Ballarat.

3.39 Cameron Dole, Coach of the North Ballarat/University of Ballarat Roosters women's football team, gave evidence to the Inquiry. Mr Dole told the Committee that the team's relationship with men's football has been "patchy."<sup>365</sup> The Committee heard that the Roosters had been using the Mount Clear ground to train on but this arrangement ended when one of the male football teams decided they would use the ground for training. The women's football team experienced similar problems with the use of the University of Ballarat oval. Mr Dole explained that this "has had a directly negative effect on recruiting, as we would often have prospective new players attend training, only to have to stand around waiting as boys' teams trained well past their allotted times without notifying us."<sup>366</sup> Mr Dole also told the Committee that he had contacted the Ballarat Football League and the Central Highlands Football Leagues to propose that the North Ballarat Roosters be represented on either league, but had received no response to date.

3.40 In Mr Dole's view "[a]ll football clubs and leagues should be encouraged to develop female participation, especially in the junior ranks, and then provide a pathway...for females to continue their participation beyond junior years."<sup>367</sup> The Committee appreciates that Football Victoria has undertaken a range of initiatives, in addition to its affiliation with the VWFL, to encourage women's participation in football, including the appointment of a Female Football Development Officer, the pilot of the 'Footy Pak Cup' girls competition and the creation of a 'youth girls' site through the Football Victoria website.

3.41 Women also have an important role to play as umpires, trainers, officials and supporters of country football. The Committee was therefore concerned to hear that

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<sup>364</sup> Debbie Lee, President, Victorian Women's Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 26.

<sup>365</sup> Cameron Dole, Coach, North Ballarat-University of Ballarat Roosters Women's Football Team, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 29.

<sup>366</sup> Cameron Dole, Coach, North Ballarat-University of Ballarat Roosters Women's Football Team, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 29.

<sup>367</sup> Cameron Dole, Coach, North Ballarat-University of Ballarat Roosters Women's Football Team, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 30.

some women who have been involved in umpiring country games have been subject to abuse, which is a significant deterrent to participation. Shane Carbines, Chairman of the Geelong Football Umpires League, told the Committee that “females get a certain kind of sexist abuse...which would deter parents, for example, from having their daughters run the boundary or that sort of thing.”<sup>368</sup> The Geelong Football Umpires League’s General Manager, Bill Fulton, told the Committee that the league had 20 women umpires in January 2003, and now has six. The Geelong Football Umpires League undertook an informal exit survey and found that for those women who left:

*...it was nothing to do with the physical training or the demands of being an umpire; it was more to do with...the levels of abuse they were being subjected to on the ground. Some of it was quite severe. In fact I had letters from three clubs last year apologising for the behaviour of people as a result of that type of abuse.*<sup>369</sup>

3.42 The Committee heard similar evidence from the Bendigo Football Umpires Association.<sup>370</sup> The Committee is aware that the AFL has developed an Umpire Mentoring Program, based on a successful program developed by the Bendigo Umpires Association. The Committee is hopeful that this program can assist to combat abuse of female umpires and encourage and support women who wish to be involved in umpiring country football. The Committee also heard from a number of witnesses that poor or inadequate facilities are a barrier to women participating as umpires.<sup>371</sup> Issues associated with country football facilities, including those for netballers and umpires, are discussed further in Chapter Six.

### **Risk and consequence of injury**

3.43 The Committee has received evidence which suggests that perceptions about high levels of injury associated with playing Australian rules football, and concerns about the effect of such injuries on people’s livelihoods, may be having an adverse impact on participation. Nello Marino from Sports Medicine Australia told the

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<sup>368</sup> Shane Carbines, Chairman, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 33.

<sup>369</sup> Bill Fulton, General Manager, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 33.

<sup>370</sup> Kevin Monk, President, Bendigo Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 24.

<sup>371</sup> Shane Carbines, Chairman, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 33; David Drane, General Manager, Umpiring, Victorian Country Football League and Victorian Country Football Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 15; Bill Fulton, General Manager, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 33.

Committee that research suggests injury and fear of suffering injury are significant barriers that deter participation in sports such as football.<sup>372</sup> While Australian football injury literature is limited,<sup>373</sup> research has found that Australian rules football is associated with the highest number of sports injury presentations at hospital emergency departments, sports medicine clinics and general practices.<sup>374</sup> National hospital emergency department attendance figures indicate that Australian rules football is the sport most commonly associated with injury presentations in most states, including those where participation is relatively low, such as Queensland. Research also suggests that the injury rate among amateur Australian rules footballers is higher than for those playing at the elite level.<sup>375</sup> According to an article about injury rates in Australian rules football, published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, the high level of injury “poses a considerable threat to the viability of the game over the longer term because many potential players may be turned away from it for fear of incurring injuries during their playing careers.”<sup>376</sup>

3.44 A study on sport and recreational injury in rural and regional Australia found that “many factors linked to economic and social disadvantage have the potential to increase the risk of injury” from sport in rural areas,<sup>377</sup> and some of these factors were also identified during the Inquiry as features of declining participation in football. These include inappropriate age and skill match-ups due to the lack of player availability, encouraging older and less fit players to play in order to make up team numbers and placing pressure on injured players to play despite their injuries.<sup>378</sup>

According to Mr Marino:

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<sup>372</sup> Nello Marino, Program Manager, Smartplay, Sports Medicine Australia - Victorian Branch, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 43.

<sup>373</sup> B Gabbe, C Finch, H Wajswelner & K Bennell, 'Australian football: injury profile at the community level', *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, vol. 5, 2002, p. 150.

<sup>374</sup> P Bacquie & P Brukner, 'Injuries presenting to an Australian sports medicine centre: a 12 month study', *Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine*, vol. 7, 1997, p. 26; C Finch, J Valuri & J Ozanne-Smith, 'Sport and active recreation injuries in Australia: evidence from emergency department presentations', *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, vol. 32, 1998, p. 220; B Gabbe & C Finch, 'A profile of Australian football injuries presenting to sports medicine clinics', *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, vol. 4, 2001, p. 386; D Jago & C Finch, 'Sporting and recreation injuries in a general practice setting', *Australian Family Physician*, vol. 27, 1998, p. 389.

<sup>375</sup> B Gabbe, C Finch, H Wajswelner & K Bennell, 'Australian football: injury profile at the community level', *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, vol. 5, 2002, pp. 157-8.

<sup>376</sup> K Norton, S Schwerdt & K Lange, 'Evidence for the aetiology of injuries in Australian football', *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, vol. 35, 2001, p. 418.

<sup>377</sup> C Finch, M Mahoney & M Townsend, 'Rural sports and recreational injuries in Australia: what do we know?' *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, vol. 11, 2003, p. 152.

<sup>378</sup> C Finch, M Mahoney & M Townsend, 'Rural sports and recreational injuries in Australia: what do we know?' *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, vol. 11, 2003, p. 152.



*Whilst the figures presented are simply indicators, they serve to suggest that sports injury and the perceptions associated with sports injury may be contributing factors to the current circumstances of Victorian country football. Declining populations is an issue....[a]nd like circumstances serve to exacerbate the risk associated with injury in football. For instance, diminishing player pools means a greater likelihood of using younger, underdeveloped, sometimes unfit and even previously retired players, to fill the teams. In doing so, this is basically creating a cycle of injury; so we've got diminishing pools, we're draining on player pools, recruiting players that are not prepared for the game or under prepared for the game, leading to a greater risk of injury. As a result we have more injured players, and that cycle continues.*<sup>379</sup>

3.45 Ian Kett of VicFit told the Committee that injuries occurring through sport can deter younger and older players from participating in football.<sup>380</sup> This view was confirmed by evidence received during regional hearings. In speaking about the perceived impact of injuries on junior football, Ms Trotter told the Committee that one of the issues associated with the over-exposure of elite football is that it creates an impression that it is mandatory to test the limits of the rules and 'take out' opposing players. Ms Trotter said "[p]articularly women, the mums of potential players, see the game as a threat to their offspring and do all they can to steer them away from taking up the game."<sup>381</sup> The Greater Geelong City Council also informed the Committee that parents view Australian rules football as a dangerous sport in comparison to other pursuits.<sup>382</sup>

3.46 The financial cost of injury for older players and its potential impact on their employment and livelihood also seems to be a factor in older players' decisions about whether or not to participate in football. Paul Cox of the Seymour Football Club said:

*When I first started playing in Melbourne in 1986 I do not think anyone ever commented, 'I do not think I will play this year because if I get injured I will lose my job or be out of pocket'. In those days you just wanted to play footy and if you got injured, bad luck. These days we lose a lot of players for that reason.*<sup>383</sup>

The Committee is aware that a football injury may mean that some people are unable to maintain their current job (if they are contractors, for example), or that in some

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<sup>379</sup> Nello Marino, Program Manager, Smartplay, Sports Medicine Australia - Victorian Branch, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 43.

<sup>380</sup> Ian Kett, Executive Director, Victorian Council on Fitness and General Health, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 41.

<sup>381</sup> Di Trotter, Executive Officer, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 21.

<sup>382</sup> Greater Geelong City Council, *Submission*, no. 7, 19 November 2003, p. 3.

<sup>383</sup> Paul Cox, President, Seymour Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 18.

cases, their employer may replace them if they become injured from playing football. This can create a substantial disincentive to play football. The cost of medical treatment was also identified by one witness as a deterrent to football participation in rural Victoria.<sup>384</sup> The Committee notes that specialised sports medical clinics are available to players from Melbourne, but that there are few equivalents in rural and regional Victoria. As a consequence, injured football players (and indeed, injured participants in all sports) may be more likely to present at hospital emergency departments, thus creating an additional burden on state health services.

3.47 The Committee appreciates however that considerable effort is being made to make football safer for participants and officials, and to reduce football clubs' liability. One example is 'Smartplay', a program that is designed to facilitate the adoption of safe practices in sport through health information, social marketing and education. Increasing awareness of injury risks and consequences also means that a greater emphasis is being placed on pre-season, pre-game and game safety by coaches, trainers and medical staff, players and club officials. Projects like the 'Investigation of serious injury among adult non-elite Australian rules football players' study, currently being undertaken by the Monash University Accident Research Centre, will also improve understanding of the cause, treatment and prevention of injuries in grassroots football competitions.

### ***Conclusion***

3.48 It is clear that changes occurring at a demographic, economic and social level have an impact upon participation in country football by players, supporters, volunteers and officials. Population movement in particular has had a major effect on country football, as population migration in younger age groups has sharply reduced the number of people available to play football and fulfil administrative functions. Country football has also been affected by structural changes in the farming and agricultural sector and is facing challenges arising from social and cultural change, such as a rise in unstructured and unorganised recreation activities and greater preference among children and teenagers for passive leisure pursuits. The ongoing

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<sup>384</sup> Di Trotter, Executive Officer, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 21.

viability of football in rural and regional Victoria depends upon its ability to adapt to a changing environment. As a witness told the Committee:

*For country football to survive in an area where the population is ageing and decreasing, where young people are leaving the region to seek tertiary education and job opportunities, where competition from other sports and other recreational options is having an impact on participation numbers, football must look internally to seek solutions if it is to survive in this current and future climate.<sup>385</sup>*

However, the Committee also recognises the need to ensure that country football is adequately supported to enable it to respond to these challenges. Ways in which this support could be provided are discussed in the following chapters.

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<sup>385</sup> Di Trotter, Executive Officer, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 21.



## Chapter Four

# Financial challenges for country football operations

### *Introduction*

4.1 In a number of the submissions it received, and throughout the course of its public hearings, the Committee heard a great deal about the impact of specific expenses on football operations and the structure of costs that are experienced by most country football leagues and clubs. The Committee also received considerable evidence concerning the generation of revenue by country football clubs. This chapter considers the major expenses and sources of revenue associated with football operations in country Victoria, including the proportions of funds spent on specific items by most football clubs.

4.2 The Committee notes that some major costs associated with football operations in rural and regional Victoria are not found in other community sports, particularly in the case of player payments, umpires and trainers. However, country football also shares a number of financial challenges with other sports, including difficulties in securing adequate sponsorship, insurance costs and costs associated with club facilities.<sup>386</sup> Australian rules football is one of the few ‘grassroots’ sports in which player payments are widespread and a notable feature of most country football clubs is the high proportion of operating costs devoted to expenditure on player payments (see page 122).

*Mr Barassi was here at one of our sports dos for the Seymour footy club, and he said it is the only sport in the world where people at fifth grade level get paid, and he is pretty right.*<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> Oscar Aertssen, Regional Manager, North West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 22; Damian Drum, Board Member, Bendigo Football League, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 3; Phillip O’Keefe, Chairman, South West District Football Netball League, *Public Hearing*, Warrnambool, 10 March 2004, p. 17; Graeme Pigdon, President, Lexton Plains Football League and Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 14; Luke Robinson, President, East Gippsland Football League, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 11; Bill Storey-Smith, Secretary/Manager, Central Highlands Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 9; Rod Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Ballarat Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 4.

<sup>387</sup> Jim Ure, President, Central Goulburn Football League, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 2.

4.3 Another significant cost factor for football clubs is the amount of resources required to maintain large football ovals – a characteristic it shares with cricket. The Committee heard on a number of occasions that in rural and regional Victoria, the high demands of ground maintenance have been exacerbated by drought.<sup>388</sup> Finally, changes in the organisation of country football during the past decades – namely, the inclusion of netball teams within club structure – has also produced some new cost considerations for country football organisations.<sup>389</sup> The Committee recognises, however, that the incorporation of netball with football in country Victoria has also secured a number of benefits for country leagues and clubs, such as increased participation and revenue from additional membership and players.

4.4 The Committee notes that, while expenses associated with country football operations are often considerable, football clubs and leagues also demonstrate a remarkable capacity to generate revenue in (and from) country communities. While the Committee heard that some clubs failed to ‘balance the books’ and so were forced to fold,<sup>390</sup> it is clear that the vast majority of football clubs are able to remain financially viable. A number of witnesses told the Committee that when country football clubs did merge or fold it was largely due to those clubs’ inability to recruit enough players, rather than an inability of those clubs to meet the financial demands of football operations.<sup>391</sup>

4.5 This chapter describes the economic contribution of, and expenditure by, peak football organisations to Australian rules football in Victoria. It then provides a

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<sup>388</sup> Allen Dillon, President, Huntly Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 30; Neil Jacobs, Chief Executive Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 19; Colin Kelly, Executive Committee Member, Seymour District Junior Football League, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 7; Chris Lewis, Manager, Sport and Recreation, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 4; Kenneth McLean, Chief Commissioner, Wimmera Football League, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 11; Graeme Pigdon, President, Lexton Plains Football League and Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 16; Ian Thomas, Regional Manager, North East, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 10; Neville Whitley, President, Geelong and District Football League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 23.

<sup>389</sup> These costs are more properly associated with infrastructure development than with on-going, ordinary annual costs. Infrastructure development issues are considered in depth in Chapter Six.

<sup>390</sup> Denise Trickey, Chief Executive Officer, Colac and District Football Netball League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 14.

<sup>391</sup> Beres Fitch, Vice-President, Bendigo Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 22; Craig Niemann, Chief Executive Officer, Loddon Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 14; John Stoward, *Submission*, no. 39, 20 January 2004, p. 20.

detailed description of specific costs and revenues associated with running football clubs and leagues in country Victoria. The description of expenses for football clubs and leagues has been largely restricted to recurring seasonal expenses and so does not include costs associated with occasional football club and league expenditure, such as infrastructure and facility development (facilities and infrastructure development issues are considered in detail in Chapter Six).

### ***Australian Football League***

4.6 The Australian Football League (AFL) is the peak national body for Australian rules football. The AFL is responsible for running the elite Australian rules football competition, including marketing and publicity of the AFL competition, and is responsible for the coordination of Australia's state football peak bodies. The AFL also distributes funds to state football bodies by means of 'direct' and 'indirect' grants. 'Direct' grants are those made to state football bodies for core functions, without any specific requirements attached to the use of those funds. 'Indirect' grants are typically 'tied' funds and allocated by the AFL to state bodies for specific programs or expenditure (for example, Indigenous programs, umpire support and marketing expenditure).

4.7 State football bodies also receive various monies from the AFL clubs, primarily by means of player transfer payments. Victorian AFL clubs also pay license fees for club-affiliated Victorian Football League (VFL) teams and each AFL club also pays annual fees in support of Football Victoria's talent competition (the TAC Cup).

4.8 Most AFL expenditure on country football is provided to Australian state bodies, which run operations and programs to assist country football associations, leagues and clubs. In 2004, direct grants from the AFL to Football Victoria (the peak football body in Victoria) were \$3,859,000 and indirect and/or tied grants were \$1,116,000.<sup>392</sup> AFL clubs contributed a further \$3,500,000 to Football Victoria in the

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<sup>392</sup> Football Victoria, email, 20 August 2004.

form of transfer fees (\$2,150,000), TAC Cup levies (\$1,040,000) and VFL competition fees (\$310,000).<sup>393</sup> With regard to country football, the Committee notes that the AFL and AFL clubs have conducted community camps in country Victoria with an estimated cost to those organisations of \$200,000 in 2004.<sup>394</sup>

4.9 The Committee is aware that the majority of the AFL’s funding for state programs and development is distributed through its affiliated state bodies, including Football Victoria. The Committee also notes that over the period 2001 to 2004, AFL and AFL club direct and indirect funding to Football Victoria has remained relatively constant. This is detailed in Table 5 below:

**Table 5: AFL and AFL club funding to Football Victoria, 2001-04<sup>395</sup>**

	2001	2002	2003	2004
Direct AFL grants	\$3,205,000	\$3,590,000	\$3,710,000	\$3,859,000
Indirect AFL grants	\$1,796,494	\$1,595,000	\$1,133,214	\$1,116,000
<b>Total AFL grants</b>	<b>\$5,001,494</b>	<b>\$5,185,000</b>	<b>\$4,843,214</b>	<b>\$4,975,000</b>
AFL club contributions	\$3,556,938	\$4,052,210	\$3,607,880	\$3,500,000
<b>Total AFL and club grants</b>	<b>\$8,558,432</b>	<b>\$9,237,210</b>	<b>\$8,451,094</b>	<b>\$8,475,000</b>

4.10 The AFL’s game expansion interests are largely focussed on states other than Australian rules football ‘heartlands’ (Victoria, South Australia, and Western Australia).<sup>396</sup> This view was also widely expressed during the Committee’s public hearings. In 2001, the AFL’s ‘Carter Report’ identified the states of Queensland and New South Wales as priority areas for Australian rules football development and recommended additional AFL funding be directed to those states for that purpose.<sup>397</sup> However, the Committee also notes that the Carter Report made certain

<sup>393</sup> Football Victoria, email, 20 August 2004.

<sup>394</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 2.

<sup>395</sup> Australian Football League, email, 20 August 2004; Football Victoria, email, 20 August 2004. Please note that there were minor discrepancies between the accounts provided to the Committee by the AFL and Football Victoria, respectively, regarding ‘total AFL grants’ in 2001 and 2002. Where figures provided by Football Victoria and the AFL do not agree, the higher is quoted (in 2001 the difference was \$10,240, and in 2002, \$30,000). AFL club contributions for 2004 include an estimate of club transfer fees, provided by Football Victoria.

<sup>396</sup> “We must deepen and strengthen the presence of our game in New South Wales and Queensland, while continuing to build our success in our traditional markets. We must use the success of our elite competition to support community football, the building block of our game.” – Australian Football League, *Strategic plan 2004-2006*, Australian Football League, Melbourne, 2004, p. 2.

<sup>397</sup> AFL Commission Review Group, *Investing in the future of Australian Football*, 2001, p. 4.



recommendations on football development in all of Australia’s states and territories. The Committee is aware that this report suggested that future funding for state development by the AFL should be indexed to cover increases in the Consumer Price Index, and further, that additional money should be allocated in each state and territory as ‘new grants’.<sup>398</sup> The Carter Report recommendations in respect of Victoria follow:

**Table 6: Actual AFL funding of Football Victoria, and funding as suggested in the Carter report, 2001, 2002 and 2004<sup>399\*</sup>**

	2001 (\$ million)	2002 (\$ million)	2004 (\$ million)
Carter Report (recommended grants)	5.0	5.5	7.0
Total AFL grants	5.0	5.2	5.0

\* No figures were provided in the Carter Report for the year ending 2003.

4.11 The Committee notes that grants by the AFL to Football Victoria have remained relatively stable over the past four years, as have AFL clubs’ transfers to Football Victoria. While it is apparent that Football Victoria and its affiliated bodies are making progress in identifying alternate sources of funding and have been relatively successful in this regard (see page 113), the Committee is concerned that the AFL’s contribution to Victorian state football (and by extension, Victorian country football), has apparently declined in real and nominal terms since the release of the Carter Report in 2001.

4.12 The Committee observes that funding recommendations from the Carter Report have not been implemented by the AFL for other peak state football bodies across Australia.<sup>400</sup> Victoria has been treated substantially the same as other states regarding AFL funding since 2001 (see Table 7 below):

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<sup>398</sup> AFL Commission Review Group, *Investing in the future of Australian Football*, 2001, pp. 84-6.

<sup>399</sup> AFL Commission Review Group, *Investing in the future of Australian Football*, 2001, p. 86; Football Victoria, email, 20 August 2004.

<sup>400</sup> The Committee Secretariat enquired of the AFL on the extent to which funding recommendations from the Carter Report were adopted in AFL policy, but the AFL did elected not to comment on this matter to the Committee.

**Table 7: AFL funding to Australian state football bodies and funding as suggested in the Carter Report, 2001, 2002 and 2004<sup>401\*</sup>**

	<b>2001 (\$ million)</b>	<b>2002 (\$ million)</b>	<b>2004 (\$ million)</b>
<b>NSW/ACT</b>			
Carter Report (recommended grants)	5.0	6.2	7.9
Total AFL grants	5.0	5.3	5.4
<b>NT</b>			
Carter Report (recommended grants)	0.7	0.9	1.2
Total AFL grants	0.7	0.9	1.1
<b>QLD</b>			
Carter Report (recommended grants)	3.1	3.7	4.7
Total AFL grants	3.1	3.2	3.6
<b>SA</b>			
Carter Report (recommended grants)	0.7	0.8	1.2
Total AFL grants	0.7	0.8	0.5
<b>TAS</b>			
Carter Report (recommended grants)	1.3	1.4	1.7
Total AFL grants	1.3	1.5	1.3
<b>WA</b>			
Carter Report (recommended grants)	1.0	1.2	1.9
Total AFL grants	1.0	0.9	1.3
<b>VIC</b>			
Carter Report (recommended grants)	5.0	5.5	7.0
Total AFL grants	5.0	5.2	5.0
<b>TOTAL</b>			
Carter Report (recommended grants)	16.8	19.7	25.6
Total AFL grants	16.8	17.8	18.2

\* No figures were provided in the Carter Report for the year ending 2003.

4.13 The Committee notes that the Carter Report recommendations on state body funding were determined with reference to total revenue generated by the AFL and AFL clubs. The Carter Report suggested that development funding of approximately 10% of total AFL and AFL club revenue was an appropriate proportion for those bodies to allocate to development funding:

*Today [2001], the investment of \$32 million in development [by the AFL and AFL clubs] is about 10% of total AFL and AFL club revenues. Our proposals, if accepted, to increase total investment to \$51 million in 2006 maintains this ratio at about 10%.... a 10% spend on 'market' development (which includes talent development and code marketing as well as junior participation) would not be viewed as excessive in most businesses.<sup>402</sup>*

As the Carter Report was written in 2001, funding recommendations suggested in the Report for 2002 and 2004 were determined on estimated AFL and AFL club revenues during that period. Unfortunately, the Committee was not able to obtain current data

<sup>401</sup> AFL Commission Review Group, *Investing in the future of Australian Football*, 2001, p. 86; Australian Football League, email, 20 August 2004. Quoted figures exclude AFL club transfer fees. No figures were provided in the Carter Report for the year ending 2003.

<sup>402</sup> AFL Commission Review Group, *Investing in the future of Australian Football*, 2001, p. 8.

on AFL club revenue, and so is unable to compare current development spending as a proportion of total AFL and AFL club revenue with the proportion suggested in the Carter Report.

4.14 According to data from a report prepared for the AFL on the economic impact of Australian rules football in Australia, the ‘football economy’ grew an average of 9.1% per annum over the period 2000 to 2003, with total growth in that period of approximately 30.1%.<sup>403</sup> The aggregate growth of the direct financial contribution of Australian rules football ‘peak bodies and clubs’ to the Australian economy grew an average of 11.1% per annum, or 37% for the entire period 2000 to 2003.<sup>404</sup> However, the economic impact report provided to the Committee by the AFL does not differentiate between elite level football and grassroots football in its various categories, including ‘peak bodies and leagues’, ‘clubs’, ‘players and members’, ‘spectators’ and ‘business and multiplier effects’. For example, ‘peak bodies and leagues’ includes the AFL, state bodies (such as Football Victoria), affiliated peak state bodies (such as the Victorian Country Football League (VCFL), Victorian Amateur Football Association and Victorian metropolitan football leagues), and all Australian rules leagues (such as the AFL, VFL and the Wimmera Football League). As a consequence, the Committee is unable to accurately determine the extent and/or volume of AFL and AFL club revenue on the basis of the AFL economic impact report.

4.15 The AFL provided the Committee with copies of its Annual Financial Report for the years 2000-01, 2001-02, and 2002-03. The Committee notes that the AFL’s consolidated revenue (less proceeds from the sale of Waverley Park in the 2001-02 year ended 31 October) rose substantially between 2000 and 2003 (see Table 8 below):

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<sup>403</sup> Street Ryan and Associates, *Economic impact 2003 of Australian Football*, Street Ryan and Associates, 2003.

<sup>404</sup> Street Ryan and Associates, *Economic impact 2003 of Australian Football*, Street Ryan and Associates, 2003, p. 4.

**Table 8: AFL consolidated revenues from operating activities (not including proceeds from sale of Waverley Park), 2000-2003 (\$000)<sup>405</sup>**

	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
Trading Operations	111957	118859	165362	181070
Contra Advertising			10000	10000
Interest	267	267	299	404
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>112224</b>	<b>119126</b>	<b>175661</b>	<b>191474</b>

4.16 The Committee also received the following information on AFL development funding (not including AFL club grants to state bodies and other activities) from the AFL for the years 2000 to 2003:

**Table 9: AFL revenue and grants to state bodies (not including proceeds from sale of Waverley Park), 2000-03 (\$000)<sup>406</sup>**

	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
Total revenue from operating activities	112224	119126	175661	191474
Development grants to state bodies	15156	16510	17700	16500
Per cent development grants	14%	14%	10%	9%

4.17 The Committee notes that AFL funding to state football bodies has declined as a proportion of AFL total revenue from operating activities since 31 October 2001. Although the Committee is aware that AFL funding to state football bodies is now equivalent to that proposed in the Carter Report (that is, approximately 10% of operating revenue), there has been no increase in AFL club funding to state football bodies, so that the net effect is likely to have been a reduction in the proportion of AFL and AFL club operating revenue to development activities.

4.18 Given substantial growth in operating revenue of the AFL and the Committee's assumption that AFL club revenues have not declined as a group since 2001, it appears to the Committee that the failure of the AFL and AFL clubs to increase their direct and indirect contributions to football development, in Victoria and throughout Australia, has not been due to constriction or stagnation of those organisations' economies. Consequently, the Committee is very concerned at the

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<sup>405</sup> Source: Australian Football League, *Annual financial report*, 2001; Australian Football League, *Annual financial report*, 2002; Australian Football League, *Annual financial report*, 2003.

<sup>406</sup> Source: Australian Football League, *Annual financial report*, 2001; Australian Football League, *Annual financial report*, 2002; Australian Football League, *Annual financial report*, 2003.

apparent failure of the AFL and AFL clubs to adequately support state peak football organisations and strongly encourages the AFL and AFL clubs to evaluate their funding to those bodies with reference to its increased operating revenue.

### **Football Victoria**

4.19 Football Victoria is the state body for Australian rules football in Victoria. Its activities are largely funded by the AFL and the AFL clubs, although 38% of Football Victoria's funds are obtained from sources other than the AFL or AFL clubs (see Table 10). In 2004, Football Victoria's sources of funds were:

**Table 10: Football Victoria income, 2004<sup>407</sup>**

AFL direct grants	\$ 3,859,000
AFL and AFL club indirect grants	\$ 4,616,000
Football Victoria operations	\$ 670,000
Football Victoria Development programs	\$ 2,024,420
VFL competition	\$ 1,221,500
Talent programs	\$ 1,312,301
State Government grants	\$ 45,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$13,748,221</b>

4.20 Income from Football Victoria Development (FVD) programs include revenue from the Auskick program, fees for various accreditation courses, and other activities run by FVD. Football Victoria revenue is also derived from sponsorship across the VCFL competition, the TAC Cup, and other talent programs.

**Table 11: Football Victoria expenditure, 2004<sup>408</sup>**

<b>Head office administration</b>	<b>\$ 1,352,500</b>
<b>Football Victoria Development programs</b>	
<i>Administration</i>	\$ 880,810
<i>Direct program cost</i>	\$ 1,933,100
<i>Regional staff</i>	\$ 1,437,500
<i>Community Football</i>	\$ 1,600,500
<b>TOTAL FVD programs</b>	<b>\$ 5,851,910</b>
<b>VFL</b>	<b>\$ 1,461,100</b>
<b>Talent programs</b>	<b>\$ 3,539,301</b>
<b>Umpires and development</b>	<b>\$ 1,050,000</b>
<b>Capital programs</b>	<b>\$ 489,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$13,743,811</b>

<sup>407</sup> Football Victoria, email, 20 August 2004.

<sup>408</sup> Football Victoria, email, 20 August 2004.

4.21 The Committee was provided with estimates of expenditure on country football by Football Victoria in August 2003. These show that Football Victoria's expenditure on country football was disproportionate to the both the number of people living in country Victoria (as opposed to Melbourne) and the number of players in country Victoria (again, as opposed to Melbourne, but including Auskick players).

**Table 12: Football Victoria country expenditure, 2003<sup>409</sup>**

	<b>\$ million</b>	<b>% state expenditure</b>
Auskick / Junior	\$ 1.040	50%
club transfer fees and development	\$ 0.401	70%
Coach and sports trainer education	\$ 0.525	70%
KickStart	\$ 0.020	100%
State squads	\$ 0.165	50%
Umpire education	\$ 0.417	50%
Youth	\$ 0.375	70%
Talent	\$ 2.000	60%
Staff	\$ 0.252	70%
VCFL grants and transfer fees	\$ 0.380	55%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 5.575</b>	<b>58%</b>

4.22 The Committee notes that, in funding and resource allocations to its development activities, Football Victoria has endeavoured to introduce an equitable balance between the requirements of country and metropolitan football.<sup>410</sup> The Committee is also aware, however, that most of Football Victoria's activities in Victoria are focussed on junior and elite development and that as a consequence, senior 'grassroots' football organisations receive only peripheral support from Football Victoria (and by extension, the AFL).

4.23 The Committee recognises that football organisations affiliated to Football Victoria, such as the VCFL, assume responsibility for the development of senior football in country Victoria. The Committee also notes that these organisations are largely self-funded and are maintaining themselves without substantial assistance from Football Victoria or the AFL.

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<sup>409</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004.

<sup>410</sup> Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 3.

## Victorian Country Football League

4.24 During 2002-03, the VCFL operating budget was comprised of the following:

**Table 13: VCFL operating budget, 2002-03<sup>411</sup>**

<b>Income</b>	
Affiliation fees	\$ 222,000
AFL transfer fees	\$ 225,000
Grants (Football Victoria)	\$ 233,000
Player registration and insurance	\$ 1,431,000
Marketing – royalties	\$ 320,000
Marketing – sponsorship	\$ 530,000
Other	\$ 167,167
	<b>\$ 3,128,167</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>	
AFL transfer fees (distributed to VCFL regions)	\$ 225,000
Grants	\$ 148,000
Insurance (incl. public liability)	\$ 361,000
Insurance (personal accident, non Medicare medical)	\$ 814,545
Non salary operating costs	\$ 292,000
Player registration benefits	\$ 246,363
Personnel costs	\$ 477,000
Representative and championship football programs	\$ 287,000
Training and education programs	\$ 85,000
Umpires	\$ 55,000
General	\$ 114,372
	<b>\$ 3,105,280</b>

4.25 AFL transfer fees are paid directly from Football Victoria to the VCFL, which then distributes those transfer fees to the VCFL regions. The VCFL regional boards then determine expenditure priorities within their respective districts.

4.26 Under current arrangements, the VCFL receives a guaranteed grant from Football Victoria of \$225,000 per annum. In 2003, this grant included \$165,000 for VCFL administration and facilities expenses, a contribution to the salary of the General Manager (now Chief Executive Officer) and the General Manager's secretary, and a contribution to the salary of the VCFL Umpire Development

<sup>411</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 50.

Manager. Approximately half of the transfer fees paid by AFL clubs to Football Victoria are retained for capital improvements programs (9% of all transfer fees in 2002-03) and for administration of the TAC Cup (39% of all transfer fees in 2002-03). Finally, Football Victoria pays a proportion of AFL club player transfer fees directly to football clubs that have former players drafted to the AFL, or that have former players that have met certain milestones within the AFL. In 2002-03, Football Victoria's direct distribution to VCFL clubs was \$285,000 (14% of all transfer fees in 2002-03).<sup>412</sup>

4.27 This distribution of AFL club player transfer payments to clubs is determined by Football Victoria, in consultation with its affiliated organisations. Consequently, individual clubs only receive a proportion of the total payments AFL clubs make for player transfers. Currently, AFL clubs pay the following amounts to each state body for each player, upon meeting certain milestones:

- \$16,000 when a player is drafted
- \$16,000 upon a player's first game for the AFL club
- \$12,500 for the player's tenth game
- \$12,550 for the player's second year

4.28 In the case of Football Victoria, a proportion of these payments are distributed directly to the clubs those players competed for in the five years prior to their draft. TAC Cup teams do not receive any part of this direct payment, as their players remain affiliated to their original clubs during their participation in that competition.<sup>413</sup> The 'club share' of AFL club player transfer payments is as follows:

- \$3,000 when a player is drafted
- \$3,000 upon a player's first game for the AFL club
- \$3,400 for the player's tenth game
- \$3,400 for the player's second year<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004.

<sup>413</sup> However, the TAC Cup does receive separate funding from Football Victoria that is directly derived from AFL club transfer fees.

<sup>414</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004.



4.29 To use a hypothetical example, a country football player who played for Genoa Football club for two years from age 12 and then transferred to Boinka Football Netball club at age 15 is drafted to the AFL when he turns 18. Prior to his draft, he played in the TAC Cup. In determining the distribution of transfer fees to his country football clubs, Football Victoria determines which clubs (excluding the TAC Cup team) that player was attached to in the five years prior to his draft. On this basis, Boinka Football Netball Club receives three-fifths of those funds (as he ‘played’ for that club for the three years prior to the draft), and Genoa Football Club receives two-fifths of the transfer fee allocation. Therefore, at various stages of his career those clubs would receive:

**Table 14: Sample Player Transfer Fee Distribution**

<b>Stage of player’s AFL Career</b>	<b>Genoa FC</b>	<b>Boinka Football Netball Club</b>	<b>Total</b>
Draft	\$1200	\$1800	\$3000
First game	\$1200	\$1800	\$3000
Tenth game	\$1360	\$2040	\$3400
Second year	\$1360	\$2040	\$3400

4.30 The Committee notes that Football Victoria and the VCFL are currently considering varying arrangements for the disbursement of transfer fees to clubs. In their submissions to the Committee, both Football Victoria and the VCFL noted that a relatively small proportion of clubs within the VCFL received direct benefit from AFL club transfer fees.<sup>415</sup> In 2002-03, of approximately 465 senior clubs in the VCFL competition and 880 clubs overall, only 73 clubs received AFL player transfer fees. The Committee is aware that both Football Victoria and the VCFL are considering whether AFL transfer fees paid directly to clubs should be pooled with the general funds paid to the VCFL through AFL transfer payments, so that they can be better used to benefit all clubs in the league.

*So 174 clubs have attracted some level of transfer fee in country Victoria, which means over 700 clubs have received not \$1. Not \$1. Some 80% of clubs do not receive funds, and so in terms of the solution to any perceived problems in country football, you could double, you could treble, you could make them any figure you like. Some 80% of clubs aren’t going to get any. We more favourably look upon the provision of funds. At the moment \$225,000 as a lump sum to the Country Football League is a better method of*

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<sup>415</sup> Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 6; Brendan Ryan, individual, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 5.

*distributing those sort of funds, so that everyone can share in something they can decide what to do with through the Country Football League.*<sup>416</sup>

4.31 The Committee also notes that a large proportion of the VCFL's operating budget is secured through its own revenue sources, and that it is largely financially independent of the AFL and Football Victoria. The ability of local football organisations to 'stand on their own feet' was also noted in the AFL's Carter Report in 2001:

*Football beneath the AFL level was able to self generate \$390 million, to which the AFL contributes an extra \$32 million, or just 8% of the total. In other words, football beneath the AFL is largely paying its own way.*<sup>417</sup>

4.32 The Committee also notes, however, that both Football Victoria and the VCFL have limited funds available for discretionary expenditure on major works such as facilities development. Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer of Football Victoria, explained to the Committee that:

*Football Victoria...is about seven or eight years old. We simply don't have the money [for widespread facilities development]... What money we get in goes out. It's a little bit like that's the inheritance that we earn because the game went national, so who's going to run Victoria? I mean, that's the nub of this thing. We don't have the discretionary income, so when you ask, "What can Football Victoria and the Country Footy League do?" we simply don't have the cash reserves or the cash flows to make those long-term strategic decisions. That's why you end up asking, "Can we run a case to the AFL, for whatever the program might be?" because that's ultimately where the resources might lie. But we also get in a queue with all the other states that want to develop football. So we end up with a national scale as to what's a priority.*<sup>418</sup>

The maintenance and development of country football and netball facilities are discussed later in the report.

### ***Economic profile of Victorian country football***

4.33 The Committee notes that the economic impact of country football on Victorian regional economies is substantial. As discussed in Chapter One, the VCFL estimates that direct expenditure on country football in Victoria is in the order of

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<sup>416</sup> Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 6.

<sup>417</sup> AFL Commission Review Group, *Investing in the future of Australian Football*, 2001, p. 13.

<sup>418</sup> Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 12.

\$83,465,000.<sup>419</sup> This estimate does not take into account unpaid volunteer work, which also contributes substantially to the value of country football activities.

4.34 The VCFL’s estimate of direct expenditure on country football is comprised of the following:

**Table 15: Total expenditure on Victorian country football<sup>420</sup>**

Senior clubs	\$ 56,304,000
Junior clubs	\$ 9,920,000
Senior leagues	\$ 9,600,000
Junior leagues	\$ 868,000
Regional boards	\$ 480,000
Victorian Country Football League	\$ 3,105,000
Football Victoria Development (country)	\$ 3,195,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 83,472,000</b>

4.35 The Committee notes that this estimate of direct expenditure is approximate only, as the VCFL built its analysis of country football expenditure on a report prepared for it in the mid-1990s, and figures from that report were adjusted according to various considerations such as changes in the Consumer Price Index. As such, the Committee recognises that these figures are, at best, indicative of expenditure on country football.<sup>421</sup> However, the Committee received evidence from a number of witnesses describing the important place of football in the economies of rural and regional Victoria (see Chapter One).

4.36 Football Victoria Development’s expenditure on country football (see Table 15) includes costs associated with employment of Football Victoria Development’s Country Development Managers, a proportional share of expenditure associated with umpire and coach education, the employment of Auskick and Youth Development Officers, and National Championship costs for the Victoria under-16s and under-18s.

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<sup>419</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 56.

<sup>420</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 56.

<sup>421</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 26 October 2004.

## **Club and league income and expenditure**

*The cost of running a football club of any size is proving to be one of the biggest headaches facing the administration of the clubs. The days of being able to survive by running a chook raffle at the local pub on a Friday night no longer exist. The raising of funds is a 12 months of the year job and involves hundreds of hours work by voluntary workers.<sup>422</sup>*

4.37 The Committee heard evidence and received submissions from the VCFL and a number of country clubs and leagues on income and expenditure associated with football in country Victoria. In preparing its submission to the Inquiry, the VCFL conducted a survey of affiliated leagues and clubs on running costs, and supplemented data received from that survey with input from VCFL Area and Regional Managers. Based upon this data, the VCFL estimated that the average cost to operate a major league club over the course of one year was between \$182,000 and \$198,000, while the average cost to operate a district league club was between \$82,080 and \$91,300.<sup>423</sup>

4.38 The VCFL also provided the Committee with an estimate of income and expenditure in specific categories for major and district league clubs. The proportion of income and expenditure in specific categories was largely similar for both major and district league clubs, although the average cost for major league club operations was larger than for district league clubs:

**Table 16: Sources of income for senior VCFL football clubs<sup>424</sup>**

Bar Takings	24%
Canteen/Catering	16%
Sponsorship	16%
Fundraising	16%
Major Events/Functions	9%
Memberships/Registrations	6%
Gate Takings	6%
Donations	4%
Miscellaneous	3%

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<sup>422</sup> Ronald Schrader, individual, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 16.

<sup>423</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 8 June 2004; Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 53.

<sup>424</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 53.

**Table 17: Operation costs for senior VCFL football clubs<sup>425</sup>**

Player Payments	30%
Bar Purchases	14%
Canteen Purchases	8%
Coaches Payments	8%
Medical Supplies	7%
Power/Water/Ground Rental	7%
Operating Costs <sup>426</sup>	7%
Football Products	4%
Affiliations & Umpires	5%
Insurance (inc. Registration Fees)	3%
Miscellaneous <sup>427</sup>	7%

4.39 In addition to revenue and expense requirements at club level, the Committee received evidence indicating that considerable expenditure also takes place at league level within the VCFL. The VCFL estimated the average cost of operating football leagues across country Victoria at approximately \$200,000 per league.<sup>428</sup> The Committee notes that there is considerable variation in the cost structures of different leagues, however the range of operating costs for various leagues was estimated at between \$50,000 and \$500,000, depending on the size of the league, whether it was a major or district league, and whether it employed any full time staff.<sup>429</sup> For example, the Committee received evidence from the Goulburn Valley Football League that showed it had receipts of \$444,291.35 and payments of \$443,082.34 in 2003.<sup>430</sup>

4.40 The VCFL also provided the Committee with information on the cost of operating junior football clubs that were not attached to senior clubs.<sup>431</sup> For these clubs, the VCFL estimated average club annual operating costs at \$24,800.<sup>432</sup> The VCFL also estimated that junior football clubs were far more dependent on canteen, fundraising, membership and registration revenue than senior clubs.

<sup>425</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 52.

<sup>426</sup> Including costs such as phone, printing, stationery, computers, postage, and personnel.

<sup>427</sup> Including costs such as trophies, signage, bank fees, marketing, function costs, etc.

<sup>428</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 55.

<sup>429</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 55.

<sup>430</sup> Goulburn Valley Football League, *Annual Report 2003, 2004*. The GVFL is a major league, and employs a full-time general manager.

<sup>431</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 54. The estimate provided by the VCFL in this case was based on a small number of clubs (N=6).

<sup>432</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 54.

### ***Specific costs and revenue sources for country football***

4.41 The Committee received a great deal of evidence on costs incurred by football clubs and leagues during the course of its public hearings and in submissions.

Football club and league expenses were consistently listed by witnesses and in submissions under the following categories: player and coaching payments; training and medical expenses; water and utility expenses; insurance costs; affiliation and registration costs; bar, catering and canteen expenses; marketing, fundraising and recognition (trophies and awards) expenses; administration and operating expenses; facilities and grounds fees, development and maintenance; football products; and umpires expenses. These costs and expenses, and various sources of football revenue, are discussed in the following pages.

#### **Player and coaching payments**

4.42 In 2004, the salary cap endorsed by the VCFL was \$30,000 for clubs playing in district leagues (all player and coach payments) and \$50,000 for clubs playing in major leagues (not including payment to one player and one coach).<sup>433</sup> The Committee notes that in the case of major league clubs, payments for the coach and player that did not fall under the salary cap were often substantial, so that the total expenditure of major league clubs on player payments often far exceeded \$50,000. However, specific details on player payments were rarely forthcoming from major league football clubs. In 2004, the salary cap could be adjusted within individual leagues by application to the relevant Regional Board of the VCFL. According to Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer of the VCFL, average expenditure by district league clubs on coach and player payments in 2003 was \$28,728, and average expenditure by major league clubs was \$79,200.<sup>434</sup>

4.43 The Committee has been told that, in practice, a number of clubs affiliated to the VCFL exceeded the salary cap by means of alternate methods of payment to

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<sup>433</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Handbook*, Victorian Country Football League, Melbourne, 2004, p. 59.

<sup>434</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 8 June 2004.

players and coaches. These may have included the provision of services or goods to particular players, or the provision of cash, services or goods by third parties (such as sponsors or club supporters):

*I remember sitting at Rochester one day when I was still at this club. This bloke said, 'I am paying that bastard \$600 a week, and look — he has not had a kick yet'. I am not joking. That did not show in the club's records. That is under the lap stuff. There is that much of that going on. It could be the local car dealer who helps him with a car. You would not know, would you? It is too easy to cheat.<sup>435</sup>*

4.44 The Committee is aware that the VCFL removed the salary cap in October 2004. While 53% of club respondents to a survey by the VCFL in 2004 indicated they would like to retain the salary cap, Mr Scott observed that 90% of those that wanted to retain the salary cap were unable to suggest adequate ways to enforce it.<sup>436</sup>

### **Trainer and medical expenses**

*...the cost of medical supplies is extremely high over a full season. We spend a lot of money on bandages, and tape just seems to disappear for some reason!<sup>437</sup>*

4.45 The Committee heard from a number of football representatives that they were finding recruitment of trainers increasingly difficult, due to a lack of appropriately qualified volunteers or because trainer services often had to be paid for.<sup>438</sup> At the Committee's request, the VCFL conducted an informal survey of its clubs on payment to trainers.<sup>439</sup> Ten club and league representatives responded to the survey, and indicated that there is considerable variation in trainer payments amongst VCFL leagues and clubs. Echuca Football Club and the Mallee Football League indicated that they made no payments to trainers. On the other hand, Wy Yung Football Netball Club, Mooroopna Football Netball Club, Woorinen Football Netball Club, the

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<sup>435</sup> Jim Ure, President, Central Goulburn Football League, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 4.

<sup>436</sup> E Power, 'Stars get the point', *Herald Sun*, 7 August 2004.

<sup>437</sup> Wayne Shawcross, President, Robinvale Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 37.

<sup>438</sup> Paul Barnard, General Manager, Bendigo Bombers Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 36; Keith den Houting, Chief Executive Officer and Secretary/Treasurer, Golden Rivers Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 9; Graeme Kurzman, Vice-President, Kilmore Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 25; Simon Rule, Vice-President, Robinvale Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 39; Wayne Shawcross, President, Robinvale Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 36.

<sup>439</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Personal Communication*, 3 September 2004.

Bendigo Football League and the Golden Rivers Football League told the VCFL that they (or their clubs) paid their trainers between \$30 and \$350 each per week. Most clubs paid their head trainers more per week than other trainers, and most clubs indicated that they paid more than one trainer on a weekly basis. Some trainers received complimentary club membership in addition to payment. While the Committee notes that trainer payment is not universally practiced in country football, it is clear that trainer payments do have a significant financial impact on some country football clubs.

4.46 Purchase of medical supplies also made a significant contribution to the running costs of football clubs. The VCFL provided the Committee with estimates of medical expenses incurred by clubs at 6% of costs for major league clubs (an average of \$11,880), 7% of costs for district league clubs (an average of \$5745), and 4% for junior league clubs (an average of \$992).<sup>440</sup>

### **Affiliation, registration and umpires costs**

4.47 The VCFL requires its clubs and leagues to pay standard affiliation and player registration fees. These fees cover administration and services offered by the VCFL and the provision of basic insurance cover through the AFL Insurance Program. In 2004, the player registration fee for two open age teams (seniors and reserves) for major league clubs was \$2120 and player registration for two open age teams in district leagues was \$1880 (calculated at \$40 per player by 53 players and 47 players respectively). Under-age teams (18s, 17s and 16s) in both major and district league clubs were required to pay player registration of \$440 per team (\$20 per player by 22 players). Finally, player registration for junior league clubs was \$440 per team in the under-16s to under-13s categories (\$20 per player by 22 players), and \$200 per team in the under-12s to under-9s categories (\$10 per player by 20 players). In addition to player registration fees, club affiliation fees levied by the VCFL were \$735 for senior clubs and \$295 for junior clubs in 2004.

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<sup>440</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 8 June 2004; Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 54.



4.48 The Committee has been told that VCFL affiliation fees and player registration fees provide a number of benefits to clubs, including subsidies and funding for administration and coach accreditation courses, assistance for equipment and apparel purchases, and the AFL football insurance program (2004).<sup>441</sup> Commercial affiliation benefits include a medical supplies and medical supplies trainers course rebate scheme, \$20 million public liability cover, product and associations liability cover and personal accident cover. Fees are also used to fund other VCFL activities, such as interleague representative football, Area Manager support, inclusion in the league and club VCFL computer services program and access to FVD personnel.<sup>442</sup>

**Table 18: VCFL club registration and affiliation fees, 2004<sup>443</sup>**

<b>Major league clubs</b>	
Open age teams (reserves and seniors) player registration	\$ 2120
Each under-age team player registration	\$ 440
club affiliation to VCFL	\$ 735
<b>District league clubs</b>	
Open age teams (reserves and seniors) player registration	\$ 1880
Each under-age team player registration	\$ 440
club affiliation to VCFL	\$ 735
<b>Junior league clubs</b>	
Each team player registration, under-16s to under-13s	\$ 440
Each team player registration, under-12s to under-9s	\$ 200
club affiliation to VCFL	\$ 295

4.49 Player registration fees were invoiced by the VCFL to clubs at the standard rates referred to above (i.e. calculated on specified numbers of players per team), so that if clubs registered more players for specific teams they would be able to retain excess fees.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>441</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004.

<sup>442</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004.

<sup>443</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *WorkSafe VCFL 2004 club seminar*, 2004, pp. 30,4-5,8.

<sup>444</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *WorkSafe VCFL 2004 club seminar*, 2004, p. 30.

4.50 Umpires fees are paid directly from clubs and/or league bodies to umpires associations, which then pay those fees (less administration expenses) to umpires.

**Table 19: VCFL umpires fees schedule, 2004<sup>445</sup>**

<b>Major Leagues</b>	<b>One game</b>	<b>Two games</b>
<b>Senior</b>		
Field	\$135	\$270
Boundary	\$69	
Goal	\$54	
<b>Reserves</b>		
Field	\$92	\$184
Boundary	\$46	
Goal	\$37	
<b>Thirds</b>		
Field	\$71	\$142
Boundary	\$34	
Goal	\$27	
<b>District Leagues</b>		
<b>Senior</b>		
Field	\$108	\$194.40
Boundary	\$56	
Goal	\$43	
<b>Reserves</b>		
Field	\$67	\$120.60
Boundary	\$33	
Goal	\$28	
<b>Thirds</b>		
Field	\$58	\$104.40
Boundary	\$28	
Goal	\$24	
<b>Junior Leagues &amp; Under-15s/16s</b>		
Field	\$52	\$83.20
Boundary	\$27	
Goal	\$25	
<b>Under-13s/14s</b>		
Field	\$36	\$57.60
Boundary	\$20	
Goal	\$20	
<b>Under-10s/11s/12s</b>		
Field	\$31	\$49.60
Boundary	\$18	
Goal	\$18	
<b>Travel</b>	41c/km	

Information received from the VCFL regarding average club expenditure on affiliation and registration costs is pooled with data on umpires costs, so that the Committee is unable to provide a more detailed breakdown of these categories across

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<sup>445</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 26 October 2004. Fees apply according to the number of matches officiated by an umpire over one weekend.

all football clubs. Average expenditure of football clubs, including affiliation, registration and umpires costs, over the 2003 football season was:

**Table 20: VCFL club expenditure on affiliation, registrations and umpires, 2003<sup>446</sup>**

	% expenses	Average club expenditure
Major league clubs	6%	\$11,880
District league clubs	10%	\$8,208
Junior league clubs	17%	\$4,392

4.51 The Committee also heard evidence from Neil Sharpe, General Manager of the Riddell District Football League (a Victorian metropolitan football league), that its clubs paid affiliation and umpiring fees comparable to those paid by VCFL major league clubs:

*...last year we did a cost analysis of various metro leagues and the Riddell District Football League was considerably cheaper than some of the other leagues. I think it cost the club on average about \$13 000 or \$14 000 to play, including league affiliation, umpires costs, insurance are concerned, and we throw in footies as well as part of that. It is about \$14 000 for a club in the Riddell District Football League.<sup>447</sup>*

4.52 The Committee is aware that the insurance scheme facilitated by the VCFL in 2003 has now been replaced by an insurance program introduced by the AFL (see page 132). The Committee notes that the AFL insurance program is based on the insurance arrangements pioneered by the VCFL for the 2003 football season. In comparison to the 2003 VCFL insurance program, the AFL insurance program introduces broader cover and increased benefits to clubs in its standard insurance package, with slightly increased fees to clubs. However, the Committee notes that the fees associated with the AFL insurance program are less than if equivalent cover had been purchased under the 2003 VCFL insurance program.

### **Bar, catering and canteen expenses**

4.53 Bar, catering and canteen costs make up a large proportion of country football club expenditure, although of course these costs are offset by revenue secured through

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<sup>446</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 8 June 2004. VCFL affiliation and registration fees have changed since the 2003 football season.

<sup>447</sup> Neill Sharpe, General Manager, Riddell District Football League, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 41.

these activities. In its submission to the Inquiry, the VCFL included results of a VCFL survey which indicated that the following costs and revenues are associated with bar, catering and canteen activity in football clubs:

**Table 21: VCFL club bar, catering and canteen expenses and revenue<sup>448</sup>**

	<b>% all club expenses</b>	<b>% all club revenue</b>	<b>\$ expenses</b>	<b>\$ revenue</b>
<b>Major league clubs</b>				
Bar purchases	15%		\$29,700	
Canteen purchases	8%		\$15,840	
<b>Total bar and canteen purchases</b>	<b>23%</b>		<b>\$45,540</b>	
Bar and canteen revenue		42%		\$83,160
<b>Profit</b>				<b>\$37,620</b>
<b>District league clubs</b>				
Bar purchases	14%		\$11,491	
Canteen purchases	9%		\$6,566	
<b>Total bar and canteen purchases</b>	<b>23%</b>		<b>\$18,057</b>	
Bar and canteen revenue		40%		\$32,832
<b>Profit</b>				<b>\$14,775</b>
<b>Junior league clubs</b>				
Canteen purchases	23%		\$5,704	
Canteen revenue		35%		\$8,680
<b>Profit</b>				<b>\$2,976</b>

4.54 In addition to various purchases for bar, catering and canteen activities, clubs are also required to ensure that staff or volunteers that sell liquor and food for public consumption have received appropriate training. The Committee notes that course costs for safe handling of food and responsible serving of alcohol appear to vary across country Victoria. Courses cost between \$85 and \$285 for food handling<sup>449</sup> and up to \$300 for responsible serving of alcohol (per participant). Another hidden cost associated with these courses is the time and travel invested by volunteers to attend courses, which may not be held in locations convenient to residents of some of Victoria's more remote communities.

<sup>448</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 8 June 2004; Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003.

<sup>449</sup> Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 5. Depending on a clubs implementation of food handling requirements, only one person per club is required to take the food handling course.

## Marketing, fundraising and participant revenue and expenses

4.55 Information supplied to the Committee by the VCFL grouped marketing, fundraising and participant ‘recognition’ expenses, as well as those associated with various club functions and events, under one category. Overall, these expenses account for around 8% of major league club expenses (average of \$15,840 per club) and 6% of district league club expenses (average of \$4920 per club).<sup>450</sup> At junior league level, approximately 15% of club funds are devoted to marketing, fundraising and recognition expenses (average \$3720 per club).<sup>451</sup>

4.56 The Committee notes that these expenses are offset by the revenue they generate for clubs, either directly (in the case of sponsorship and fundraising), or indirectly (through increased membership or participation). The VCFL club survey indicated that 39% of major league club revenue was generated through sponsorship, fundraising and ‘major events’ (average \$77,220 per club) and that 41% of district league club revenue was obtained from these sources (average \$34,440 per club).<sup>452</sup> Junior league clubs also obtained 40% of revenue from sponsorship, fundraising and major events (average \$9920 per club).<sup>453</sup>

4.57 Although league organisations vary enormously in their scale of operations, the Committee notes that marketing, fundraising and participant costs are mostly funded by leagues rather than clubs. This is because leagues are typically responsible for the administration and marketing of league finals and inter league competitions, general marketing of league competitions, and other league recognition and awards functions and prizes. In the case of the Goulburn Valley Football League, for example, these costs accounted for 33.4% of League expenses.<sup>454</sup>

## Administration and operating expenses

4.58 Administration and operating expenses include those expenses associated with the purchase of stationery and other administrative supplies, tribunal costs, personnel and other expenditure associated with club and league operations (phone, postage,

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<sup>450</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 8 June 2004.

<sup>451</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 54.

<sup>452</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 8 June 2004.

<sup>453</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 54.

<sup>454</sup> Goulburn Valley Football League, *Annual Report 2003*, 2004.

vehicles, etc.). The Committee notes that, except where a club or league employs staff to perform administrative duties, these estimates do not account for the time spent by volunteers on administrative duties. Evidence obtained by the Committee in the course of its public hearings and through submissions indicates that volunteers who perform administrative duties give far more time to the club or league than most other football volunteers. The Committee heard on a number of occasions that certain administrative volunteers (such as club treasurers) may spend in excess of 30 hours per week on administrative duties.

4.59 Average expenditure on administration and operating costs accounts for approximately 11% of major league club expenditure (\$21,780), approximately 6% of district league club expenditure (\$4925) and 18% of junior league club expenditure (\$4464).<sup>455</sup> The Committee notes that in this instance, the VCFL submission includes other costs (such as power, water and ground rental) under the category of ‘operating costs’ for junior league clubs. As noted above, administration expenses at league level vary across country football. Leagues are responsible for the management of tribunals and surveillance of club adherence to certain VCFL rules. Leagues are also responsible for match scheduling and often reimburse officials for travel expenses, or provide transport in some cases. Although the Committee received evidence on expenses from only a few football leagues, and so is unable to make general observations on league expenses, it is likely that administrative expenses comprise a comparatively large proportion of total league expenditure.

### **Facilities and grounds fees and maintenance**

4.60 The Committee is aware that there is a great deal of variation across country Victoria in the charges and fees imposed on football clubs for facility and ground use and maintenance. This is due to the fact that many of these fees and charges are determined by local government or various ground management committees and so vary from region to region depending on the policy and resources of specific shires, rural city councils, city councils and/or committees. This means that clubs within the same league may find they pay substantially different rates for these services:

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<sup>455</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 8 June 2004; Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 54.

*It varies from club to club. You go from a situation of having council staff totally maintaining the grounds to one of where you are doing your own work, cutting your own oval and things like that, so there is a big variation depending on which shire you are talking about.<sup>456</sup>*

4.61 The VCFL conducted a survey of 112 clubs in preparation of its submission to the Committee and found that a great range of charges and fees for various facilities and ground rentals, as the following table illustrates:

**Table 22: VCFL club ground rental, water and power expenses<sup>457</sup>**

<b>Expense category</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Average</b>
Ground rental charges	\$0	\$15,000	\$3,566
Water charges	\$0	\$14,000	\$2,857
Electricity charges	\$0	\$ 4,500	\$2,450

4.62 Overall, the VCFL survey found that the average proportion of major league club expenditure on power, water and ground rental was 5% (average \$9900) and 8% for district league clubs (average \$6566).<sup>458</sup>

4.63 Information supplied to the Committee on club facility and ground expenses was generally concerned with ordinary costs associated with club operations during a football season. Facility development occurs irregularly, depending on the circumstances and requirements of individual football clubs. Issues surrounding facility development costs and funding are discussed in further detail in Chapter Six.

### **Football products**

4.64 Average expenditure on football products by major league clubs accounted for 3% of annual expenses (average \$5940) and 5% of annual expenses for district league clubs (average \$4104).<sup>459</sup> The VCFL submission categorised junior league club expenditure on football products more broadly, so that 18% of annual costs were allocated to ‘player apparel and equipment’ (average \$4392).<sup>460</sup> Due to sponsorship arrangements between the VCFL and various apparel and football equipment partners,

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<sup>456</sup> Peter Brear, Operations Officer, Ovens and Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 8.

<sup>457</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 93.

<sup>458</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 8 June 2004. Junior league club expenditure for this category was combined with ‘operating costs’, and is discussed on page 130.

<sup>459</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 8 June 2004.

<sup>460</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 54.

all affiliated VCFL clubs are required to purchase certain products (including guernseys, shorts and footballs) from VCFL protected sponsors. However, the Committee has been told that, as a result of commercial arrangements between the VCFL and protected sponsors, football equipment is made available to affiliated clubs at discounted rates.<sup>461</sup>

### **Insurance expenses**

*Because of the [insurance] paperwork that the Victorian Country Football League instigated, the VCFL clubs now pay about \$2500 insurance a year, whereas you get some in the metropolitan leagues paying \$8500; South Australian country clubs are paying about \$9000 a year in insurance — clubs, not leagues. That has come about because of some of the paperwork that is being done; so although it would be good to get rid of it, it has helped in lowering insurance premiums.<sup>462</sup>*

4.65 VCFL affiliation and registration fees cover the basic insurance package offered by the AFL insurance program but individual clubs can opt to obtain increased coverage under the agreement. Basic insurance for major and district league clubs, as covered in the VCFL affiliation and registration fees, included the following cover in 2004:<sup>463</sup>

- Non-Medicare cover to \$2500, with \$100 excess covering 75% of the non-Medicare claim
- Capital benefits of \$150,000 for senior teams (\$10,000 for under-18s and under-16s)
- Funeral expenses cover \$5000
- Public liability cover to \$20,000,000, with excess of \$1000
- Associations liability

4.66 Various options are also offered through the current AFL insurance scheme for upgrade of cover, including loss of income insurance and increased non-Medicare cover. Loss of income insurance is offered at a rate of \$235 per senior team per \$50 weekly income cover and at a rate of \$65 per junior team per \$50 weekly income cover.

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<sup>461</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004.

<sup>462</sup> Chris Brown, individual, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 28.

<sup>463</sup> Source: Victorian Country Football League, *WorkSafe VCFL 2004 club seminar*, 2004, pp. 36-7,9.



## ***Conclusion***

4.67 It is clear that the expenses faced by country football clubs and leagues are significant and that the day-to-day operation of country football represents both a substantial benefit to rural and regional economies and a considerable responsibility for volunteers, clubs and communities. The economic scale of country football operations also places a heavy burden on those volunteers who maintain clubs and leagues, as regulatory and reporting standards associated with the movement of large sums of money fall on club treasurers, presidents, secretaries and those who work to raise club funds. In the next chapter, issues affecting country football volunteers are discussed in detail.



## Chapter Five

### Issues for consideration: club and league personnel

#### *Introduction*

5.1 In previous chapters, the Committee reviewed a number of structural, economic and social issues affecting country football in Victoria. In this chapter, issues affecting football club and league personnel are considered in detail, including the recruitment and retention of football volunteers, umpires and players and challenges faced by administrators of football clubs.

#### *Volunteers*

5.2 Throughout the course of its public hearings, the Committee consistently heard that a major source of concern for most clubs is volunteer recruitment, retention and workload. A number of representatives from country football leagues and clubs told the Committee that they were running their football competitions with fewer volunteers than they would prefer and that, as a consequence, the work burden on existing football volunteers was substantial:

*It is increasingly difficult to get volunteers in football clubs. I guess that is in most clubs in our communities. We find volunteers are tired. You get fewer volunteers and the ones who are left have to take on more roles. So you see people waving the flags in one game, running the boundary in the next and doing the secretary's paperwork in the next — they are just working all day because there are just not the people around.<sup>464</sup>*

5.3 The Committee heard that in many cases the time demands on all football volunteers are significant. However, the Committee notes that the pressures and demands that fall upon country football administrators (including board and committee members, and particularly treasurers, secretaries and presidents) are typically of a far greater order than is the case for other football club volunteers. For this reason, issues associated with the administration of country football leagues and clubs are considered in a separate section below. While the Committee acknowledges the substantial workload experienced by volunteers in administrative roles, it is also

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<sup>464</sup> Garry Squires, President, Orbost Snowy Rovers Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 22.

clear to the Committee that all football and netball volunteers devote a considerable amount of time to country football and netball:

*Hundreds of volunteer hours a week are required at the Seymour Football Club alone to put the club on the field, and that is not just for match day — that is for training nights and committee meetings during the week. We have trainers; club officials; umpires; runners; people who help with the media, the canteen, the netball, the bar and the barbecue; and the person who marks the lines to the person who sweeps the final bit of rubbish out the door on a Sunday morning after a function here on Saturday night.*<sup>465</sup>

### **Volunteer recruitment and retention**

5.4 As noted above, the Committee was told by witnesses that many football leagues and clubs were finding recruitment and retention of volunteers very challenging. The Committee also heard that the number of volunteers required in order to run football events, such as match days, was substantial. Eric Bott, General Manager of the Goulburn Valley Football League, told the Committee that in Kyabram, 220 volunteers performed the multiplicity of tasks required on home match days. Marilyn Flett, Secretary of the Foster Football Club, told the Committee that club requires 100 volunteers on home match days.<sup>466</sup> The Committee recognises that a large number of volunteers are required for off-field duties in country football and that recruitment of these volunteers will often be a substantial burden on club and league executives and committees, particularly in smaller rural communities. The Committee also notes that the continued existence of country football clubs across Victoria is testament to the importance of football in those communities.

5.5 Some witnesses told the Committee that they were unable to recruit younger volunteers for their clubs and that the majority of their clubs' volunteers were older people who had often been volunteers for a number of years. These witnesses were concerned that when older volunteers retired from their clubs there would be no one to take their place. They were also concerned that any new volunteers would lack the experience and skills required for the successful and sustainable management of clubs:

*Some of the problems I see with country football is that volunteers in clubs are getting older and we do not seem to have youthful people being prepared to get involved as volunteers. A football club needs a lot of volunteers to run a*

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<sup>465</sup> Peter Liepins, individual, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 27.

<sup>466</sup> Marilyn Flett, Secretary, Foster Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Leongatha, 7 April 2004.

*football game during the day. I am not sure whether they are scared of litigation or what but they just do not seem to be terribly interested. The older volunteers are just getting older and more tired. I see that as an issue.*<sup>467</sup>

## Fear of litigation

5.6 One barrier to recruitment mentioned frequently to the Committee was that potential volunteers feared that by assuming roles of responsibility in football clubs, they would be subject to litigation should the club be sued:

*...there is always the fear of the possible litigation that could come along with the job if you do happen to make a mistake when you are trying to help out by doing something for nothing.*<sup>468</sup>

5.7 The Committee notes that while this perception is widespread, it is also mistaken. In 2002, the *Wrongs Act 1958* (Vic) was amended by the Parliament of Victoria to ensure that volunteers are protected from liability, providing that they act in good faith and that the service they provide is performed for, or on behalf of, a community organisation. ‘Community work’ in the context of the *Wrongs Act 1958* (Vic) includes “...any work that is done, or to be done... for the purpose of sport, recreation, tourism or amusement.” The relevant section of the Act follows:

*37. Protection of volunteers from liability*

*(1) A volunteer is not liable in any civil proceeding for anything done, or not done, in good faith by him or her in providing a service in relation to community work organised by a community organisation.*

5.8 It became clear to the Committee during the course of its public hearings that more work is required to promote general awareness about these amendments to the *Wrongs Act 1958* (Vic), to ensure that people who are considering volunteering for community organisations are not dissuaded because they believe they may potentially be subject to litigation. The Committee suggests that promotion of the protection now afforded to volunteers under amendments to the *Wrongs Act 1958* (Vic) be integrated into the media campaign proposed in Recommendation 5.

5.9 The Committee also believes that an opportunity exists for the State Government to take a more proactive role in promoting public awareness of volunteer protection under the *Wrongs Act 1958* (Vic). The Committee believes that volunteers

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<sup>467</sup> David Young, President, Loddon Valley Football League, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 10.

<sup>468</sup> Wayne Shawcross, President, Robinvale Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 37.

in all sporting clubs, including football/netball clubs, would benefit if the government were to send a brief letter to all sporting clubs, clearly explaining in simple terms the protection for volunteers that is available under the *Wrongs Act 1958* (Vic).

Consequently, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 1: That the State Government write a brief letter to all Victorian sporting clubs, explaining in simple terms the protection afforded volunteers under the *Wrongs Act 1958* (Vic).**

### **Financial and regulatory burdens on volunteers**

5.10 The Committee was informed by a number of witnesses during its public hearings that rules and regulations imposed by legislation and by football organisations require clubs to obtain various permits and qualifications for volunteers who perform specific tasks. Examples of these include food handling training, responsible serving of alcohol certification and coach accreditation. The Committee notes that various subsidies are made available to volunteers who obtain specific qualifications – the Victorian Country Football League (VCFL), for example, provides a \$75 rebate for club volunteers who undertake trainer accreditation.<sup>469</sup> The Committee was also told by a number of club and league representatives that many clubs pay for training and accreditation expenses incurred by volunteers as a consequence of their involvement with their club. However, the Committee also heard that not all country football clubs were able to obtain sufficient funds to pay for various forms of accreditation and that where this was the case, accreditation costs often fell upon a club's volunteers:

*...all those [accreditation] courses have to be paid for either by the volunteers themselves or by their clubs. If the clubs are financial they will pay, but in lots of cases clubs are not financial so the volunteer pays for his own accreditation out of his own pocket.*<sup>470</sup>

5.11 The Committee heard that some football and netball volunteers also incur indirect costs associated with attending accreditation courses. For example, many accreditation courses are convened only in regional centres, which means that volunteers from Victoria's more remote country communities must allocate

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<sup>469</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003.

<sup>470</sup> Vivian McGee, President, Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 34.

substantial time and resources to attend training. Time requirements of various courses can also add to the indirect cost to volunteers of obtaining accreditation. While the Committee acknowledges that most accreditation requirements, such as training for the safe handling of food and the responsible serving of alcohol, make an important contribution to public health or to the quality of sports development activities in the case of coaching accreditation, the Committee also notes that accreditation requirements can act as a financial disincentive to some volunteers.

5.12 A number of witnesses expressed a concern that the introduction of various legislative and regulatory requirements, regardless of any associated financial costs, could potentially act as a disincentive to volunteer recruitment. The Committee recognises that the benefits of regulation need to be balanced with the costs of implementation. Therefore, the Committee believes that future regulation and legislation should be analysed by government with specific attention to its potential impact on volunteer recruitment and sports participation, where appropriate. Consequently, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 2: That the State Government undertake consultation with Volunteering Victoria or other appropriate bodies on any legislative proposal that is likely to have an effect on volunteer recruitment and retention.**

**Recommendation 3: That when undertaking an assessment of proposed regulations through the Regulatory Impact Statement process, specific consideration should be given to the impact of those regulations on volunteers and voluntary organisations, and in particular, whether proposed regulations will have a detrimental effect on volunteer participation, recruitment, and retention.**

### **Acknowledgment and promotion of the role of volunteers**

5.13 The Committee heard a number of suggestions in the course of its public hearings on ways in which the contribution of volunteers to country football could be better acknowledged. Most of these suggestions emphasised the need for volunteers to receive appropriate recognition for their vital contribution to football, and by

extension, their substantial contribution to community life in country Victoria. The Committee was pleased to hear of some positive programs for volunteers currently being run in Victoria. One such program, organised by Leisure Networks, is the ‘Healthy Sport and Active Recreation Breakfast’ program, which is held regularly in Geelong. These breakfasts are free to all volunteers from sport and recreational clubs and associations in the region, and provide an opportunity for volunteers to meet in a social setting, share ideas and experiences with one another, and listen to presentations and receive advice about the operation of clubs and organisations.

5.14 The Committee also notes that many of the challenges experienced by volunteers in country football are true for football volunteers throughout Victoria. The Committee commends the Australian Football League (AFL) for its recognition of the contribution of volunteers to grassroots football with the presentation of 5, 10, and 25 year recognition of service certificates. However, the Committee also believes that the AFL has the capacity to support volunteers in additional ways. For example, the AFL could consider providing club volunteers with complimentary passes to AFL matches, similar to the scheme whereby the AFL provides complimentary game passes to junior football clubs. The AFL and AFL clubs could also consider integrating a broader range of training programs into their regional AFL club visits and forums. The Committee is of the opinion that there are further opportunities for the AFL to recognise the contribution of all football volunteers, to reward them in a meaningful way for their activities on behalf of Australian rules football, and to simultaneously promote the important role the AFL has as a custodian of Australian rules football.

5.15 To this end, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 4: That in addition to its current recognition of service awards, the Australian Football League (AFL) examine practical means to support and recognise grassroots football volunteers, such as complimentary match day passes, opportunities for country football volunteers to observe AFL and AFL club officials at work, or the integration of a broader range of training programs into AFL club forums and regional visits.**



5.16 While the Committee believes that Australian rules peak bodies have an important role to play in support for, and promotion of, football in Victoria, the Committee also acknowledges that the issues currently experienced by volunteers in country football are not restricted to rural and regional Victoria; nor are they exclusive to Australian rules football. In particular, the Committee believes that the role and value of sports volunteers and umpires, and the benefits of participation in sport, should be promoted and encouraged throughout Victoria. Through such positive promotion, the Committee believes that more volunteers may be recruited to all sports clubs, which would be of considerable benefit to those volunteers and the communities in which they live. Consequently, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 5: That the State Government develop and fund a multifaceted media campaign, to encourage, recognise and promote the recruitment and involvement of volunteers in clubs and associations of all sports, and that this campaign be linked to the program outlined in Recommendation 14.**

### ***Players***

5.17 The Committee heard a wide range of evidence during the course of this Inquiry on a number of issues related to the recruitment, retention and payment of players in country football.

### **Player recruitment and retention**

5.18 As has been discussed throughout the report, a significant number of witnesses and submissions noted that some country football clubs were finding the recruitment of players challenging. This appeared to be the case particularly in country communities that were removed from Victoria's major rural and regional centres, and the city of Melbourne. By and large, witnesses argued that these problems were experienced because there were insufficient numbers of young adults living in those communities to 'make up the numbers' for local football teams.

5.19 Likely reasons for the diminished pool of young adults available to play football in rural and remote communities have already been discussed in Chapter Three. In addition, the Committee considered a number of possible explanations for

the sharp decline in football participation rates by young men in rural and regional Victoria. Some witnesses suggested to the Committee that young men often stop playing football upon moving to Melbourne or major regional centres (such as Ballarat and Bendigo) for education and employment purposes. The Committee considered the possibility that lifestyle changes that occur in the lives of many young men after they leave secondary school may also affect their decision to play football. Many young men enter the workforce, and may find they have less time to devote to football, or that they are inclined to do other things with the spare time they have available. Many will also, as a consequence of employment, have increased disposable income and so leave home, acquire (and use) cars, or have a more active social life that does not involve football. The Committee also considered suggestions that the increased physical demands of senior football compared to junior football may dissuade young men from playing football, and that football players were more likely than their peers to leave their homes for university studies or employment in Melbourne or regional centres.

5.20 However, irrespective of the reasons for reduced participation rates among young men, the Committee notes that there is a large pool of men aged 15 and over that football clubs have the potential to recruit. The Committee therefore encourages football clubs, particularly those that struggle to find players, to explore ways in which they may identify and recruit those young men that have played football as children and teenagers but have since discontinued their association with their football club.

### **Older (and younger) players in senior football**

5.21 As discussed in Chapter Three, the Committee heard that where country clubs were struggling to recruit players between the ages of 19 to the early-30s, older players were encouraged to ‘put their boots back on’ and play for their local club. The Committee heard that when numbers were short, players from junior teams were also encouraged to play for their senior club – which meant, on some occasions, that junior players would compete in two or more games during a match day. James McFarlane, secretary of the Mallee Football League, told the Committee:

*Most teams will come with their full team list, but a lot of them are made up of older players or older people and people they have perhaps picked up out of the town... you are probably looking at some players playing that are over*

*45 to make up those numbers, and also drawing out of the juniors that have already played an under-16s game and coming in to help to fill those spots in a lot of cases.*<sup>471</sup>

5.22 While most witnesses who explicitly mentioned the recruitment of older players to country football emphasised the negative implications of this practice, the Committee notes that participation by older players (from mid-to late-thirties and older) in football competitions could be a positive development, provided those older players train adequately and prepare properly. Participation of older players in country football would, in most cases, provide encouragement for those men to maintain or increase their general fitness (through training, for example), as well as provide a regular opportunity for those men to engage in vigorous activity on match days. However, where older players do not prepare adequately and do not attain appropriate levels of fitness, the risk of injury may be increased.

5.23 The Committee notes that in most cases where older or younger players have been recruited to play in senior teams, they have been recruited because the club in question has been unable to find enough young men to field a full team. Di Trotter, the Executive Officer of the Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, told the Committee that dwindling numbers of youth in the Wimmera means that clubs cannot find enough players to field teams. In order to avoid amalgamation or disbandment “some clubs either persist with fielding players who are older or promote youngsters who were not ready to contest with fully grown men. This often leads to a mismatch...and it does nothing to promote the spectacle of the game itself.”<sup>472</sup>

5.24 A number of witnesses argued that pressure to recruit these players could be alleviated if minimum requirements on player numbers could be relaxed, with 14 or 16 player teams allowed, or if the composition of, or numbers allowed on, the reserve bench could be altered. The Committee notes that Australian football rules already provide for variations to the number of players in each team required to be on the field during a game (between 14 and 18 players), although interchange numbers are limited to a maximum of four under current regulations. The composition of team numbers and interchange is further discussed in Chapter Eight.

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<sup>471</sup> James McFarlane, Secretary, Mallee Football League, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 4.

<sup>472</sup> Di Trotter, Executive Officer, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 21.

### **Time and travel**

5.25 The Committee heard that travel requirements had an effect on the ability of some clubs to maintain player numbers, particularly in cases where country football clubs or leagues had amalgamated or where clubs relied on a number of players from Melbourne or regional centres to travel for football:

*The cost of fuel is increasing all the time. The distance to travel to games is a problem to us at times. If clubs like Pyramid Hill, which is the furthest club away, cannot pull players out of their local area up there they have to come and look further down here, so there is a cost to the club and players for travelling.<sup>473</sup>*

5.26 Increased travel also meant that in some cases, the amount of time available for football training would be constrained because by the time some players travelled to training there was insufficient light to practice effectively (see Chapter Six). Furthermore, with larger league competitions operating in some parts of country Victoria, clubs at the outer perimeters of their respective competitions find that travel time is substantially increased for most of their club's away games.

5.27 The Committee heard that all time commitments required for football, not only travel time, could also act as a disincentive for some players. In particular, the tendency for football clubs to hold two or more practice sessions during the week, as well as a tendency toward extended 'pre-season' training, was cited by some witnesses as a constraint on player recruitment, as some players were unwilling to dedicate a large amount of time to football due to family or work commitments. The Committee heard that, as a consequence, some people who might otherwise have played football opt for less time-demanding sports, such as basketball or tennis, that can be played mid-week or during the evenings only:

*Football games are played on weekends and with family structures these days that time is often used as the only time that families are together. Either a family attends the game — generally for the day — or it is split up or simply does not go. Football requires players to train twice a week and play on the weekends and this very entrenched time commitment is also turning many young people away from the sport, as they simply do not have the time to give to this type of structure. With other sport and physical activities options being available during the week for an hour or so, indoors, and some being able to be engaged in whenever the participant has the time and therefore fit very*

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<sup>473</sup> David Young, President, Loddon Valley Football League, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 10.

*well into their lifestyle, football is a harder option, requiring more than some people can commit to.*<sup>474</sup>

5.28 As noted in Chapters One and Two, some clubs have sought to overcome this problem by offering some players cars to travel to club training and games, or more generally, by offering players reimbursement for travel expenses:

*...we have to encourage them to come back home for their football. A lot of clubs will pay their fuel and that sort of thing, and a heck of a lot of university kids are more than glad to come home for their football.*<sup>475</sup>

5.29 While some clubs had some success encouraging young men who had moved to Melbourne or other regional centres to return ‘home’ for football, the Committee heard that in general, those players would continue to commute for a few seasons before they tired of the travel, and either dropped out of country football or joined clubs that were closer to where they lived.

5.30 The Committee notes that the practice of players commuting to play country football is not a new phenomenon and that some country clubs have been sustained by ‘out of town’ players for some years. For example, Craig Niemann, Chief Executive Officer of the Loddon Shire Council, told the Committee that “...local football clubs have recruited from [regional] centres for many years, and for as long as I can remember there have been footballers from Bendigo playing football in the Loddon Valley Football League.”<sup>476</sup> The Committee also notes that, as clubs and leagues in country Victoria amalgamate due to demographic pressures, travel requirements that accompany those amalgamations can increase costs associated with travel for those players, clubs and leagues.

## **Player payments**

5.31 The amount of player payments, as well as the pervasiveness of payments to players throughout senior football, was a topic frequently raised during the course of this Inquiry. The Committee heard a diverse range of opinions on the value of player payments to country football. Craig Keating, past president and now vice-president of

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<sup>474</sup> Di Trotter, Executive Officer, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 21.

<sup>475</sup> Alan Dennett, General Manager/Treasurer, Murray Valley Football League, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 35.

<sup>476</sup> Craig Niemann, Chief Executive Officer, Loddon Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 14.

the Heywood Football Club, expressed an opinion that player payments improved the state of football by providing a means for clubs to encourage high quality players and player/coaches to join country clubs, and consequently lift the quality of local football:

*Players and coaches who command fees are usually highly motivated, highly disciplined and highly skilled people. They are just the people we need in rural Victoria. I happen to believe that paying footballers is an investment for country clubs.... They add value to the community and raise the standard of our football.<sup>477</sup>*

5.32 Mr Keating also argued that players and player/coaches who were paid premium salaries to play country football made a wider contribution to community football, as clubs often encouraged them to conduct school visits or participate in other community-focused activities. The Committee was unable to determine whether these ‘community focused’ activities of paid players were widespread in country football.

5.33 A number of witnesses expressed an opinion that the payment of players was reasonable, as many players incurred travel expenses due to their club commitments (see above) and some players also rearranged work hours in order to attend practice and matches.<sup>478</sup> These witnesses also argued that because football clubs profited through bar sales and gate takings, players were entitled to receive a proportion of that revenue.<sup>479</sup> It appears that many football players hold a similar view with regard to payment.

5.34 Player payments were also regarded by a number of witnesses as a crucial means of recruiting players to play for country clubs, particularly where those clubs were struggling to find enough local players to field a senior team. Mr Niemann noted that “[c]lubs continue to have to pay out a lot of money to attract players. This is both a necessity in order to have enough players to field teams and a function of the desire for success.”<sup>480</sup> However, Chris Lewis, Manager of Recreation and Open Space for the Greater Geelong City Council, argued that “[t]he heavy focus on success often

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<sup>477</sup> Craig Keating, individual, *Public Hearing*, Warrnambool, 10 March 2004, p. 24.

<sup>478</sup> Craig Keating, individual, *Public Hearing*, Warrnambool, 10 March 2004; Wangaratta Rovers Football and Netball Club, *Submission*, no. 36, 23 December 2003.

<sup>479</sup> Craig Keating, individual, *Public Hearing*, Warrnambool, 10 March 2004; Wangaratta Rovers Football and Netball Club, *Submission*, no. 36, 23 December 2003.

<sup>480</sup> Loddon Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 18, 5 December 2003, p. 4.

drives clubs to ‘buy’ players at the expense of clubs investing in facilities, equipment or junior development.... It is difficult for local governments to justify investment in football facilities when this type of money is being spent by clubs on player payments.”<sup>481</sup> Player payments were also regarded unfavourably by some witnesses on the grounds that football players’ pursuit of financial rewards undermined community identification with local football clubs:

*Before the player payment factor entered football teams consisted of ‘locals’ and loyalty and support was evident in the communities. With the migration of more skilled players from team to team, league to league, according to the football club’s bank account.... Many older people cannot get enthused when they don’t ‘know’ any of the players, or their families... thus, support wanes.*<sup>482</sup>

5.35 A view of player payments frequently raised before the Committee was that player payments represented a potential burden on country football clubs. Witnesses argued that while country football clubs were able to sustain payments to players as well as ongoing club costs (such as ground and facility maintenance, equipment and other expenses), many clubs would benefit if some of the funds currently directed toward paying players could be spent on other aspects of club management, or that the fundraising burden on clubs would be lightened if player payments were reduced:<sup>483</sup>

*Anything done to cut player payments would be welcome. Clubs are paying too much for country footballers — way too much! They are paid beyond their abilities. It is one of the things that would take pressure off clubs if they could do something about it.*<sup>484</sup>

5.36 Another issue raised before the committee concerned the distribution of player payments. Justin Kelly, Secretary of the Wangaratta Football Club, noted that in that club, first year players received \$60 per game, with more seasoned players receiving payments of between \$100 and \$500 per game. Mr Kelly argued that the practice of paying some players more than others on grounds of their experience or perceived ability undermined the “notions of togetherness, unity and joint struggle” that were representative of Australian culture and identity.<sup>485</sup> He suggested that club resources could be better employed if payments were set at \$50 for each player in a club, which

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<sup>481</sup> Greater Geelong City Council, *Submission*, no. 7, 19 November 2003, p. 1.

<sup>482</sup> Glenda Hirth, *Submission*, no. 1, 7 October 2003, pp. 1-2.

<sup>483</sup> Wangaratta Rovers Football and Netball Club, *Submission*, no. 36, 23 December 2003, p. 5.

<sup>484</sup> Howard Rosewarne, Administration Manager, Central Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 4.

<sup>485</sup> Wangaratta Rovers Football and Netball Club, *Submission*, no. 36, 23 December 2003, p. 3.

would ensure that each player put the team first, rather than “play simply for themselves.”<sup>486</sup>

5.37 Netball players, in contrast to country football players, rarely receive payment for playing. Beverley Cummings, President of the Mallee Netball Association, told the Committee “we would not survive if we had to pay our netballers. It is done more out of town pride and begging. But... there is a bit of animosity, especially when you find out how much some [football] players are being paid.”<sup>487</sup> Ms Cummings also noted, however, that the payment of football players could have the effect of boosting netball players’ numbers:

*Some netballers are the wives or girlfriends of the paid [football] players, so that is why they come and play netball, because their respective partners are coming and they are getting paid.*<sup>488</sup>

5.38 The Committee heard evidence from Jo Dash, President of the Ballarat Netball Association, that some netball coaches in country Victoria are receiving payment for their services, although payments to players are not common practice. Where netball players do receive payment, the level of remuneration is far less than that found in comparable levels of national, state, or country football:

*Liz Taverner, who has just retired, has been one of the world’s best defenders for some time. She played with Melbourne Phoenix and she represented Australia for 10 years or more. Sharelle McMahon sat down one night at training and worked out how much money they got — they are known as professional netballers. The money they got for that year equated to 5 cents for a training session, 10 cents a game.*<sup>489</sup>

5.39 The stark contrast in player payments to footballers as compared to netballers was attributed to ‘cultural’ differences between these sports by Ms Dash, in the sense that there was an historical tradition of player payment in country football that was not found in netball:

*I am probably old fashioned, but we [netballers] do not like the: ‘And who are you playing with this year?’. The idea of the highest bidder — I do not know that that is a healthy thing, and I do not know what it has done for country football either. We see premierships being won by teams that have paid players, and then they run away the next year and the team is struggling because they got rid of their locals and are putting ads in the paper that they*

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<sup>486</sup> Wangaratta Rovers Football and Netball Club, *Submission*, no. 36, 23 December 2003, p. 3.

<sup>487</sup> Beverley Cummings, President, Mallee Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 11.

<sup>488</sup> Beverley Cummings, President, Mallee Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 11.

<sup>489</sup> Jo Dash, President, Ballarat Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 26.



*have nine players and all that sort of thing. One wonders whether the money was used wisely in the first place. I do not want that to happen to netball.*<sup>490</sup>

5.40 In its submission to the Inquiry, Netball Victoria also noted that “in many instances the football and netball players pay a membership to the club. This entitles footballers to enter the football ground for free. The netballers are, in many instances, required to pay an entry fee.”<sup>491</sup> While the Committee acknowledges that most football/netball clubs successfully represent the interests and membership of football and netball teams, and that a number of clubs provide similar services to both football and netball players, it also notes that some scope remains for leagues and clubs to further integrate and acknowledge the contribution of netball players to the vitality of country football/netball clubs and leagues.

5.41 The Committee notes that payment of players has long been practiced in country football. The Committee also notes that opinions and arguments regarding the value of player payments to country football are diverse. Consequently, the Committee decided to make no recommendation on this issue, as it considers country communities, clubs and individuals best placed to make informed decisions about player payments.

### **Salary cap**

5.42 In 2004, the VCFL was the only football organisation outside the AFL to operate a salary cap. The Victorian metropolitan football leagues, for example, did not have salary cap regulations, which meant that clubs on the periphery of metropolitan Melbourne sometimes encountered significant competition from metropolitan leagues for elite players, and found it difficult to retain players due to the VCFL salary cap. In Chapter Four, the Committee noted that player and coach payments make up a significant proportion of VCFL senior club expenditure. During and prior to 2004, the VCFL operated a salary cap for district and major leagues, which was initially introduced with the intention that it reduce the potential for wealthy clubs to dominate league competitions by means of ‘purchasing’ the best players in a district. Some witnesses were in favour of the salary cap because, in their

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<sup>490</sup> Jo Dash, President, Ballarat Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 26.

<sup>491</sup> Netball Victoria, *Submission*, no. 22, 8 December 2003, p. 7.

opinion, it provided clubs with a reasonable guideline on appropriate player expenditure in order to budget responsibly on an ongoing basis, and enable them to, for example, reduce the risk of clubs 'buying' a premiership one year and declaring bankruptcy the next. Damian Drum, Board Member of the Bendigo Football League, described the salary cap as a useful bargaining tool for clubs when negotiating payment for players:

*I think it is a very good bargaining tool for the clubs. They need to have that salary cap as a bargaining tool when negotiating with players. If it is open slather they say, 'Listen, you blokes just did the crop out the road. You blokes got \$400 000 for the crop that was donated to you', and we would say, 'Listen, we can't fit you in a salary cap'. The clubs need the salary cap as a bargaining tool; they need it as a point of reference. If they go 5 per cent or 10 per cent over or 5 per cent or 10 per cent under, so be it, but the salary cap forms an important part of the discipline associated with sticking to responsible payments.<sup>492</sup>*

5.43 The Committee was also told by a number of witnesses that, in their opinion, the salary cap should not be maintained within the VCFL. Most of these witnesses were of the opinion that salary caps provided few real restraints to club expenditure on players, and that the main effect of salary cap requirements on VCFL clubs was to increase bureaucratic workload on club administrators:

*The salary cap — player payment — is the biggest paper tiger in the VCFL rules and regulations. The VCFL must enforce its rules in this area. Much has been said about it, but, as I understand it, very little if anything has ever been achieved in ensuring that this policy is working. If it is too hard to manage or you cannot make it work, get rid of it.<sup>493</sup>*

5.44 However, while most witnesses were in favour of the salary cap, all accepted that, in practice, there were many breaches of the cap, and that it was very difficult to enforce. Most witnesses agreed that the processes and structures governing enforcement of the salary cap in the VCFL were inadequate:

*We have on a couple of occasions tried to strongly police that salary cap. On two significant occasions we have been burnt to a cinder because every single member of the club and every player, when they have been interviewed, stuck to a story and even went to [statutory declarations] and the like and we could not break them.<sup>494</sup>*

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<sup>492</sup> Damian Drum, Board Member, Bendigo Football League, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 8.

<sup>493</sup> Graeme Pigdon, President, Lexton Plains Football League and Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 15.

<sup>494</sup> Brendan Ryan, individual, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 8.

5.45 The Committee heard a diverse range of opinions on what could be done to increase club adherence to salary caps. These included suggestions that the VCFL appoint a salary cap officer, that the Australian Taxation Office audit clubs and players, and that payments be distributed from clubs to players by the VCFL Area Managers, among others. Since the Committee completed its public hearings the VCFL has removed the salary cap (see Chapter Two).<sup>495</sup>

### ***Club and league histories***

*I think we share that common trait with all country towns and clubs that have their own identities, and they hang on to the passions and history of their clubs as representative of the uniqueness of their communities.*<sup>496</sup>

5.46 As noted by the Committee in Chapter One, football clubs play an important role in country communities by contributing to a sense of identity and shared history. A number of witnesses remarked on the importance of the histories and traditions of country Victoria's football clubs and leagues. Di Trotter, Executive Officer of the Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, told the Committee:

*Football in country areas has a proud tradition and a long history. It has provided country Victorians an opportunity to come together for competition and participation, created healthy rivalry on the field, engendered a team spirit and perpetuated the 'looking after your mates' ethic that has been part of Australian culture probably since the Anzac days. The more senior, the elderly, the middle aged and current players and supporters and juniors of the game all have a story to tell about the fabulous grand finals of the 1950s, the high marking and long kicking of the 1960s, the great inter league games of the 1970s, the toughness of certain players, the skills of others, and the post game and post season celebrations. All of these contribute to the social culture of rural communities and the community's ability to connect people within their town and also between towns.*<sup>497</sup>

5.47 The Committee is also aware, however, that some aspects of this shared history are being lost over time due to the occasional disbandment of football clubs and leagues throughout country Victoria. John Stoward, a country football enthusiast, argued that the histories of all football clubs in country Victoria should be actively preserved and documented, as there was often considerable interest in these histories among football clubs and country communities. He told the Committee that some of the most interesting information about the histories of football clubs was not held in

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<sup>495</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, email, 26 October 2004.

<sup>496</sup> Paul Briggs, President, Rumbalara Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 43.

<sup>497</sup> Di Trotter, Executive Officer, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 21.

documents, but in the minds of older club members and supporters. As a consequence, club histories often passed away along with the people who possessed this knowledge:

*Yesterday a football identity with an encyclopaedic knowledge of football of his club died. Another one died today and another is going to die tomorrow. What does it matter? What does that have to do with the viability of clubs today? In my opinion it does matter.*<sup>498</sup>

5.48 The Committee believes that the preservation and reconstruction of country football club and league histories would be of considerable interest to many Victorians, particularly those from rural and regional Victoria. The Committee also notes that some repositories of historical information on football already exist online, but that these do not capture the wide range of historical information that may be of considerable interest to country Victorians, such as information on players, committee members, score lines, and so on.<sup>499</sup> The Committee therefore sees considerable benefit in the provision of funding by Government for the construction of substantial histories on country Victoria's football clubs and leagues, and for this information to be offered on-line to the general public. The Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 6: That government provide funding for research to capture historical information about leagues, clubs and competitions (including competitions and premierships, best and fairest, leading goal kickers, life members, captains, coaches etc.) and that this information be offered as a free, public online resource.**

## ***Umpires***

### **Umpire recruitment and retention**

*Retention is a key issue. This is due to work commitments, school, university and work transfers. Abuse from the crowd is one of the main things that we see as a problem.*<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> John Stoward, individual, *Public Hearing*, 9 March 2004, p. 19.

<sup>499</sup> For example, 'Footypedia' is a website dedicated to the compilation of histories of Australian rules clubs and leagues, with information provided by volunteer contributors. Detailed information on scores, volunteers and players is not available for most clubs and leagues on this site, however. See 'Footypedia', viewed 3 November 2004, <<http://www.footypedia.com/index.html>>.

<sup>500</sup> Kevin Monk, President, Bendigo Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 21.

5.49 The Committee heard from witnesses that umpires associations experienced substantial challenges recruiting and retaining umpires.<sup>501</sup> While these challenges were also experienced by many country clubs in their recruitment of players, umpires and umpires groups face additional hurdles due the negative perception of umpires by Australian rules football players and spectators:

*The biggest problem with umpiring at the moment is that there is a reluctance among secondary school age students to take it on. Part of that is peer group pressure; it can be a bit disconcerting for them. A lot of the jocks with rather short attitudes have often made fun of umpires at schools or targeted the umpires, and I think we are seeing that at the moment.*<sup>502</sup>

5.50 The Committee was encouraged to hear of initiatives that have been launched by the AFL, Football Victoria, the VCFL and other peak football bodies to encourage respect for umpires and notes that these initiatives (including the promotion of the role of umpires in football, as well as various rules and regulations concerning behaviour toward umpires) appear to have improved player, official and spectator attitudes to umpiring. One such program is the AFL Umpire Mentor Program, which was launched in 2004.<sup>503</sup> This program provides mentoring and support for new umpires. ‘Trainee’ umpires are also provided with green shirts, with the intention that spectators and players are able to identify new umpires, and be less critical of their umpiring decisions. The Committee is pleased to note that this program was developed from initiatives pioneered by the Bendigo Umpires Association:

*We also run what has been changed to the green shirt program which was developed here last year by two of our members.... That program was so successful that now the AFL umpiring department have taken it on board, and it is being developed into the green shirt program Australia wide. It creates a mentor program where a junior umpire starting out has a senior umpire running with them and... that [program] has now been offered Australia wide.*<sup>504</sup>

5.51 The Committee believes that these initiatives are a very positive step toward improving the recruitment and retention of umpires in football. The Committee

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<sup>501</sup> Shane Carbines, Chairman, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 34; David Drane, General Manager, Umpiring, Victorian Country Football League and Victorian Country Football Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, pp. 12-3; Bill Fulton, General Manager, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 33; Kevin Monk, President, Bendigo Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 21.

<sup>502</sup> Howard Rosewarne, Administration Manager, Central Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 4.

<sup>503</sup> Australian Football League, 'AFL umpire mentor program manual', viewed 1 November 2004, <<http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/article/149333af.pdf>>.

<sup>504</sup> Beres Fitch, Vice-President, Bendigo Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 25.

believes, moreover, that recruitment and retention of umpires throughout country Victoria could be substantially improved if country umpires were supported by experienced umpires with a high profile in the football community. The Committee therefore recommends:

**Recommendation 7: That the Australian Football League (AFL) employ current and retired AFL umpires to travel around rural and regional Victoria to provide advice, support and skills development to people currently umpiring country football.**

5.52 The Committee heard from Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer of the VCFL, that the introduction of the ‘most disciplined club’ program had reduced the number of umpire reports of VCFL players during 2004:

*This season we have introduced a most disciplined club program which hinges on the umpires and the umpiring associations around the state. At the end of the game, umpires, like they would with best and fairest awards with a 3, 2, 1 votes, rate the behaviour of the players, the coaches, officials and supporters on a 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 basis and submit that with the match day paperwork after each round; 90 per cent of our leagues have adopted the program this year. It is something that we learnt from discussions we had with the Victorian Amateur Football League which introduced it last year and felt that it generally helped with on field behaviour — reduced reports et cetera.<sup>505</sup>*

5.53 The Committee was also encouraged to hear that some umpiring bodies in country Victoria have successfully recruited women as umpires for football games.<sup>506</sup> As discussed in Chapter Three however, the Committee also heard that retention of women umpires by some groups was very poor, largely due to the verbal abuse many of those women experienced from spectators, and to a lesser extent because appropriate facilities for women umpires were not available at many football grounds. While verbal abuse appears to have been a substantial disincentive for women to participate in umpiring, the Committee notes that male umpires are also often subject to similar treatment by football spectators.

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<sup>505</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 3.

<sup>506</sup> Shane Carbines, Chairman, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 33; David Drane, General Manager, Umpiring, Victorian Country Football League and Victorian Country Football Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 14; Bill Fulton, General Manager, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 33; Kevin Monk, President, Bendigo Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 24.

5.54 The Committee recognises that while initial steps are being made toward improved treatment of umpires by spectators, the Committee is concerned that the behaviour of spectators to umpires has not improved substantially to date and that crowd behaviour, such as the verbal abuse of umpires, is a significant contributor to poor recruitment and retention rates of umpires throughout Victoria. These forms of behaviour are unacceptable. For this reason, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 8: That the Australian Football League and Victorian Country Football League continue to develop programs to foster respect for, and retention of, football umpires.**

### **Taxation**

5.55 Within the VCFL, all umpires who belong to umpires associations receive payment for their services on a per-match basis. Standard match fees are determined annually by the VCFL, in consultation with umpiring groups and the Victoria Country Football Umpires Association (see Chapter Four).

5.56 Umpires associations that made submissions to the Inquiry, or participated in public hearings, drew the Committee's attention to the tax status of umpires and umpires groups in Victoria.<sup>507</sup> The Committee recognises that taxation issues for umpires, including the burden they place on association administrators, are similar to issues raised before the Committee concerning tax requirements on the payment of football players. Therefore, the Committee believes that it is more appropriate to make a recommendation on taxation covering both football players and umpires. This recommendation is discussed below.

### **WorkCover**

5.57 Umpires associations also informed the Committee that they were subject to WorkCover levies. Umpires are required to pay WorkCover levies because under Section 18 of the *Accident Compensation Act 1985*, while contestants in a sporting competition are exempt from coverage under the Act, umpires are not currently

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<sup>507</sup> Shane Carbines, Chairman, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 29; David Drane, General Manager, Umpiring, Victorian Country Football League and Victorian Country Football Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 12.

considered “contestants” for the purposes of that legislation. Some umpires associations were of the opinion that umpires should not be subject to WorkCover levies.<sup>508</sup> Umpires associations and umpires representatives argued before the Committee that because costs incurred by associations for WorkCover levies were deducted from the match fees paid to umpires, the removal of those administrative costs would increase the revenue available to umpires and therefore act as an incentive for increased participation and recruitment. The Committee notes that any saving through a reduction in the WorkCover levy would likely be offset by increased insurance expenses to umpires and umpires associations. The Committee has received anecdotal evidence, however, that the cost of insurance cover for umpires associations would be substantially less than the premiums payable under WorkCover.

5.58 While the Committee accepts that WorkCover levies represent a substantial proportion of umpires associations’ expenditure, the Committee is also concerned that insurance cover for individual umpires remain at levels comparable to those in place at present. If umpires associations do obtain WorkCover exemption, the Committee considers that umpires should be provided with the best insurance cover currently provided by the AFL, including income insurance sufficient to cover reasonable loss of earnings to umpires from their full-time employment, as well as income from umpiring. With these issues in mind, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 9: That umpires, like country and suburban players, be considered ‘contestants’ for the purpose of the WorkCover scheme, and that adequate insurance be obtained by umpires’ associations to provide appropriate cover for football umpires.**

### ***Coaches***

5.59 The Committee heard a wide range of evidence on the role of, and resources available to, coaches in country football. The Committee notes that, at senior level football, a large majority of coaches are paid for their services to football clubs.

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<sup>508</sup> Shane Carbines, Chairman, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 29; David Drane, General Manager, Umpiring, Victorian Country Football League and Victorian Country Football Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 12; Beres Fitch, Vice-President, Bendigo Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 22; Kevin Monk, President, Bendigo Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 21.



Coaching payments in major league clubs were excluded from the salary cap in 2004 and the Committee heard that payments coaches received could be quite substantial:

*In the Latrobe Valley Football League, which is a premier league, it is \$50,000, plus your coach or your top paid player.... There are clubs down there which are [paying] \$30,000 odd for a coach.<sup>509</sup>*

While a large proportion of coaches at senior and reserves club level are remunerated, the Committee recognises that the majority of coaches at youth, junior and Auskick level receive no payment for their services.

5.60 A number of witnesses described how important coaches were to country football, not only because they provided structure and direction to football teams and players, but also because they could be excellent role models for people of all ages, particularly children and youth:

*One of the most important things in sport is to have a good coach relationship as it means kids become better at skills, they are taught better and the coach will give them a chance to play.... The coach I think probably more than any other person holds the key to what approach is used, the standards, the values and the behaviours....Coaches hold in their hands the quality of recruiting, developing and retaining of participants. That's not just at primary level, but at youth and senior levels too.<sup>510</sup>*

5.61 The Committee notes that the AFL, Football Victoria and the VCFL currently run programs that contribute to coach development. The AFL, for example, pays two AFL coaching mentors a retainer to provide mentoring to young coaches around Victoria. David Parkin, who is one of those coaching mentors, told the Committee that he provided mentoring to 17 coaches across Victoria at all levels of competition.<sup>511</sup> AFL Community Camps also regularly have a session devoted to coach development. Within Football Victoria Development, Country Development Managers convene coach accreditation courses, and are also required to assist coaches throughout their region on an ongoing basis. Country Development Managers are also required to manage their regional branch of the Australian Football Coaches Association. The Committee acknowledges that coach mentoring programs are of significant benefit to country football and believes that there is considerable scope for mentor programs to be extended within country Victoria. The Committee also notes

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<sup>509</sup> Ronald Schrader, individual, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 17.

<sup>510</sup> David Parkin, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 22.

<sup>511</sup> David Parkin, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, pp. 21,4.

that existing organisations, such as Australian Football Coaches Association, may have the capacity to develop a coach mentoring program if provided with appropriate resources. Towards this end, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 10: That further activity, such as coach mentoring programs, be undertaken to support coaches in rural and regional football clubs to improve coaching competencies.**

### **Accreditation**

5.62 Football Victoria convenes coaching courses that are tailored for specific grades of football, including senior, youth, junior, Auskick, and courses for teachers (youth and primary). Accreditation courses are graduated, with level 1, 2 and 3 courses available. Level 1 accreditation courses require one full day of training (9am to 5pm), with an additional correspondence component (2-3 hours).<sup>512</sup> Currently, VCFL regulations require that all football coaches become accredited to level 1 through courses run by Football Victoria upon entering their second year of coaching. Some witnesses told the Committee that they would prefer that coach accreditation be required before any person began coaching football. Brendan Ryan, a high school principal from Horsham, told the Committee:

*I believe that this committee should recommend that coaching accreditation should take place before anybody starts coaching. Don't give them 12 months. Some of them can coach for 12 months, drop out of the system and not coach again — and the damage they have done during that period is immense. During the last 12 months I have visited various leagues. During last year I took notice of some absolutely disgraceful performances by coaches involving young people, particularly in the 15, 16 and 17 years age group.<sup>513</sup>*

5.63 The Committee recognises a requirement for coaches to obtain accreditation before starting to coach football would provide some assurance of the quality of coaching in country football meets appropriate standards, and would also enable new coaches to gain necessary skills and knowledge of the game. However, the Committee is also concerned, given the difficulties currently experienced throughout football (and generally in sports) to obtain volunteers, that a requirement for coaches

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<sup>512</sup> Football Victoria Development, 'Coaching', viewed 28 July 2004, <<http://svc227.bne117v.server-web.com/vfdf/vfdfcoaching.htm>>.

<sup>513</sup> Brendan Ryan, individual, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 5.

to obtain prior accreditation would dissuade people from volunteering for this role. Consequently, the Committee is of the opinion that the current VCFL coach accreditation requirements are appropriate and should be maintained.

5.64 The Committee also recognises that while coach accreditation is desirable, it also imposes financial and time costs on volunteers (and/or their clubs). In 2003-2004, the cost to attend Football Victoria's coaching courses was \$100 for all course levels. The VCFL provides a rebate of \$50 for junior and youth courses. The Committee heard that, while a number of country football clubs endeavoured to subsidise or pay for their coaches' courses, not all football clubs were able to do this. Where clubs could not afford to pay the costs of accreditation these expenses fell to the volunteers. While it is probably appropriate that these costs are borne by coaches who are in paid positions at football clubs, the Committee also recognises that these costs may represent a barrier for unpaid voluntary coaches. At junior and Auskick level in particular, the Committee believes that coaching accreditation should be provided at no cost to volunteers, primarily because the clubs those coaches represent have limited revenue streams with which to fund coach accreditation and secondly because, in the case of Football Victoria and the AFL, junior and Auskick coaches contribute directly to their development programs which are largely aimed at securing participation and identifying elite talent. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 11: That greater funding and support be provided by the Australian Football League, Football Victoria and the Victorian Country Football League for coaching development programs at junior and Auskick levels of football, so that these programs can be provided at no cost to participants.**

5.65 As noted previously, an added burden for country football volunteers regarding training and accreditation is that various courses are often held at venues some distance removed from where they live (particularly affecting volunteers from rural and remote Victoria). In 2003-2004, Football Victoria held coach accreditation

courses in the following locations in rural and regional Victoria:

Ballarat	Sale
Bendigo	Shepparton
Geelong	Swan Hill
Glenormiston	Wangaratta
Hopetoun	Warragul
Horsham	

5.66 The Committee notes that the locations of these courses were distributed relatively widely over Victoria, although the Committee also notes that coaching volunteers from more distant locations in East Gippsland and the North West of Victoria were still required to travel some distance to attend courses. Of concern to the Committee was the number of courses convened by Football Victoria in rural and regional Victoria in comparison to metropolitan areas. The number of courses was not proportionate to the number of players in country Victoria (and therefore, presumably, was not proportionate to the number of coaches in country Victoria):

**Table 23: Coaching courses convened by Football Victoria, 2003-04<sup>514</sup>**

Rural and Regional Victoria		Metropolitan Melbourne	
Grade	Courses	Grade	Courses
Senior	13	Senior	25
Youth/Junior	16	Youth/Junior	44
Auskick	5	Auskick	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 24: Coaching courses convened by Football Victoria by football players, 2003-04<sup>515</sup>**

Rural and Regional Victoria				
Grade	Courses	% Courses	Players	% Players
Senior, Youth, and Junior	29	30%	53875	47%
Auskick	5	14%	17350	38%
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>71225</b>	<b>44%</b>

Metropolitan Melbourne				
Grade	Courses	% Courses	Players	% Players
Senior, Youth, and Junior	69	70%	61800	53%
Auskick	31	86%	27784	62%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>89584</b>	<b>56%</b>

<sup>514</sup> Source: Football Victoria Development, 'Coaching', viewed 28 July 2004, <<http://svc227.bne117v.server-web.com/vfdf/vfdfcoaching.htm>>.

<sup>515</sup> Source: Football Victoria Development, 'Coaching', viewed 28 July 2004, <<http://svc227.bne117v.server-web.com/vfdf/vfdfcoaching.htm>>; Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Victoria, email, 24 May 2004.

5.67 Table 24 shows the number of courses convened and the number of players in rural and regional Victoria, and metropolitan Melbourne, respectively.<sup>516</sup> It shows that 47% of all senior, youth and junior footballers played in country Victoria, yet only 30% of all coaching courses were convened in country Victoria. Country Auskick participants comprise 38% of all Victorian Auskick participants, yet only 14% of coaching courses were convened in country Victoria. Overall, country football players account for 44% of all players, yet only 25% of coaching courses convened by Football Victoria are in country Victoria. Given the additional cost placed upon many country coaching volunteers because they have to travel substantial distances to attend courses, the Committee is of the opinion that the number of courses convened in country Victoria by Football Victoria should be increased, so that they are at least in proportion to the number of football participants in country Victoria.

### **Trainers**

5.68 Witnesses told the Committee that trainers were often difficult to recruit, because there were not enough qualified volunteers and because a number of trainers were required for each club (around three to four per club). The Committee also received evidence that trainers are also increasingly paid for their duties in the VCFL, although payment to trainers was not practiced by every club and there was a wide range of variation in the payments trainers received (see Chapter Four).<sup>517</sup> The Committee also heard that in the case of trainers, accreditation was crucial, given issues surrounding potential litigation associated with the medical treatment of injured players:

*The shortage of trained and adequate medical staff is a huge factor around this town [Bendigo], not only for us but I am sure for the country leagues as well. We need to provide some sort of funding to educate and train the people who want to be medical staff and get involved with football clubs, which has a ripple effect back to OHS, insurance and public liability, because if any of*

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<sup>516</sup> Player numbers are those provided by Football Victoria. These are different from player numbers provided by the VCFL, as they exclude interstate players (who are not the responsibility of Football Victoria), and as certain players from the VCFL (Mornington Peninsula and other regions) are categorised by Football Victoria as within its metropolitan zone.

<sup>517</sup> Paul Barnard, General Manager, Bendigo Bombers Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 36; Keith den Houting, Chief Executive Officer and Secretary/Treasurer, Golden Rivers Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 9; Graeme Kurzman, Vice-President, Kilmore Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 25; Simon Rule, Vice-President, Robinvale Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 39; Wayne Shawcross, President, Robinvale Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 36.

*these trainers are not trained and they touch our players and something goes wrong, we get sued.*<sup>518</sup>

Many issues that are pertinent to trainers are similar to those encountered for coaches. The time and cost burdens are greater for trainers than for coaches, as the basic trainers course requires two nine-hour sessions to complete and in 2003-2004 cost \$170. The VCFL provides a subsidy of \$75 for volunteers who take part in the trainer accreditation course.

5.69 The Committee was told that various support programs run in country Victoria for the benefit of trainers were very well received. Michael Harrison, General Manager of the Hampden Football Netball League, told the Committee:

*When the Essendon Football Club were here in Warrnambool we had forum nights. We had one for administration, which was conducted by Peter Jackson.... One of the important ones they had was a trainers one. A lot of the trainers from the area, from all leagues around here, went to it. Walking out, following them out — because I was one of the last to leave — a guy from Essendon said to his partners when he was going out to the car, 'I could have gone for another hour or two quite easily. I kept it simple; they listened, they looked. I could have gone for a lot longer than I did'. It was good to hear that he got plenty of response from the trainers who did attend.*<sup>519</sup>

The Committee was also interested in a proposal put by Oscar Aertssen, Regional Manager, North West, VCFL, who suggested that AFL clubs could invite country football trainers to spend time with AFL club trainers, so that country trainers could learn from their observations at an elite level.<sup>520</sup>

5.70 The Committee acknowledges the contribution of the AFL Community Camps to the development of football volunteers and also recognises that some trainers already receive valuable experience from working with select AFL clubs, although it appears that this is largely limited to elite competition clubs, such as the Bendigo Bombers Football Club in the Victorian Football League.<sup>521</sup> The Committee believes there would be considerable benefit to country football if these initiatives were extended and/or increased throughout country Victoria for trainers and for other football volunteers. The Committee therefore recommends:

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<sup>518</sup> Warren Driscoll, Chairman, Bendigo Bombers Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 35.

<sup>519</sup> Michael Harrison, General Manager, Hampden Football Netball League, *Public Hearing*, Warrnambool, 10 March 2004, p. 11.

<sup>520</sup> Oscar Aertssen, Regional Manager, North West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 22.

<sup>521</sup> Paul Barnard, General Manager, Bendigo Bombers Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 36.

**Recommendation 12: That the Australian Football League (AFL) develop a system to ensure that AFL clubs establish ongoing relationships with specific districts, leagues and/or clubs in country Victoria, and provide AFL club-based mentoring and support to coaches, trainers and medical staff associated with those country football districts, leagues and/or clubs.**

### **Administration tasks**

*It [administration] quite often gets left to the same old people. We are finding that some people drift in and a few drift out probably through lack of numbers in the population here. We are not getting a lot of those volunteers coming through. We could certainly do with more.<sup>522</sup>*

5.71 An issue raised consistently during the course of this Inquiry concerned the work burden experienced by volunteers who performed administrative duties for country football clubs and leagues. The Committee heard that football administrators are required to perform a large number of administrative duties, and that many of these tasks were complex and required high levels of expertise. Consequently, football volunteers who assumed administrative duties tended to dedicate far more time to football activities than volunteers who were responsible for other tasks associated with running a football club or league:

*Estimates within our league suggest that each club secretary commit some 20 to 30 hours per week, and to find a volunteer with the time and expertise to commit to particularly rural communities is near on impossible.<sup>523</sup>*

5.72 Some witnesses also suggested that the work burden experienced by administrative volunteers often meant that they would only continue in those roles for a few years before dropping out due to exhaustion:

*...volunteers are few and far between. The people who are willing to be there on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, they are just hard to come by. The people who do do it you probably get in the role for three or four years and then they are burnt out. They suggest they have had enough and it is time for somebody else to take it on and they just basically force the*

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<sup>522</sup> Colin Kelly, Executive Committee Member, Seymour District Junior Football League, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 9.

<sup>523</sup> Bill Storey-Smith, Secretary/Manager, Central Highlands Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 8.

*hand of the club to get someone to do it. There are not too many people who stick their hand up and say, 'I'll get in there and do my job'*<sup>524</sup>

5.73 The Committee heard from a number of witnesses that the workload for football club administrators has increased in recent years, and that this is largely due to the increased attention paid to insurance and compliance obligations arising from new laws. Administrative tasks cited by witnesses also included player clearances and registration, insurance, taxation of player payments, food handling and serving of alcohol requirements, and tasks associated with GST and superannuation.

5.74 The Committee notes that the complexity and volume of tasks that administrative volunteers perform may act as a significant disincentive for potential volunteers, and particularly young volunteers, to become involved. The Committee heard that people without prior administration experience often work long hours as they endeavour to learn how various systems work, and what regulations and requirements apply to their club or league. The Committee heard that the VCFL Area Managers provide valuable administrative assistance and expertise for many clubs and leagues, particularly those undergoing amalgamation, or new clubs. The VCFL has also informed the Committee that some experienced club administrators may benefit from a better understanding of their regulatory obligations with regard to matters such as employer superannuation contributions.<sup>525</sup> The Committee therefore considers that there is considerable potential for football club and league administrators to benefit from a comprehensive and relatively detailed resource to guide them in core aspects of club administration. The Committee notes that the AFL has prepared a guide, the AFL 'Club Start-up Kit', for groups that are considering the formation of an Australian rules football club.<sup>526</sup> However, the Committee also notes that this document focuses on generic issues relating to the administration of football clubs, and in particular, junior and amateur football club administration. Therefore the Committee recommends:

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<sup>524</sup> Bruce Hartigan, Chairman, Horsham Football and Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 29.

<sup>525</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 6.

<sup>526</sup> Australian Football League, *AFL club start-up kit*, AFL Publishing, Melbourne, 2003.



**Recommendation 13:** That the Australian Football League ‘Club Start-up Kit’, or a version of that document, be adapted to provide assistance to existing and emerging clubs, and that it be:

- (i) expanded to include consideration of issues relating to the payment of players; and**
- (ii) that sections of that document describing financial activities and reporting requirements for football clubs provide more detailed descriptions and templates of how to manage complex financial transactions and regulatory requirements; and**
- (iii) that this resource be offered on-line, in electronic form, and in hard-copy.**

5.75 The Committee is also aware that many of the administrative issues currently experienced by football clubs and leagues are shared by other sporting organisations throughout Victoria. Furthermore, while the Committee believes that the resource document described in Recommendation 13 would be valuable to grassroots football administrators throughout Victoria, a comprehensive program for the support of all grassroots sporting organisations is required. Consequently, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 14:** That in the order of \$2 million per annum over five years be made available by the State Government to develop and provide a comprehensive, integrated program to assist volunteers in community sport in the following areas:

- (i) sports administration;**
- (ii) understanding and managing volunteer liability insurance issues;**
- (iii) alcohol and food handling competencies;**
- (iv) awareness of current grants and resources available to sports organisations;**
- (v) general sports administration and organisation skills acquisition;**

**and that programs should be run in rural and regional centres across Victoria to ensure reasonable access for all people.**

## **Ground reports and local government**

5.76 The Committee heard from some witnesses that, in some cases, football club volunteers were required to complete two safety inspections of grounds prior to matches in order to fulfil the insurance requirements of both the AFL insurance program and those of their particular local government. Chris Soumilas, General Manager of the West Gippsland Latrobe Football League, told the Committee:

*At the present time, in insurance, we are asked by the VCFL and the insurers that we carry out ground match reports before we can play. They are all the insurance requirements. Now we have local governments wanting us to carry out a different report, but in their terminology. All of a sudden it is just a duplication of work that really does not need to be done. The insurance company insures the footy club. Whatever happens out on the ground is covered, so I am at a loss as to why we then have to do another one for the local council. Surely they can mix in? I believe most of the councils are with JLT Sport, which is the same insurer that the VCFL has.<sup>527</sup>*

While this comprises only a small part of the administrative duties of football volunteers, the Committee believes that in cases where two insurance reports are required local councils and football clubs should work together with their insurers to produce a single, comprehensive form that satisfies the requirements of both parties. The Committee received in-principal agreement from Rob Spence, Chief Executive Officer of the Municipal Association of Victoria, that this could be achieved.<sup>528</sup> Consequently, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 15: That the Municipal Association of Victoria work with local councils and the Victorian Country Football League to develop a system to reduce the number of ground reports required before a game from two to one.**

## **Taxation**

5.77 The Committee notes that a number of umpires' representatives called upon it to recommend that umpires be categorised as 'hobbyists'.<sup>529</sup> Under taxation law,

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<sup>527</sup> Chris Soumilas, General Manager, West Gippsland Latrobe Football League, *Public Hearing*, Leongatha, 7 April 2004, p. 8.

<sup>528</sup> Rob Spence, Chief Executive Officer, Municipal Association of Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 46.

<sup>529</sup> Shane Carbines, Chairman, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 30; David Drane, General Manager, Umpiring, Victorian Country Football League and Victorian Country Football Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 12; Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer,

payments or other benefits received in connection with the provision of personal ‘sporting services’ are taxable. However, money and other benefits received from the pursuit of a pastime or hobby, including a sporting hobby, are not assessable income for tax purposes. Sporting clubs or associations, such as umpires associations, are able to apply to the Australian Taxation Office to clarify the tax status of match payments or other benefits. The Committee was told that the Geelong Football Umpires League applied to the Australian Taxation Office for such a ruling. The Australian Taxation Office found that income received by members of the Geelong Football Umpires League should not be considered as assessable income for tax purposes, and that losses and outgoings incurred by Geelong Football Umpires League umpires were not tax deductible.

5.78 While the universal categorisation of umpires as ‘hobbyists’ may have certain benefits for umpiring associations, the Committee believes that there is considerable potential for the administrative burdens on umpire and football administrators to be eased with a blanket recommendation, covering both umpires and players, that would ensure the duties of administrators involving taxation would be reduced substantially.

5.79 The Committee understands that a number of administrative activities currently undertaken by football clubs and umpires associations in order to comply with regulations pertaining to the payment of participants, including income tax payments, Pay As You Go payment summaries (formerly group certificates), and superannuation contributions, add substantially to the time demands on administrators. The Committee is of the opinion that there is some potential for these administrative requirements to be reduced in cases where players and umpires earn marginal incomes from football payments. In particular, the Committee considers that in cases where annual earnings through football by players and umpires is low, tax deductions generated by them through their participation in football may be greater than their earnings over the course of a financial year. In such cases, the net return to government through taxation may be negligible, yet create substantial paperwork for taxation authorities and football administrators. For this reason, the Committee

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Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 6; Bill Storey-Smith, Secretary/Manager, Central Highlands Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 9.

recommends that options be explored for tax exemptions where annual earnings of players and umpires are below a certain threshold.

5.80 The Committee also considers that, if a tax-free threshold was established for footballers and umpires, it would likely have the effect of encouraging football club administrators and players to accept lower remuneration in order to avoid filing a tax return for secondary income (in the case of players), or having to submit Pay As You Go payment summaries and engage in other bureaucratic requirements related to income payments (in the case of football administrators). The Committee is also of the opinion that similar requirements in relation to superannuation and other payments (such as payroll tax, long service leave and recreation leave) on behalf of employers could be investigated, with a view to reducing the workload on umpires' associations and football administrators where payments to participants are of small or marginal value.

**Recommendation 16: That the State Government make representations to the federal Treasurer, the Australian Taxation Office and other appropriate authorities to have participants in local football competitions, namely umpires and players, who receive less than the tax free threshold per annum (currently \$6000) declared as engaging in a hobby and therefore not subject to taxation, superannuation contributions and other associated requirements for these payments.**

### ***Conclusion***

5.81 Volunteers are integral to the healthy functioning of communities, including sporting clubs, in country Victoria. The Committee has noted through the course of this chapter that there are a number of challenges for volunteers involved in country football. The amount of work done by volunteers in country football is significant, and the Committee believes that this contribution to country communities should receive appropriate recognition. As discussed in previous chapters, measures are being taken to reduce the work burden on volunteers (such as through programs run by the VCFL). However, the Committee believes that opportunities remain for government and peak football bodies to further reduce the workload on volunteers. There are also opportunities to better recognise the important role of umpires in

football and to encourage more people to participate in sport, either as players, coaches or volunteers. Opportunities also exist to better support the increasingly important role played by trainers and other medical personnel in country football competitions.



## **Chapter Six**

# **Issues for consideration: club infrastructure and maintenance**

### ***Introduction***

6.1 In Chapter Four, the Committee considered some of the financial challenges facing football in rural and regional Victoria. In that chapter, the Committee noted that there is considerable variation in the fees and charges imposed for ground rental and use. This is because there are a variety of ground management arrangements across the state, each with their own fee policy. Fees and charges therefore vary between regions, shires, leagues and clubs. This chapter considers another major issue associated with football grounds and clubrooms – maintenance and facility upgrades. The Committee received a large amount of evidence about these issues through submissions and public hearings and it appears from this evidence that many football leagues and clubs are struggling to maintain their facilities at a level that meets the needs of players (particularly netballers), umpires and club members and satisfies legal requirements. Much of the evidence suggested that the quality of playing fields has been significantly reduced due to the recent drought. This chapter therefore also considers water and drought relief measures.

6.2 The chapter begins with a discussion of the sporting facility grants available through Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV), part of the Department for Victorian Communities. It then goes on to consider concerns that witnesses have identified with the current facility grants system. The chapter discusses the adequacy of grounds, courts, pavilions and changing facilities for footballers, netballers and umpires. The adequacy of lighting at many grounds and the need to upgrade social club facilities to encompass the needs of families is also taken into account. Finally, issues concerning ground surface quality and water availability are discussed.

### ***Sport and Recreation Victoria Facility Grants***

6.3 As discussed in Chapter Six, SRV told the Committee that over \$23 million in direct funding was provided in the financial years 2000-01 to 2003-04 (inclusive)

toward initiatives relating to country based football, netball and/or cricket.<sup>530</sup> This includes state level funding (\$13,500,000), community facility funding (\$7,442,040), country action grants (\$127,155), state sporting association grants (\$291,225) and funding from Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and the Community Support Fund. However, the Committee notes that more than half of all SRV funding provided for country football, netball and cricket over the past four financial years has been allocated to the upgrade of the Geelong AFL ground – Kardinia Park – which is of limited benefit to country football and netball.

6.4 The Community Facility Funding Program has most relevance to the maintenance of country football and netball facilities. Features of the program are discussed below.

### **Community facility funding program**

6.5 According to information provided to the Committee, SRV's Community Facility Funding Program contributes to the provision of high-quality and accessible community sport and recreation facilities across Victoria. The specific objectives of this program are:

- to encourage a planned approach to the development of sport and recreation facilities;
- to encourage innovation in sport and recreation facility provision;
- to support high-quality, accessible, inclusive and robust sport and recreation environments at the community level;
- to increase and broaden community access to leisure participation opportunities; and
- to strengthen communities through sport and recreation participation.<sup>531</sup>

Information provided to the Committee by the Department for Victorian Communities states that over \$7.4 million was allocated from the Community Facility Funding Program to fund projects relating to country football, cricket and netball in rural and

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<sup>530</sup> Department for Victorian Communities, *Factual information to support the parliamentary inquiry into country football*, 2004, p. 9.

<sup>531</sup> Department for Victorian Communities, *Community Facility Funding 2004/2005: guidelines and application*, Department for Victorian Communities, 2004, p. 3.



regional Victoria in the 2000-01 to 2003-04 financial years.<sup>532</sup> With regard to country football, the three most relevant Community Facility Funding Program categories are Planning, Major Facilities and Minor Facilities.

### ***Planning***

6.6 The objectives of the *Planning Projects Funding Program* are to encourage:

- recreation planning that is integrated and linked to other planning processes of local council;
- recreation planning that utilises partnerships and/or strategies for community strengthening;
- subregional and regional planning and development where possible; and
- thorough feasibility analysis and business planning for all major facility developments.

6.7 Two types of planning activity are funded under this category: recreational planning and facility feasibility studies. Recreational planning can focus on a number of areas, such as strategic municipal, sub-regional or regional recreational planning, planning for specific localities, planning for specific facility types or planning for specific sports or activities (such as football and netball). Facility feasibility studies cover studies into the feasibility of new facility developments, redevelopment of existing facilities, rationalisation of a number of like facilities (such as football grounds) and regional facility provision. External consultancy fees and costs associated with the production of a study report, such as printing expenses, are funded in both categories. The maximum grant available from SRV is \$30,000. The Department for Victorian Communities advises that, since the inception of these grants, 46 projects have been funded which benefit rural and regional football, netball and/or cricket clubs, with a total value of \$697,015.

### ***Major Facilities***

6.8 Major Facilities funding applies to projects which are designed to benefit sport or recreation and have a total value greater than \$150,000 (GST exclusive). SRV grants range from \$50,000 to a maximum grant of \$500,000 per project. Each

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<sup>532</sup> Department for Victorian Communities, *Factual information to support the parliamentary inquiry into country football*, 2004, p. 10.

municipality can apply for one Major Facilities grant a year. Under the funding formula, SRV will match each dollar raised or provided locally in rural municipalities. In regional cities (Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong), SRV will contribute \$1 for every \$2 raised locally, to a maximum of \$500,000. The funding formula follows:

- Metropolitan shires: SRV \$1:\$3 local
- Outer metropolitan shires: SRV \$1:\$2 local
- Regional cities: SRV \$1:\$2 local
- Rural shires: SRV \$1:\$1 local

The primary aim of Major Facilities funding is to support a coordinated and integrated approach to the development of major sport and recreational facilities throughout Victoria. According to funding information available through SRV, this category assists local government to respond to municipal and regional level needs for major sport and recreation facilities.

### ***Minor Facilities development***

6.9 Minor Facilities funding applies to projects designed to benefit sport or recreation with a total value up to \$150,000 (GST exclusive). SRV provides a maximum grant of \$50,000 per project, with SRV contributing \$2 for every \$1 raised locally in rural municipalities. In regional cities, SRV provides \$1.50 for every \$1 raised locally to a maximum of \$50,000. Every local council has the opportunity to submit three projects to SRV per annum but only two applications may be for projects with total project costs in excess of \$50,000. SRV also considers applications for development projects staged over time, provided that the project stages are fully self-contained and supported by appropriate planning documentation. An example of a staged development is the Greenhill Recreation Reserve in Wallan, which was funded in the 2002-03 round to upgrade change rooms and toilets. Stage 2 of this development involves improving canteen, kiosk and meeting room facilities. The former Delatite Shire Council received a staged grant to redevelop the Mansfield netball courts. The Wangaratta Football Club complex refurbishment is also a staged project. The funding formula follows:

- Metropolitan shires: SRV \$1:\$1 local
- Outer metropolitan shires: SRV \$1.5:\$1 local
- Regional cities: SRV \$1.5:\$1 local

- Rural shires: SRV \$2:\$1 local

SRV also recognises in-kind costs such as labour and materials as part of the local contribution to projects to a maximum of 25% of the total project cost.

6.10 According to SRV, minor facility grants are designed to assist sport and recreation organisations, communities and local governments to work together through the development of grassroots sport and recreation facilities and environments. Thus, minor facility grants, like major facility grants, apply to all sport and recreation activity, not just football and netball. Under the funding guidelines, only councils are eligible to apply directly to SRV for minor facility grants. Community organisations, such as local football and netball clubs, have the opportunity to access funds from the Minor Facilities category by applying directly to their local council.

### ***The effectiveness of the current facility grants program***

6.11 During public hearings across rural and regional Victoria, the Committee heard some evidence that the SRV facilities grants scheme is an effective program through which local councils and communities can obtain funds to upgrade football and netball facilities. For example, Phil Currie, Recreation Manager at the Southern Grampians Shire Council, told the Committee “I suppose our main source of government assistance for our recreation reserve upgrades is through the Sport and Recreation Victoria Minor Facilities assistance grants scheme. That has been quite good, and they are very open to the upgrade of facilities.”<sup>533</sup> However, the Committee also received evidence from submissions and presentations suggesting that the Community Facility Funding Program, and particularly the Minor Facilities funding program, could be improved in a number of respects. Some witnesses expressed concern about the complexity of the application process, the perceived lack of information, support and feedback, the size of the grants and the current system of allocation. Whilst acknowledging these concerns, the Committee is however aware that assistance with preparing applications is provided by a range of organisations, including regional sporting associations, local councils and SRV regional offices.

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<sup>533</sup> Phil Currie, Leisure Services Coordinator, Southern Grampians Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Warrnambool, 10 March 2004, p. 3.

## **Complexity of application process**

6.12 Under the Minor Facilities funding program, local councils apply to SRV for funding for up to three projects. In order for local councils to develop their submission to SRV, sporting clubs are required to provide project details, anticipated outcomes, stakeholders and responses to the SRV evaluation criteria, identify key tasks and anticipated dates of completion, provide a breakdown of the project budget and identify project income sources. Quotes must be provided with all applications and evidence of funds is also required, including bank statements, loan details, letters of support and the value of voluntary labour or in-kind support.

6.13 The Committee heard evidence from a number of witnesses that the current application process is complex and that successful submissions often require high level writing skills which some volunteer administrators may not possess. The Committee was told by Beres Fitch, Vice-President of the Bendigo Umpires Association, that the complexity of the process is a deterrent to football clubs, netball clubs and umpire associations making applications:

*I have looked on the sport and recreation site a couple of times for the umpires and other businesses. Applying for a grant is nearly a nightmare. What category you fall into, how much paperwork you have to go through and your submission — it is just an absolute nightmare. It is all right if you are in a business situation where you have the support but a lot of clubs and associations do not have that, and to really go down the line people would look at the web site and just go, 'No, I am not going to apply; it is too hard'.<sup>534</sup>*

Oscar Aertssen, Regional Manager, North-West with the Victorian Country Football League (VCFL) similarly told the Committee that the “reams and reams of paperwork required for a little \$5,000 or \$10,000 grant – which is little to the government but to us is an upgrade of a facility for the future – is mind blowing.”<sup>535</sup> Although speaking in the context of a grant application for \$125,000, the President of the Orbost Snowy Rovers Football Club, Garry Squires, told the Committee:

*Grant applications have been talked about. We have recently put in for a grant at our club, and it is a really complex process. You have got to have planning documents, and you have to put the thing in the context of all the other facilities in the town. We finished up with an 8 or 10 page document to try and justify a grant for new change room facilities, because ours is one of those that is in a pretty bad state. At the end of the day we were told that it*

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<sup>534</sup> Beres Fitch, Vice-President, Bendigo Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 22.

<sup>535</sup> Oscar Aertssen, Regional Manager, North West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 20.

*probably would not be successful because we did not have enough detail in the costings for it...it should be easier than that to try and build an asset.*<sup>536</sup>

6.14 The Committee also received evidence from witnesses who expressed a belief that, in order to be successful in the current application process, football clubs need to obtain the services of professional submission writers, often at considerable cost. The Committee was told “it is a big task to sit down and write a grant.”<sup>537</sup> Another witness, Craig Keating of Heywood, described the impact on smaller clubs who are unable to use the services of professional submission writers:

*In Hamilton and Portland we now have people, ex local government employees, who are writing submissions for clubs, trying to write the best one, because they know that is how they get the money. That is demoralising to the small club which writes its own submission with a worthy requirement and gets it knocked over because some professional submission writer has knocked them off and done a better job.*<sup>538</sup>

6.15 Alan Davies, Area Manager, North-West Central with the VCFL, suggested to the Committee that there needs to be better coordination between government departments, local councils and communities to assist local sporting clubs with their applications. According to Mr Davies “we probably need to look at a more coordinated and planned approach.”<sup>539</sup> Keith den Houting, Executive Officer and Secretary/Treasurer of the Golden Rivers Football League, told the Committee that there is an opportunity for the State Government to provide better assistance to local sporting clubs with the grant application process through additional training. Cr den Houting explained:

*Some people are very skilled at putting in grant applications, but other clubs cannot cope with it and we need some training. My suggestion was that people within government organisations who are already dealing with grant applications could come up and run some courses to help people with them, or even help the club or body concerned with their applications. That would certainly be beneficial and would save the clubs a lot of time and hassle.*<sup>540</sup>

6.16 Garry Squires, President of the Orbost Snowy Rovers Football Club, suggested that SRV establish a two-tiered system, whereby expressions of interest are

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<sup>536</sup> Garry Squires, President, Orbost Snowy Rovers Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 22.

<sup>537</sup> Eric Bott, General Manager, Goulburn Valley Football League, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 50.

<sup>538</sup> Craig Keating, individual, *Public Hearing*, Warrnambool, 10 March 2004, p. 23.

<sup>539</sup> Alan Davies, Area Manager, North West/Central, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 18.

<sup>540</sup> Keith den Houting, Chief Executive Officer and Secretary/Treasurer, Golden Rivers Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 9.

sought, viable grant applications are short-listed and government assistance provided to enable short-listed applicants to write detailed submissions. Mr Squires said “[w]e were told we should spend a couple of thousand dollars on getting our whole building costed out accurately and so on, but we have not got that sort of money to throw around on the hope that we might get a go with a grant this year.”<sup>541</sup>

6.17 On the basis of the evidence received, the Committee believes that the State Government should review the current application process for Minor Facilities funding to identify areas where the process of applying for grants can be simplified. The Committee also believes that local government should give consideration to introducing a two-stage application process, whereby expressions of interest are called for and preferred viable applicants are provided with assistance, financial or otherwise, to prepare a detailed funding submission. The Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 17: That Sport and Recreation Victoria undertake a review of the current application process for Minor Facilities grants with a view to simplifying the process and reducing the administrative burden on local sporting clubs.**

**Recommendation 18: That local government give consideration to introducing a two-stage application process for Minor Facilities grants, whereby short listed applicants are given assistance to prepare detailed funding submissions where required.**

### **Lack of available support and information**

6.18 Each year, SRV produces a publication entitled ‘Community Facilities Funding: Guidelines and Applications’ to provide information on the funding program and application process. A shorter guide to making application for Minor Facilities grants is also produced. In addition, SRV provides funds to VicSport to produce and update a *Guide to Grants and Funding Programs for Victorian Sporting and Recreation Service Organisations*. This guide details council and shire funding

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<sup>541</sup> Garry Squires, President, Orbost Snowy Rovers Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 23.

programs, with tips on how to access them and what makes for a successful application.<sup>542</sup> The guide also outlines available State Government funding programs, as well as those of agencies like VicHealth and leading corporate and philanthropic bodies. An interactive, on-line version of the guide can be accessed through the SRV and VicSport websites.

6.19 In evidence to the Committee the Executive Director of SRV, Peter Hertan, said that SRV also provides support to applicants through its regional officers. Dr Hertan told the Committee:

*Sport and Recreation Victoria has regional officers in five regions across the state and part of the exercise is our people are available to work with those clubs and the council to help develop those grant programs. Often a grant would miss out the first time but sometimes it is not because they have written a bad grant but because they have not done all the proper planning and other things that are needed to make a grant work. Our people say talk to council, talk to the other clubs around, think about what you are going to do with the oval, is there some other group that can use it — those sort of things. You develop a better proposal, council then supports it and there is a high chance we will support it. So there is a process that is gone through and our regional officers are available to work with those clubs or councils in the grants programs.*<sup>543</sup>

However, during its public hearings and through submissions, the Committee heard that some football clubs are concerned about the level of information, support and feedback provided by SRV. One witness, Alan Davies, Area Manager, North-West Central with the VCFL, told the Committee that although the *Guide to Grants and Funding Programs for Victorian Sporting and Recreation Service Organisations* is an excellent resource, he does not believe that the guide is well known in rural and regional communities. Mr Davies said to the Committee that “[t]he State Government has a role in regard to providing these types of services and resources that actually filter down and are able to assist clubs and leagues in applying for grants and funds.”<sup>544</sup>

6.20 Mr Davies also told the Committee that the amount of information provided in correspondence advising football clubs of the outcome of their grant applications

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<sup>542</sup> Sport and Recreation Victoria, 'Guide to grants and funding programs for Victorian sporting and recreation service organisations', viewed 26 August 2004, <www.sport.vic.gov.au>.

<sup>543</sup> Peter Hertan, Executive Director, Sport and Recreation Victoria, Department for Victorian Communities, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 30.

<sup>544</sup> Alan Davies, Area Manager, North West/Central, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 20.

could be improved. Whilst recognising that there is a high volume of applications and limitations in available funding, Mr Davies suggested that it would be valuable for clubs to be provided with feedback on how future submissions could be improved. The Committee understands that the need for appropriate feedback arises at two stages of the application process: when local government communicates with individual sporting organisations and when SRV communicates with local government. Although local government has limited resources, the Committee believes it is important for all clubs who make application for Minor Facilities grants to be given sufficient feedback to enable them to identify opportunities for improvement and become more competitive in the submission process. It is also important that local government be provided with sufficient information by SRV to enable them to improve their own application processes, where necessary, and to communicate effectively with their local sporting groups.

**Recommendation 19a: That when corresponding with applicants for Minor Facilities grants who have not been selected for consideration by Sport and Recreation Victoria, local government identify why the application was not successful and how the funding submission could be improved in the future.**

**Recommendation 19b: That when corresponding with local councils that have unsuccessfully applied for Minor Facilities grants, Sport and Recreation Victoria identify why the application was not successful and how the funding submission could be improved in the future.**

### **Availability and size of grants**

6.21 Another area of concern expressed to the Committee was the size of available grants. For example, the submission from the Swan Hill Rural City Council explained:

*The State Government provides some support for capital works via the Minor Facilities Grants Program administered through the Department of Sport and Recreation. Unfortunately...very few funds are received to support the provision of additional capital works at football/netball clubs.*<sup>545</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Submission*, no. 32, 16 December 2003, p. 4.



Chris Lewis, Manager of Recreation Services with the Greater Geelong City Council, told the Committee that “there is a capping on the total cost of a project at \$150,000. Whilst the state is prepared to put \$50,000 in, it is our experience that it is almost impossible to do a pavilion upgrade for \$150,000. It is our experience that it is more likely to be \$300,000 to \$400,000.”<sup>546</sup> Another witness, representing the Picola and District Football League, told the Committee that there has been a reduction in the amount the amount of money available to small clubs through the various grants schemes, which has meant that little or no facility maintenance has been undertaken.<sup>547</sup> Chris Brown, the ex-President of the Underbool Football Club said to the Committee that “at the Underbool recreation reserve I have \$100,000 sitting ready waiting for another grant to go with it so that we can build a new social facility at the recreation reserve. We just cannot get the grants to match it.”<sup>548</sup>

6.22 An additional area of concern was the reduction in the number of grants available in each year. Bill McCarthy, a local football enthusiast from Shepparton and Mr Brown both told the Committee that the number of available grants in each year has reduced from five to three,<sup>549</sup> which is placing increasing pressure on the ability of football and netball clubs to maintain their facilities. The Committee also recognises that prioritising projects at a local level is an important part of the grant application process.

6.23 In 2000-01, SRV increased their funding contribution ratio for rural municipalities from dollar for dollar to two dollars for every one dollar raised locally. In 2004-05, SRV increased the funding contribution for regional cities from dollar for dollar to one dollar and fifty cents for every dollar raised locally. Some witnesses told the Committee that the change in the funding formula has been a positive development. Craig Niemann, Chief Executive Officer of Loddon Shire Council, said that the increased contribution from the State Government for minor facility developments in rural Victoria has been welcomed “because it helps our communities

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<sup>546</sup> Greater Geelong City Council, *Submission*, no. 7, 19 November 2003, p. 2.

<sup>547</sup> Bruce Tuhon, Senior Vice-President, Picola and District Football Netball League, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 61.

<sup>548</sup> Chris Brown, individual, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 24.

<sup>549</sup> Bill McCarthy, individual, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 38.

to put their money where they need to put it.”<sup>550</sup> Similarly, the Chief Executive Officer of Hindmarsh Shire Council, Neil Jacobs, informed the Committee that “[t]hese 2:1 grants are much appreciated and often are used for safety improvements...”<sup>551</sup>

6.24 The Committee believes that the current funding ratio for minor facility grants, which provides relatively greater financial support from the State Government for upgrades of rural and regional facilities, is appropriate. The Committee recommends that Minor Facilities funding grants through Sport and Recreation Victoria be retained at the current two dollar to one dollar ratio for rural sporting projects and one dollar fifty cents to one dollar ratio for regional sporting projects.

**Recommendation 20: That in continuing recognition of the reduced fundraising capacity in rural and regional areas, the current funding ratio for Minor Facilities grants, whereby the State Government contributes \$2 for every \$1 locally raised for projects in rural shires and \$1.50 for every \$1 locally raised for projects in regional cities, be retained.**

### **Inequity in grant allocation**

6.25 The final area of concern expressed to the Committee about the SRV facility grants program related to inequity in grant allocation. Minor facility grants are allocated on a per-shire basis, rather than a head of population basis, and this was perceived as inequitable by Rod Ward, Chief Executive Officer of Ballarat Football League. Mr Ward told the Committee:

*In my mind — and I have provided an example to substantiate this — there is something wrong with the current capital works funding program. To highlight this the City of Ballarat is the second largest regional city in Victoria, with an approximate population of 85 000 people. Within the boundaries we have 8 senior and 11 junior football clubs, countless cricket clubs, basketball, tennis, bowls, croquet clubs and so on, yet under the current legislation the City of Ballarat is only able to submit three applications to Sport and Recreation Victoria for Minor Facilities funding. I highlight the Borough of Queenscliffe, with an approximate population of 4000. I have nothing against the Borough of Queenscliffe — I grew up there — but within its boundary it has one football club, one cricket club, one tennis club and one bowls club, yet it is also able to submit three sport and*

<sup>550</sup> Craig Niemann, Chief Executive Officer, Loddon Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 16.

<sup>551</sup> Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 19, 5 December 2003, p. 7.

*recreation facility grants. The facility funding program, whilst it is fantastic, needs to be proportional on population and take into account the number of clubs with input, on a needs basis.*<sup>552</sup>

6.26 The Committee is concerned however that allocation of grants on a per capita rather than a per shire basis would be likely to disadvantage residents of more remote and less populous shires. However, the Committee also believes that the existing structure of the minor facility grants program creates the potential for inequities and inconsistencies between larger and smaller shires and may not be sufficiently flexible to take account of local or individual needs. For example, the Committee recognises that some rural shires may benefit by being able to apply for a higher number of small grants each year, rather than a maximum of three sizable grants. The Committee wishes to encourage the State Government to ensure that the Minor Facilities program is delivering maximum benefit to country sporting clubs and recommends:

**Recommendation 21: That the State Government review the structure and maximum number of grants available through the Minor Facilities funding program to reduce inequities between smaller and larger shires and to ensure that grants are meeting local needs.**

### ***The need for facility upgrades***

6.27 In 1997, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts ('the ERA Committee') tabled its report *Rethinking the Funding of Community Sporting and Recreational Facilities: A Sporting Chance*.<sup>553</sup> In that report, the ERA Committee received a number of submissions highlighting problems associated with the age of sport and recreational facilities. The Committee stated:

*Not only is their fabric deteriorating and in need of extensive maintenance, their design and standard of construction are poor by present day standards. For example, they had often been constructed as single use, stand-alone entities and do not lend themselves readily to conversion or other uses. The location of older facilities sometimes appears to have been poorly chosen or*

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<sup>552</sup> Rod Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Ballarat Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 3.

<sup>553</sup> House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment Recreation and the Arts, *Rethinking the funding of community sporting and recreational facilities: a sporting chance*, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, October 1997.

*has now been built out, or the facilities are no longer well-positioned to serve their clientele because of demographic changes.*<sup>554</sup>

The ERA Committee's findings are true of many community football and netball facilities in rural Victoria. Mick Murrell, President of the Western Border Football League in the state's south-west (and also encompassing clubs from South Australia) told the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee that football facilities "...definitely need an upgrade. Nothing much has changed since 1950 when I was playing football."<sup>555</sup>

6.28 During the process of speaking to local communities, it became apparent to the Committee that there is an urgent need to upgrade football and netball facilities in four main areas. These are:

- to create or improve facilities for netballers;
- to create or improve facilities for umpires, particularly women umpires;
- to improve the quality of lighting at football grounds; and
- to ensure that social rooms are suitable for families.

Each of these will be discussed in turn.

### **Netball facilities**

6.29 The vital role played by netball clubs in ensuring the livelihood of country football is discussed in previous chapters. Disappointingly, it appears that the condition of netball facilities is not commensurate with the importance of netball in football/netball competitions. Kate Palmer, the Chief Executive of Netball Victoria, told the Committee:

*One of the most significant areas of concern is related to netball facilities. Despite the fact that the State Government has funded projects in football/netball clubs over the past three years, there continues to be major issues about the quality and the availability of the basis infrastructure required for safe and equitable participation in netball. If the football/netball leagues are to be viable, a more strategic approach to facility development by both the VCFL and Netball Victoria is required. We both need to know what facilities are out there, what conditions they are in and what plans are in place to develop and upgrade. The current situation reduces the quality experience, increases the risk of injury to netballers, decreases their personal*

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<sup>554</sup> House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment Recreation and the Arts, *Rethinking the funding of community sporting and recreational facilities: a sporting chance*, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, October 1997, p. 81.

<sup>555</sup> Ivan Murrell, President, Western Border Football League, *Public Hearing*, Warrnambool, 10 March 2004, p. 8.

*safety, and reinforces the perception that netballers are not as important as footballers in rural and regional Victoria.*<sup>556</sup>

6.30 In 2001, Netball Victoria conducted a *Football Netball Leagues/Clubs Netball Structure and Facility Review*. One of the aims of the review was to gather information on the current status of football/netball league netball facilities in rural Victoria. As part of the review, a survey was sent to the secretary of each of the 46 affiliated football/netball leagues and a questionnaire sent to 306 football/netball clubs. Based on responses this survey, Netball Victoria concluded that netball courts (as compared with netball facilities) are generally in good condition. On the issue of netball facilities, however, the review concluded that:

*Many clubs indicated that they do not own their own facilities. At best, the netballers have access to the football club/social club toilet and shower facilities. The majority have access to toilet facilities, however this may only be the use of nearby public toilets. Some clubs indicated that players are required to shower and change at home.*<sup>557</sup>

The report concluded that many netballers work out of a shed or similar structure, which is used as a change room. Concern was expressed about the risk management issues arising from poor facilities, including lack of access to water for player hydration and lack of shelter in extreme weather conditions.

6.31 Concern about netball facilities was shared by many participants in the Inquiry. The Committee heard that:

*It is extremely disappointing to be around a lot of the country football games on the weekends and to see, when we go into the social environment after the game, that the girls are still in their track suits. The guys have already had their showers and they are right for the night, but the girls have to change sometimes in their cars, sometimes in public toilets, and they have no change room facilities in about half of the grounds around the state.*<sup>558</sup>

Rod Ward, Chief Executive Officer of Ballarat Football League told the Committee that no Ballarat Football League venues have separate change room and shower facilities for netballers. As a result, netballers change in their cars or in toilets. The Chief Commissioner of the Wimmera Football League, Ken McLean, similarly told the Committee that although the League's clubs have good facilities in terms of

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<sup>556</sup> Kate Palmer, Chief Executive, Netball Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 20.

<sup>557</sup> Netball Victoria, *Submission*, no. 22, 8 December 2003, annexure 1, p. 5.

<sup>558</sup> Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 7.

clubrooms, there are few facilities for netballers.<sup>559</sup> The same concerns were expressed by Geoff Jones, Administration Manager of the Sunraysia Football League, who said that there is no provision for change or shower facilities for netballers or women umpires at any of the Sunraysia Football League grounds, an issue he described as “extremely serious.”<sup>560</sup> In the Ovens and Murray Football League in the north-east of Victoria, a self-described premier league, only one club has showers available for netballers to use.<sup>561</sup>

6.32 The Committee shares these concerns. It is apparent that many netballers are required to use sub-standard facilities, which expose them to significant health and safety risks. The Committee also recognises the importance of ensuring that netball clubs are treated as equal partners with football clubs and believes that football and netball facilities should be of an equally high standard.

### **Facilities for umpires**

6.33 The lack of suitable facilities for umpires, particularly change and shower facilities, was consistently raised as an issue during public hearings. Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South-West with the VCFL, told the Committee that “[u]mpiring facilities such as training venues, upgrade of change rooms and lighting is...something that is worrying many umpiring groups.”<sup>562</sup> The Bendigo Umpires Association, for example, told the Committee that the changing rooms on many grounds are too small, having been built during the time of one-umpire systems. According to the Bendigo Umpires Association’s President, Kevin Monk, five or six umpires are using facilities designed for one umpire and these facilities are only accessible from the players’ rooms and have no separate entrances and exits away

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<sup>559</sup> Kenneth McLean, Chief Commissioner, Wimmera Football League, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 20. See also Neville Whitley, President, Geelong and District Football League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 25.

<sup>560</sup> Geoff Jones, Administration Manager, Sunraysia Football League, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 29.. The Committee notes however that the Robinvale Football Netball Club has recently upgraded its facilities for netballers and umpires.

<sup>561</sup> Leigh Elder, General Manager, Ovens and Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 8.

<sup>562</sup> Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 20.

from the general public.<sup>563</sup> Given the evidence received by the Committee about the poor behaviour of some spectators towards umpires, this is of concern.

6.34 The Committee is aware that many country football clubs have made significant contributions toward the construction of appropriate facilities for umpires. However, Shane Carbines, Chairman of the Geelong Football Umpires League, told the Committee that the Greater Geelong City Council, which is managing the \$26,000,000 upgrade of Kardinia Park/Skilled Stadium, decided against including an upgrade of the Geelong Football Umpires League clubrooms in the development, despite the fact that the clubrooms are adjacent to Skilled Stadium and are on council land.<sup>564</sup> The Committee believes that the continued involvement of umpires is vital to the continuation of country football competitions and that local government should explore opportunities to improve umpires' facilities.

6.35 The lack of facilities for women umpires in particular was raised with the Committee during public hearings. The General Manager of the Victorian Country Football Umpires Association, David Drane, said “[w]hilst it is fantastic to have female umpires – and let’s have them and encourage them to be involved with the game – there are other issues in relation to facilities.”<sup>565</sup> Mr Carbines told the Committee that “facilities for females are minimal but we cannot afford to upgrade our rooms to make umpiring more attractive to females and support is hard to find in this area.”<sup>566</sup> Mr Monk said that there are quite a few women umpires joining the Association. He explained to the Committee that the facilities are shared between male and female umpires, and access to the facilities is rationed. Mr Monk said “[w]e as a body now allow our females to change first. They have the right to change first. They go out, then we come in to change.”<sup>567</sup>

6.36 In addition to concerns expressed by umpiring associations, league and club representatives also discussed the adequacy of facilities for women umpires. For

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<sup>563</sup> Kevin Monk, President, Bendigo Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 21.

<sup>564</sup> Shane Carbines, Chairman, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 30.

<sup>565</sup> David Drane, General Manager, Umpiring, Victorian Country Football League and Victorian Country Football Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 15.

<sup>566</sup> Shane Carbines, Chairman, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 30.

<sup>567</sup> Kevin Monk, President, Bendigo Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 21.

example, Mr Ward identified a need for separate change and shower rooms for women umpires, as it is often the case that there is only one changing room available for both males and females umpiring in the Ballarat Football League.<sup>568</sup> Similar concerns were expressed by Neville Whitely, President of the Geelong and District Football League and Denise Trickey, Chief Executive Officer of the Colac and District Football League.<sup>569</sup> As with netballers, the lack of adequate facilities for women umpires exposes them to health and safety risks and has a deleterious effect on recruitment. Mr Carbines pointed out that young girls and teenagers are ideal recruits for umpiring, yet they are often embarrassed because their changing facilities are inadequate.<sup>570</sup> The Committee believes that a facility upgrade for women umpires must be a priority in order to grow the game and increase women's participation, and was interested in the following suggestion from Bill Fulton, General Manager of the Geelong Football Umpires League:

*What we are saying is that there should be some sort of condition (in facilities grants) that any new additions or upgrade to any facilities at sporting venues, particularly football venues, should have to have included upgraded facilities that include facilities for female umpires.<sup>571</sup>*

### **Lighting**

6.37 In their submission to the Inquiry, the Warrnambool City Council told the Committee that “[e]xpectations from users, and standards now established by regulators – including insurers, WorkSafe and the football leagues themselves – are contributing to an ever-increasing requirement to maintain and upgrade facilities at sportsgrounds.”<sup>572</sup> The Committee understands that football clubs are increasingly aware of their obligation to provide a safe environment for players, supporters, officials and club members. Allan Dillon, President of the Huntly Football Netball Club, explained these obligations to the Committee:

*There are issues relating to risk management that need strong administration in not only the obvious risks of grounds and so forth, but also in making sure that we are aware of any risks that might be detrimental to the club. We need*

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<sup>568</sup> Rod Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Ballarat Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 3.

<sup>569</sup> Denise Trickey, Chief Executive Officer, Colac and District Football Netball League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 17; Neville Whitely, President, Geelong and District Football League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 23.

<sup>570</sup> Shane Carbines, Chairman, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 33.

<sup>571</sup> Bill Fulton, General Manager, Geelong Football Umpires League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 34.

<sup>572</sup> Warrnambool City Council, *Submission*, no. 11, 28 November 2003, p. 3.



*to take a professional approach to administration. We need to have accountability for our actions and obviously a duty of care to not only our members but also our players, and we take that very seriously.*<sup>573</sup>

6.38 Concerns about poor lighting were raised with the Committee on a number of occasions. According to the Warrnambool City Council, there is a large demand in the south-western Victoria for the upgrade of lighting towers.<sup>574</sup> The Hampden Football Netball League, located in the south-west, told the Committee that there are three grounds where football can be played under lights but that lights at one of those grounds are not bright enough and need to be upgraded.<sup>575</sup> In Horsham, the Committee heard that lighting at the Horsham Football Netball Club is poor, which is a concern for that club.<sup>576</sup> The Geelong and District Football League explained to the Committee that a particular issue for the Geelong region is the drop-off in players aged between 16 to 18 years of age. The League have considered creative options to retain that age group, such as night games, but this is not currently possible due to the lack of adequate lighting.<sup>577</sup>

6.39 Clubs and leagues in the north-west of the state also stressed the importance of lighting at football grounds with the Committee. For example, Wayne Shawcross, the President of the Robinvale Football Netball Club said:

*They[our players] have to train in the dark, so we have to have adequate lighting on the ground. It will cost us in the vicinity of \$25,000 to upgrade one half of the ground, and we are hoping to get it right, because we have to raise the poles, put in all new globes; and then the wiring is not good enough to cater for it, so we have to put all new wiring in as well. It is just an ongoing amount of money to make sure that things are right, safe and so on.*<sup>578</sup>

6.40 Interestingly, the Committee also heard that club amalgamations in north-western Victoria have created a strong demand for lighting at football grounds. Howard Rosewarne of the Central Murray Football League told the Committee that

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<sup>573</sup> Allen Dillon, President, Huntly Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 28.

<sup>574</sup> Paul O'Brien, Director, Residential Services, City of Warrnambool, *Public Hearing*, Warrnambool, 10 March 2004, p. 28. See for example the submission from Cavendish Football and Netball Club, *Submission*, no. 5, 6 November 2003, p. 2., which states that the club is looking at erecting more lighting so that players will be able to train safely.

<sup>575</sup> Michael Harrison, General Manager, Hampden Football Netball League, *Public Hearing*, Warrnambool, 10 March 2004, p. 9.

<sup>576</sup> Bruce Hartigan, Chairman, Horsham Football and Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 27.

<sup>577</sup> Neville Whitley, President, Geelong and District Football League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 23.

<sup>578</sup> Wayne Shawcross, President, Robinvale Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 37.

players are travelling longer distances to attend training, which means that training is starting after dark to enable players to attend. Mr Rosewarne said that many clubs would like to improve the quality of their lighting to ensure their long term viability, and that facility grants are needed for this to occur.<sup>579</sup> The General Manager of the Ovens and Murray Football League, which includes clubs from both sides of the Victorian/New South Wales border, informed the Committee that lighting at two venues in New South Wales is “sensational” but that there are few venues used by Victorian clubs that have adequate lighting.<sup>580</sup>

### **Social rooms**

6.41 Chapter One discusses the vital role that football/netball clubs play in local communities as ‘community hubs’ – places where people can meet and interact before, during and after matches. Chapter One also highlights the need for clubs to develop a family friendly environment and welcoming atmosphere in order to encourage the whole community to use the football/netball club as a focal point. As discussed in that chapter, the Committee is aware that many clubs have been successful in attracting families through, for example, the development and implementation of family friendly policies and undertaking responsible serving of alcohol courses. As Ian Thomas, Regional Manager, North-East Border with the VCFL told the Committee “clubs have certainly done themselves proud in the last couple of years in the way they have conducted their affairs.”<sup>581</sup>

6.42 However, the Committee is also aware that social rooms at clubs often require upgrades to ensure that they are suitable for all individuals, families and people with special needs. In its submission to the Inquiry, the VCFL told the Committee that there is an urgent need for capital grants to enable clubs to construct new social rooms that reflect modern standards for a family environment.<sup>582</sup> This view was echoed by the Chief Executive Officer of the Ballarat Football League, who said the league’s

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<sup>579</sup> Howard Rosewarne, Administration Manager, Central Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 2.

<sup>580</sup> Leigh Elder, General Manager, Ovens and Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 8.

<sup>581</sup> Ian Thomas, Regional Manager, North East, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 11.

<sup>582</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 67.

clubs need new social rooms that reflect social standards.<sup>583</sup> The importance of high quality social rooms to the ability of clubs to act as a social base, particularly in small communities, is illustrated by the success of the Yinnar Football Netball Club. The Yinnar Football Netball Club, which was identified by the Australian Drug Foundation as an example of a successful football club both on and off the field, is used as gathering place by the Yinnar community, in part because the Club spent \$100,000 to improve and extend their social rooms.<sup>584</sup>

6.43 The Committee is aware that modern, accessible and welcoming social rooms at football/netball clubs are also important to clubs' financial viability. If social rooms are of a good quality, they can attract more people to the club, which generates revenue through food and bar sales, and the venue can be hired out to external users. When considering how to increase the community-wide use of sporting and recreational facilities, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts emphasised the importance of making sport and recreation facilities more user friendly and noted that the provision of a pleasant social atmosphere was important.

6.44 A number of witnesses appearing before the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee emphasised the need for grants to support the development of football/netball clubs as multi-purpose facilities and the need for grants to support this. Wayne Shawcross, President of the Robinvale Football Netball Club, which has undertaken a \$75,000 facility upgrade, told the Committee that “[w]e hire the venue out for other purposes: engagements, baptisms, 21sts, that sort of thing. That is another way of raising money.”<sup>585</sup> Howard Rosewarne of the Central Murray Football League explained that “many football clubs have rooms that are community centres, not just clubs; they are social rooms and clubrooms. A lot of them are looking to update those facilities so that they become multipurpose venues, and easier access to grants would help in those areas.”<sup>586</sup> Similarly, Geoff Jones, Administration Manager of the Sunraysia Football League, told the Committee that:

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<sup>583</sup> Rod Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Ballarat Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 3.

<sup>584</sup> Russell Cheffers, President, Yinnar Football and Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Leongatha, 7 April 2004, p. 13.

<sup>585</sup> Wayne Shawcross, President, Robinvale Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 36.

<sup>586</sup> Howard Rosewarne, Administration Manager, Central Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 2.

*Football club rooms are used by other sports and community groups for such things as sporting nights, presentation functions and weddings, and they are not always restricted to football clubs. Councils these days are very reluctant to give funds for the upgrading of facilities, even though they are multipurpose use facilities. In the case of the Mildura Rural City Council, it is not in a position to finance the upgrading of buildings because of lack of funds. Football clubs are not in a position to commence any upgrading of facilities for the same reasons, with the result that nothing happens and the facilities further deteriorate.<sup>587</sup>*

### **Local action to improve facilities**

6.45 It is clear to the Committee that many football/netball clubs, country football leagues and umpires associations are concerned about the state of football club rooms, change rooms and other facilities. The Committee heard that many clubs and leagues, often in partnership with State and Local Government, have shown considerable leadership and innovation to improve their facilities or to explore alternatives to maximise use of existing facilities.

6.46 It was apparent to the Committee that many football and netball clubs have been extremely active raising funds to improve the quality of club facilities. Although some of this activity has been supported by State and Local Government grants, the Committee is aware that clubs have also raised their own funds to undertake maintenance and upgrades. Jo Dash, President of the Ballarat Netball Association, told the Committee that the Association funded the construction of their stadium in Ballarat and also funds court resurfacing and other activities:

*We have improved in our talent identification since the facilities have been built, and I remind you that we received a one off grant of \$50,000 some 15 years ago from the City of Ballarat. Everything else has been done by ourselves, by borrowing money or by fundraising, by ourselves. We are very efficient, very hardworking; we attract not much because we are probably too efficient. We have gotten into the habit of doing it ourselves, and I think sometimes we could get more help with some things if we sought the need. We have recently resurfaced our two outdoor courts at some cost. No one was going to pay for it and we needed the courts to be safer. Our risk management policy stated that the courts needed upgrading. We upgraded them; we are paying for it.<sup>588</sup>*

The Huntly Football Netball Club similarly told the Committee that it had raised sufficient funds to spend \$8000 to run power across their oval to have lights on the other side of the ground, paint the clubrooms and lay carpet, and that it is in the

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<sup>587</sup> Geoff Jones, Administration Manager, Sunraysia Football League, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 29.

<sup>588</sup> Jo Dash, President, Ballarat Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 24.

process of building a multi-purpose shed for use as a storage facility and gym.<sup>589</sup> The Sunraysia Football League told the Committee that the Robinvale Football Netball Club borrowed \$50,000 from the Swan Hill Rural City Council and raised \$25,000 of its own funds to improve its change rooms. The Robinvale Football Netball Club is the first club in the Sunraysia League to have separate facilities for female netballers and umpires.<sup>590</sup>

6.47 The Committee is also aware that local councils, leagues and football-netball clubs are increasingly taking a cooperative and strategic approach to facility use and development. One example is the Loddon Shire Council. The Chief Executive Officer of the Council, Craig Niemann, said to the Committee:

*We did a recreation strategy a few years ago, and we decided to put on a manager of recreation community development, because a lot of clubs were saying, 'How do we get access to grants? We never know where to find them and what we can do'. This person goes and talks to the committees, helps them to develop 10 year plans if we can get them thinking about that and thinking a bit to the future, and makes sure they are spending their money wisely. We are supporting them as much as we possibly can in terms of putting applications together and supporting those.*<sup>591</sup>

Findings that emerged from Netball Victoria's survey of football/netball clubs also suggested a strong emphasis on strategic facilities planning. Netball Victoria received 114 responses from football/netball clubs to its questionnaire. Of the respondents, 63% had been involved in some long term planning in relation to the development of their facility or reserve and, of the 36% who did not have a strategic facilities plan, 21% said that they would be interested in developing one in the future.<sup>592</sup> As Netball Victoria concluded "it is pleasing to see that most clubs have some sort of plan regarding upgrading or development of their facilities."<sup>593</sup> The availability of grants to undertake recreational planning and facility feasibility studies further supports a strategic approach towards facility use and development.

6.48 Sharing facilities was also identified as a way of maximising the financial and community benefit of sporting facilities. The Committee heard that some local

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<sup>589</sup> Allen Dillon, President, Huntly Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 28.

<sup>590</sup> Wayne Shawcross, President, Robinvale Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 37.

<sup>591</sup> Craig Niemann, Chief Executive Officer, Loddon Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 16.

<sup>592</sup> Netball Victoria, *Submission*, no. 22, 8 December 2003, annexure 1, p. 4.

<sup>593</sup> Netball Victoria, *Submission*, no. 22, 8 December 2003, annexure 1, p. 5.

councils provide incentives to clubs to share grounds. Chris Lewis, Manager, Sport and Recreation at the Greater Geelong City Council, told the Committee:

*Certainly our funding and application arrangements give preference to those grounds that are used by multiple groups, not just multiple sporting groups but also the pavilion being used for after school care or play groups, or that type of thing. We certainly encourage clubs to share and our fee structure is set up such that if you are a club and you are sharing that ground then the ground rental is halved, so there are some incentives from that point of view.*<sup>594</sup>

Mr Lewis also told the Committee that while he was not aware of two football clubs in the municipality sharing a ground, there were certainly examples of cricket and football clubs sharing grounds. The Committee heard similar evidence in Robinvale, where it was told that cricket and football clubs in Mildura, Red Cliff and Manangatang share grounds.<sup>595</sup> In Wangaratta, the Committee heard that the Wangaratta Rovers Football Club and the Rovers United Cricket Club share the WJ Findlay oval and that both clubs work very closely together.<sup>596</sup> Similarly, the Committee heard that there is an “excellent” relationship between the Yinnar Football Netball Club and the local cricket and tennis clubs, which share facilities at the recreation reserve.<sup>597</sup> The Committee is also aware that there are examples of country football clubs who share grounds. In Hamilton, two major league teams – Hamilton and the Hamilton Imperials – share Melville Oval. The Committee also heard that the Queen Elizabeth Oval in Bendigo is shared by a number of football teams, including the Bendigo Bombers VFL side and two major league football teams, as well as the Sandhurst Cricket Club.

6.49 Rationalisation of existing grounds is also a way of maximising facility use.

Brendan Ryan, a school principal from Horsham, said to the Committee:

*Think about your own communities and the schools and football grounds that are in them. During the course of the week between 9.00 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. each day my football oval is used regularly for physical education and sport education. At the end of the day it sits there. It is not used after 3.30 p.m. each day, and often it is not used at the weekends. You go 1 kilometre down the road and you have a football club that uses the oval for two or three nights training and on Saturday afternoon, but it is left idle for the rest of the week. I believe we need to have what I have called ‘connected government’. We need*

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<sup>594</sup> Chris Lewis, Manager, Sport and Recreation, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 3.

<sup>595</sup> Daryl McClure, Robinvale and District Cricket Association, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 44.

<sup>596</sup> Peter McCudden, Secretary, Wangaratta and District Cricket Association, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 16.

<sup>597</sup> Russell Cheffers, President, Yinnar Football and Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Leongatha, 7 April 2004, p. 13.

*education, the municipality and the clubs to work together and focus on a single turf facility in a community so that both the school and the local community can use it in conjunction with each other and you get maximum usage out of the facility, and not at double the cost.*<sup>598</sup>

The Committee also heard that the Sea Lake Nandaly Football Club, which formed from two amalgamated clubs and currently plays at three grounds, is actively considering reducing the number of grounds on which it plays to one. Greg Martin, the club President, told the Committee that this would improve the club by making better use of its resources.<sup>599</sup>

6.50 Paul Daffey, a journalist with an interest in country football, proposed to the Committee that high quality facilities should be built in a central location for use by smaller neighbouring communities. Mr Daffey used the example of Lake Cullulleraine, 50 kilometres west of Mildura, which has two ovals shared by three clubs. Mr Daffey said that communal facilities would make sense for isolated clubs such as Werrimul and Bambill, both of which play at Lake Cullulleraine. According to Mr Daffey:

*Maybe the Mallee League would be better off with great facilities in, say, Birchip, where all teams could converge every week. A weekly carnival atmosphere might emerge, with auctions and stalls augmenting sport in the fashion of an English fair.*<sup>600</sup>

6.51 The Committee is also aware that the adoption of centralised administrative structures can have a positive effect on ground maintenance and facility upgrades. Centralising administration can assist in the development and coordination of strategic facility plans, improved ground maintenance and the development of high quality and professional grant applications. The Committee recognises that at least one region – Geelong – has adopted a centralised management structure through Football Geelong (incorporating Netball Geelong) and that there is interest in Bendigo in adopting a similar structure. Damian Drum, a board member of the Bendigo Football League, explained the concept of ‘Football Bendigo’ to the Committee:

*We would like a governing body to stand over the top of all of football in the region, so we are looking at someone who would administer collectively junior football in Bendigo, two district leagues such as the Heathcote and*

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<sup>598</sup> Brendan Ryan, individual, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 6.

<sup>599</sup> Greg Martin, Secretary, Sea Lake Nandaly Football/Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 19.

<sup>600</sup> Paul Daffey, *Submission*, no. 67, 5 May 2004, p. 3.

*District Football League and the Loddon Valley Football League, and the Bendigo Football League. This body would then also incorporate the TAC Cup team, the Pioneers, the VFL team, the Bendigo Bombers, and bring it all under one umbrella.*<sup>601</sup>

Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East, with the VCFL also told the Committee that “[d]eveloping a central administration concept is one of the prime issues I am looking at the moment – that is, ensuring that we take the pressure of our volunteers by having central administration that may run two or three leagues.”<sup>602</sup>

6.52 The development of ‘regional hubs’ was mentioned to the Committee as a way of ensuring that available sporting facilities are used to their maximum potential.

Julie Sarll, Chief Executive Officer of VicSport, told the Committee that regional or community sporting hubs “are the sort of thing we should be trying to aim for.”<sup>603</sup>

Andrew Crowden, a witness who appeared before the Committee in his own capacity, told the Committee:

*Collaborative models of shared sporting administration and research and resources should be developed and operationalised, and rural communities should be encouraged to continue to develop sporting precincts where swimming pools, gymnasiums, netball, tennis, hockey, lacrosse, cycling, football, soccer, Australian rules football, rugby, and a wide range of diverse sports are all co located together sharing resources and collaborative administrations.*<sup>604</sup>

In the context of resources, Mr Crowden said “we could share a gymnasium, share the grounds, maybe build a ground with our pooled resources.”<sup>605</sup> The concept of regional or community hubs is not confined to larger regional areas. The Committee is aware that the *Sporting Capital* report recommended the creation of ‘community hubs’ as a means to make better use of community and club experience and resources in small towns. The aim of such hubs, according to the report, is to coordinate planning, fundraising, facility maintenance and management of sport and recreation reserves.<sup>606</sup>

6.53 It is clear to the Committee that football and netball clubs and leagues have been proactive and creative in finding ways to maintain or improve club facilities.

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<sup>601</sup> Damian Drum, Board Member, Bendigo Football League, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 3.

<sup>602</sup> Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 3.

<sup>603</sup> Julie Sarll, Chief Executive Officer, VicSport, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 51.

<sup>604</sup> Andrew Crowden, individual, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 20.

<sup>605</sup> Andrew Crowden, individual, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 22.

<sup>606</sup> K Driscoll & L Wood, *Sporting capital: changes and challenges for rural communities in Victoria*, Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT, 1999, p. 12.



Football and netball leagues and clubs, in conjunction with local government, have developed local solutions to the problem of capital infrastructure improvement and have done so successfully. It is also apparent that many sporting organisations are looking to the future and are adopting more strategic approaches to the management of club facilities, including the use of strategic facilities plans and centralised resources. The Committee recognises that there are a number of ways in which individual sporting clubs and local leagues can work cooperatively to improve the management and use of facilities. However, it is vital that there be flexibility in the approach towards facility management and that local sporting clubs are supported in developing solutions that are appropriate for their own town and region. For this reason, the Committee is not recommending that any particular approach toward the use and management of facilities be preferred. However, it encourages local councils and sporting groups to adopt a strategic planning approach towards facility use and development and consider co-location or sharing of grounds and clubrooms where appropriate. The Committee also encourages local sporting clubs to take advantage of grants available through SRV's *Planning Projects Funding Program* to fund strategic planning activities and undertake feasibility studies into improving the use of football grounds or clubrooms, redeveloping football/netball facilities or establishing 'administrative hubs'.

6.54 The Committee does, however, recognise that there is an urgent need for capital upgrades at many football/netball clubs. The lack of appropriate facilities for netballers and umpires, particularly women umpires, is a significant cause for concern. The Committee believes that the poor standard of facilities in many areas is an impediment to the ongoing development and growth of grassroots football and netball.

6.55 The Committee was pleased to hear from Andrew Demetriou, the Chief Executive Officer of the AFL, that the AFL is "on record as always contributing to things like facility development and capital grants development...[i]f there are proposals out there that require funding for the betterment of football in country

Victoria, the AFL will certainly consider them.”<sup>607</sup> The ability of local communities to raise revenue for capital development has been amply demonstrated to the Committee. Thus, the Committee believes that, in addition to continuing its existing capital grants program, the State Government should work in partnership with local communities to undertake a comprehensive program of facility upgrades, with the construction of appropriate facilities for netballers and umpires as a priority. The Committee further believes that the AFL should make a substantial financial contribution to any new grants scheme established by the State Government to undertake facility upgrades that directly benefit country football clubs. Accordingly, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 22: That the State Government establish a new multi-million dollar grants scheme for the upgrade of football and netball facilities in rural and regional Victoria, to be allocated over four years. Grants should be made available to rural shires on the basis of \$2 for every \$1 raised locally and to regional cities on the basis of \$1.50 for every \$1 raised locally, and the State Government should negotiate with the AFL for a matched funding contribution.**

**Recommendation 23: That in considering applications for grants for upgrading football and netball facilities, the State Government give priority to applications that seek to address particular areas of need, including:**

- (i) appropriate netball facilities;**
- (ii) appropriate facilities for umpires;**
- (iii) shared community, club and social facilities;**
- (iv) multi-use facilities;**
- (v) lighting; and**
- (vi) health and safety improvements.**

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<sup>607</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 4.

**Recommendation 24: That local sporting clubs and local government be encouraged to apply for funding through the *Planning Projects Funding Program* to develop strategic facilities plans and give consideration to sharing or co-locating sporting facilities and resources where appropriate.**

## **Water**

6.56 The Committee is aware that the availability of water is a crucial issue for many sporting clubs, including football clubs and leagues. In 2001, the *Cost of Delivering Sport Taskforce* identified water issues as one of the five main areas impacting on sport, with water usage issues being more significant in rural and regional Victoria than in metropolitan Melbourne.<sup>608</sup> According to the *Sustainable Water Practices for Sport and Recreation* guide, released in 2004, turf sports in the northern, western and north-eastern regions of Victoria are experiencing the worst impact of the drought and that, in many cases, games have been deferred or transferred to minimise risk of injury to players. The Committee understands that the lack of water and appropriate water delivery systems can have a profound impact on the welfare of country football clubs and small rural and regional communities. Mardie Townsend from the School of Health and Social Development at Deakin University said to the Committee:

*The issue of water availability and costs obviously has huge implications for rural football clubs. If water needs to be carted to keep grounds playable, the cost poses a difficulty for small clubs and associations. If that's not done, then there's a risk of increased injury as a result of playing on hard grounds. This sort of problem, if games have to be played out of town, means no home games can be played, and that then affects the economics of the communities and those small businesses struggle. That can ultimately threaten the retention of those businesses in small towns, and can deprive the community of necessary services.*<sup>609</sup>

6.57 The importance of water was impressed on the Committee during its public hearings across rural and regional Victoria. Almost every person who spoke to the Committee during its public hearings raised the issue of ground quality, water availability and water delivery systems. This section considers some of the evidence

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<sup>608</sup> *The cost of delivering sport and recreation to the Victorian community*, Report of the Independent Taskforce, 2001.

<sup>609</sup> Mardie Townsend, Senior Lecturer, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 32.

received by the Committee across the state about water issues and discusses possible solutions.

6.58 While recognising that the drought is having an impact across the state, the Committee heard that clubs and leagues in northern and central Victoria have been particularly affected, with many grounds unplayable due to ground hardness. Rod Ward, the Chief Executive Officer of Ballarat Football League, told the Committee:

*...as of Monday, 26 April, only one Ballarat Football League ground within the City of Ballarat boundaries was open for competition. Eleven grounds were closed due to risk management concerns caused by the lack of water. Attached to the back of this submission is a letter from the City of Ballarat confirming the closure of all of those grounds. The Ballarat Football League extends to four local government municipalities. The City of Ballarat itself has experienced stage 3 water restrictions, the Moorabool and Melton shires have experienced stage 4 restrictions, while the City of Hume, which covers Sunbury, has experienced stage 2 restrictions.<sup>610</sup>*

6.59 The General Manager of the Riddell District Football League similarly told the Committee that the drought has been a major issue for that League, with the Kilmore and Rockbank Football Clubs' grounds severely affected.<sup>611</sup> In Bendigo, the Committee was told that the Kangaroo Park Football Club and the Golden Square Football Club were unable to play or train on their grounds because of poor ground quality due to a lack of water. These clubs were forced to share the Queen Elizabeth Oval to play their games and the Committee was informed that this ground is now "ruined" through overuse.<sup>612</sup> Representatives from the Bendigo Umpires Association told the Committee that ground hardness is a concern for their members when they begin pre-season training.<sup>613</sup> Graeme Pigdon, President of the Lexton Plains Football League and Netball Association, a district league located in central Victoria, told the Committee that one of the League's clubs plays its games at Linton for the first half of the year and its last three or four games at Snake Valley "simply because Snake Valley never has any water."<sup>614</sup>

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<sup>610</sup> Rod Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Ballarat Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 3.

<sup>611</sup> Neill Sharpe, General Manager, Riddell District Football League, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 40.

<sup>612</sup> Damian Drum, Board Member, Bendigo Football League, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 4.

<sup>613</sup> Beres Fitch, Vice-President, Bendigo Umpires Association, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 21.

<sup>614</sup> Graeme Pigdon, President, Lexton Plains Football League and Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 16.

6.60 In Gippsland, the Committee heard that “[w]ith the seasons being longer and drier, water is a real growing problem.”<sup>615</sup> In the case of the Foster Football Club, the Club’s Secretary, Marilyn Flett, told the Committee that although the club is on town water, there is no practical way of getting that water onto the football ground. During public hearings in Seymour, the Committee was told by Craig Kelly, an executive committee member of the Seymour District Junior Football League, that the drought has presented ground preparation problems for all clubs and that watering playing surfaces has become an urgent issue due to concerns about occupational health and safety.<sup>616</sup> The Committee heard from the Regional Manager, North East Border with the VCFL, Ian Thomas, that the north-east has gone through the worst period of drought in the state’s history and, as many of the grounds are “rock solid”, some clubs are obliged to play their home games at opposition grounds.<sup>617</sup>

6.61 In the Barwon Region, the Committee heard that the introduction of stage two water restrictions meant that sporting clubs were unable to water their grounds and that ground quality deteriorated as a result. The Committee was told that the water restrictions have now been lifted and that the quality of grounds is much improved. Further west, the Chief Commissioner of the Wimmera Football League, Ken McLean, said:

*...the drought, which appears to be continuing, has caused problems, with some clubs being unable to water ovals pre season. As the ovals are not able to be watered during summer periods they die off, thus causing problems when training begins, especially with the possibility of injuries. It also means extra work has to be put in to bring the grounds up to standard as the rejuvenated grass becomes tough and dangerous to play on.*<sup>618</sup>

6.62 The Committee is aware, however, that some football leagues and clubs are not significantly affected by the current drought. Geoff Jones, the Administration Manager of the Sunraysia Football League, told the Committee that the League has irrigation facilities in all venues “and does not have the problem that other leagues

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<sup>615</sup> Rod Lucas, Secretary, Mid Gippsland Football League, *Public Hearing*, Leongatha, 7 April 2004, p. 3.

<sup>616</sup> Colin Kelly, Executive Committee Member, Seymour District Junior Football League, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 8.

<sup>617</sup> Ian Thomas, Regional Manager, North East, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 10.

<sup>618</sup> Kenneth McLean, Chief Commissioner, Wimmera Football League, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004.

have in being able to water their grounds.”<sup>619</sup> In its submission to the Inquiry, the Mildura Rural City Council said “up to this point in time, the Mildura area has been very lucky compared to other central Victorian areas in relation to the effects of drought.”<sup>620</sup> Similarly, the Glenelg Shire Council’s submission states that “[g]enerally availability of water is not an issue, apart from the cost.”<sup>621</sup>

6.63 The Committee received a number of suggestions about how the availability of water to country football clubs could be increased. Rod Ward, Chief Executive Officer of the Ballarat Football League, recommended a program be introduced to fund the implementation of bores at football venues, or that alternative water supplies, such as grey water, be prioritised.<sup>622</sup> In Lakes Entrance, it was suggested to the Committee that a program be developed to use wastewater to water football grounds, in the same way that the Lakes Entrance Golf Course is watered using recycled water from the sewerage treatment plant.<sup>623</sup> The Greater Geelong City Council told the Committee that the State Government should allow football clubs in rural and regional Victoria to water their grounds during stage two water restrictions, because watering grounds is permitted in metropolitan area. The Greater Geelong City Council also encouraged the State Government to provide increased incentives to resource water re-use initiatives.<sup>624</sup> Craig Kelly of the Seymour District Junior Football League told the Committee that “country clubs would benefit from funding grants to sink bores or gain access to reclaimed water to provide a safe environment for all participants, be they senior or junior footballers.”<sup>625</sup> The President of the East Gippsland Football League, Luke Robinson, also supported the introduction of a program to provide financial assistance to clubs to put down bores and establish sprinkler systems.<sup>626</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Geoff Jones, Administration Manager, Sunraysia Football League, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 28.

<sup>620</sup> Mildura Rural City Council, *Submission*, no. 13, 3 December 2003, p. 2.

<sup>621</sup> Glenelg Shire Council, *Submission*, no. 29, 11 December 2003, p. 6.

<sup>622</sup> Rod Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Ballarat Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 3.

<sup>623</sup> Trevor Bourke, individual, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 31.

<sup>624</sup> Greater Geelong City Council, *Submission*, no. 7, 19 November 2003, pp. 2-3.

<sup>625</sup> Colin Kelly, Executive Committee Member, Seymour District Junior Football League, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 8.

<sup>626</sup> Luke Robinson, President, East Gippsland Football League, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 12.

6.64 In April 2004, the State Government announced that it would provide \$1 million over two years to assist country football clubs to protect their playing fields from the impact of drought through the *Country Football Grounds Assistance Program*.<sup>627</sup> The government announced that the funding would be delivered in two stages. Stage 1, delivered through Regional Development Victoria, provided ‘immediate response grants’ of up to \$20,000 to rural and regional and interface local councils, generally on a matched dollar for dollar basis. Grants could be used to develop programs including carting water, subsidising transporting players to alternative venues, hiring mobile water treatment plants and injecting soil supplements to stimulate turf growth. Stage 2, delivered through the Department for Victorian Communities, provided \$500,000 in grants to develop long-term water saving strategies. According to media releases, grants have been made under Stage 1 to protect 125 grounds across 27 shires, assisting 42 football leagues. For example, a grant of \$9250 was made to the Greater Shepparton City Council to help install an automatic irrigation system and complete turf renovation work at the Shepparton Umpires’ training ground, and a grant of \$11,750 was made to the Central Goldfields Shire Council towards carting water to the Delidio Reserve Football Oval at Dunolly.<sup>628</sup>

6.65 It appears that Stage 2 of the *Country Football Grounds Assistance Program* is encouraging football clubs to focus on broad community involvement in facility use and maximising the benefit of football grounds and facilities for the whole community. The Department for Victorian Communities has released an information sheet to accompany the Stage 2 application booklet entitled ‘Features of Good Projects’. Good projects have been identified as those that:

- contribute to increased co-operation between key stakeholders in the delivery of increasingly integrated services;
- include new ideas and reforms of community ownership, planning and delivery in the project’s design;
- foster innovation so as to maximise the project’s impact; and

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<sup>627</sup> Office of the Premier, *\$1 million water boost for country football clubs*, Media Release, 26 April 2004.

<sup>628</sup> Minister for State and Regional Development, *Country Football Assistance Hits \$500,000 Milestone*, Media Release, 3 August 2004; Minister for State and Regional Development and Minister for Water and Victorian Communities, *First Round of Country Football Grants Announced*, Media Release, 2 June 2004.

- develop an approach/service that is designed to ensure continuance and positive impact for the wider community beyond the direct funding period.<sup>629</sup>

6.66 According to the Chief Executive Officer of the VCFL “[t]here is no doubt that the country football fraternity appreciated the news back in early May of government funding. It has been a terrific start.”<sup>630</sup> In referring to one of the measures arising from the *Country Football Grounds Assistance Program* Damian Drum, a board member of the Bendigo Football League, said that the funding announcement should have occurred in late 2003/early 2004:

*The State Government option of trying to cart water to football grounds has been met with a fair amount of mirth in this region, simply because you cannot get a water carrying truck without a couple of weeks notice and you simply could not hire one for the two, three or four days that you would need to cart the water in to fill a dam and then pump it on to an oval. The opportunity of carting water to get these football grounds out of the drought ridden state...does not make sense in this area, although there is an enormous amount of support for the assistance for bores option because grounds such as Kyneton and Castlemaine have had success with putting down bores.*<sup>631</sup>

6.67 The Committee recognises that funding available through the *Country Football Grounds Assistance Program* has been of considerable benefit to many football clubs in rural and regional Victoria. The Committee also believes that additional support should be provided to local councils in rural and regional Victoria to encourage them to further explore initiatives using recycled and grey water for sporting grounds, provided that appropriate safety precautions are taken. In 2001, the *Cost of Delivering Sport Taskforce* found that only 2-5% of sporting facilities are utilising water re-use plans. The Committee also heard that some large regional municipalities, such as the City of Greater Geelong, do not have any formal water re-use programs for sporting grounds,<sup>632</sup> and the Committee believes that the introduction of financial incentives will assist local government and water authorities to develop such programs, in conjunction with sporting clubs. The Committee understands that \$160 million remains unallocated from the Victorian Water Trust and believes that this could be a potential source of funding for initiatives to further encourage

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<sup>629</sup> Department for Victorian Communities, 'Country Football Grounds Assistance Program, Features of Good Projects', viewed 22 September 2004, <[www.dvc.vic.gov.au/grants](http://www.dvc.vic.gov.au/grants)>.

<sup>630</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 4.

<sup>631</sup> Damian Drum, Board Member, Bendigo Football League, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 4.

<sup>632</sup> Chris Lewis, Manager, Sport and Recreation, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 2.



environmentally sustainable water use by sporting clubs. The Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 25: That the State Government provide financial incentives to local councils and water authorities in rural and regional Victoria to develop and implement initiatives using recycled and grey water for sporting grounds, in consultation with sporting groups.**

### ***Conclusion***

6.68 The public hearing process the Committee undertook during this Inquiry demonstrated strongly to Committee members that there is an urgent need to upgrade football and netball facilities in rural and regional Victoria. Netball is an equal partner with football and the adequacy of the facilities available to netballers needs to reflect this. In many cases, they do not. Umpires are also integral to country football competitions, yet umpires are often forced to use sub-standard facilities. The ability of umpiring associations to attract and retain women umpires is currently being compromised by the fact that they are often required to share facilities with male umpires or use public toilets in which to change. In the Committee's view, this needs improvement.

6.69 The Committee understands that football clubs and leagues have been active in attempting to improve the suitability of their clubrooms, changing rooms and social rooms, particularly for use by women and families. However, the current pressures that are placed on country football and netball clubs mean that adequate funds have not always been available to enable facility upgrades to occur. For this reason, the Committee is strongly supportive of an injection of funding from the State Government and the AFL, to be matched by local communities, to ensure that football and netball facilities across the state are modern, accessible and reflective of the current social environment.



## Chapter Seven

### Issues for consideration: youth and schools

#### *Introduction*

7.1 Evidence presented to the Committee has consistently demonstrated that there is strong growth in football participation by young people living in rural and regional Victoria. The Committee has been told that the number of people playing Australian rules football in the 5-12 year old age group increased by 73% between 1990 and 2002 and there has also been an increase in participation by people aged 13-19 years, although not as significant (10%). The Committee recognises that encouraging and supporting participation in football by children and young people is vital to the health of country football in Victoria. Despite strong participation by children and young people, however, the Committee is aware that there are still concerns about young people's football participation, particularly with respect to tensions between school-based football, community football and elite player pathways. The extent to which football is promoted at school and the availability of football development programs for teachers were also issues raised in evidence to the Committee. This chapter provides some information about the structure of junior football in rural and regional Victoria through schools and the Victorian Country Football League (VCFL), and also discusses the TAC Cup under-18s elite competition. The Committee then discusses some of the key issues associated with junior football development and makes recommendations designed to improve relationships between school and community football and improve the quality of physical education and sports training provided to children in schools. Finally, the Committee considers the adequacy of mentoring and support services provided by the Australian Football League (AFL) to junior football, particularly through clinics and player appearances.

#### *The structure of junior and youth football*

7.2 Ken Gannon, the Chief Executive Officer of Football Victoria, told the Committee about “the complex nature of schools and the local football club

environment.”<sup>633</sup> This section considers some of the football competitions offered through government and non-government schools, peak bodies such as the AFL, Football Victoria and the VCFL and by local communities. As much of the evidence received by the Committee focused on the importance of football in the school curriculum and issues associated with the interaction between elite level and community football, discussion in this section is largely confined to Auskick, football competitions run by the Victorian Primary School Sports Association, the Victorian Secondary School Sports Association and elite level competitions such as the TAC Cup.

### **Junior Football (5-12 years of age)**

#### ***Auskick***

7.3 Chapter Two of this report discussed the current status of country football and sought to identify the responsibilities of the AFL, Football Victoria (including Football Victoria Development) and the VCFL. As noted in that chapter, the AFL Auskick program is the official AFL coaching program for primary school aged children and their families. It offers boys and girls aged between 5-12 years an opportunity to play Australian rules football under modified rules and activities. The emphasis of the program is on having fun while improving children’s sporting skills, coordination, health and fitness, and social skills. Football Victoria told the Committee there were 42,276 children in the Auskick Community Program in 2003.<sup>634</sup>

7.4 The Committee is aware that there has been significant expansion of the Auskick program in rural and regional Victoria over the past 15 years. Football Victoria told the Committee that the number of Auskick centres grew from 122 to 312 between 1990 and 2004 and that participation in the program by children living in country Victoria increased by 105% over the same period. In 2003, there were 17,353 Auskick players registered in country Victoria.<sup>635</sup> Evidence received by the

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<sup>633</sup> Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 3.

<sup>634</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004, p. 4.

<sup>635</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004, p. 6.

Committee during its public hearings was strongly supportive of the Auskick competition. Bill Storey-Smith of the Central Highlands Football and Netball League told the Committee that each of the League’s thirteen clubs supports a strong Auskick program, which attracts 800 children under the age of 12 years to football.<sup>636</sup>

7.5 David Parkin, an AFL coaching ambassador and lecturer, told the Committee that in his opinion Auskick “provides the best introductory sports program of any sport anywhere in the world.”<sup>637</sup> Mr Parkin also explained that Auskick “has become critical for learning separate and complex motor skills.”<sup>638</sup> According to Mr Parkin, research indicates that the development of these skills underpins children’s motives for becoming involved in sport.<sup>639</sup> Mr Parkin informed the Committee that the United States of America is “fascinated” in the Auskick program because it is often based in schools yet has a high level of parental involvement, and also said that Japan and Hong Kong are trying to introduce similar principles to Auskick in their introductory sports programs. During a discussion about the ‘ugly parent syndrome’, David Matthews, General Manager, Game Development with the AFL, told the Committee that Auskick has an important cultural impact on football through its emphasis on skill development over competition.<sup>640</sup>

7.6 The Committee is strongly supportive of the Auskick program and has consistently heard evidence throughout Victoria that it is extremely well regarded by football’s peak bodies, local leagues, clubs, players and parents. The Committee encourages the AFL and Football Development Victoria to continue their efforts to promote the Auskick program in rural and regional Victoria.

### ***Victorian Primary School Sports Association***

7.7 The Victorian Primary School Sports Association (VPSSA) is responsible for the organisation of sport for primary school children across Victoria from government

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<sup>636</sup> Bill Storey-Smith, Secretary/Manager, Central Highlands Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 4.

<sup>637</sup> David Parkin, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 21.

<sup>638</sup> David Parkin, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 21.

<sup>639</sup> David Parkin, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 21.

<sup>640</sup> David Matthews, General Manager, Game Development, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 13.

and non-government primary schools. The VPSSA is involved in 18 sports, including Australian rules football. The VPSSA football competition involves approximately 1800 schools. Schools are divided into 280 school districts, which are aligned to 32 zones throughout Victoria. Each zone is allocated to one of eight regions across the state. The VPSSA runs a domestic football competition which culminates in one school becoming the state champion and also conducts trials to choose a state team. The domestic competition is now known as the 'Bega Cup' and acts as an intermediate competition between Auskick and standard Australian rules competitions. Male and female teams of 15 a side participate, with unlimited interchange, no designated rucks, and restrictions on tackling. In describing the domestic competition conducted by the VPSSA, Steve Fisher, a Peninsula Zone Officer for the VPSSA said "[t]he great thing about our domestic competition is the number of kids playing footy. When we think about 1800 schools all having a school team, that is an enormous number of kids playing footy if you have 15 to 20 kids on a team." Similarly, Mr Fisher explained to the Committee that the process of selecting a state team:

*...is not just a selection trial to get an elite team, we have tried to make it a mass participation thing. You can imagine that right from the bottom to the top there is an enormous number of children going through that program.*<sup>641</sup>

### **Youth Football (13-18 years of age)**

#### ***Secondary school football***

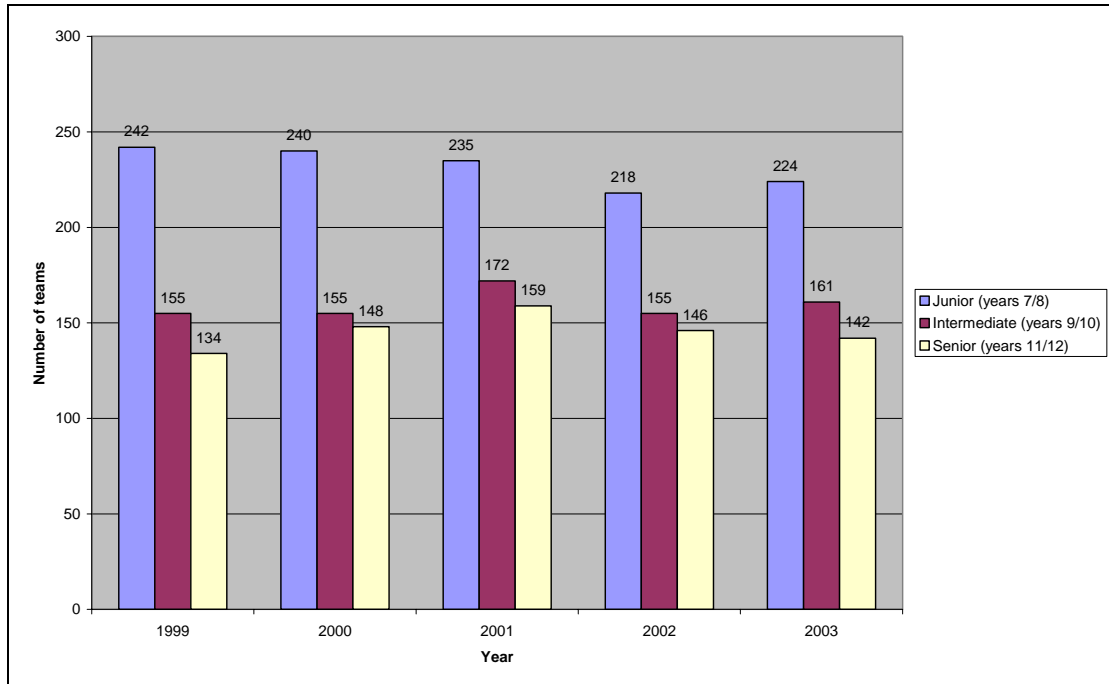
7.8 The Committee has been informed by Football Victoria that participant numbers have remained static in secondary school football, whilst complexities associated with managing football competitions in the changing secondary school environment have increased.<sup>642</sup> The following chart illustrates the number of male football teams that participated in country secondary school football competitions between 1999-2003.

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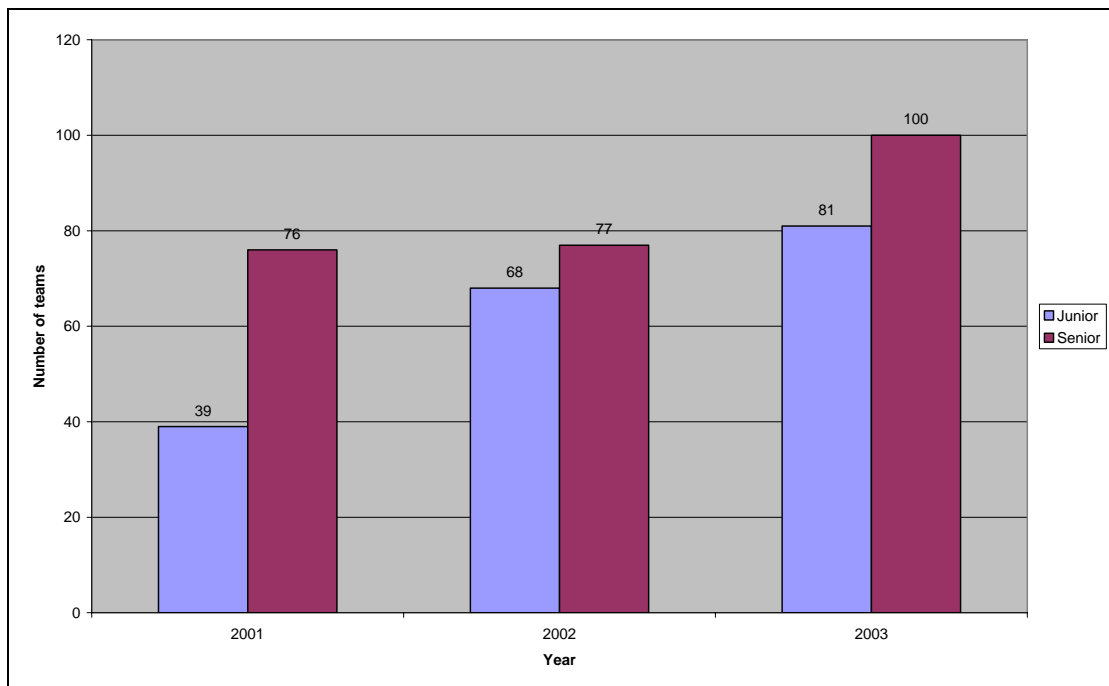
<sup>641</sup> Steven Fisher, Peninsula Zone Officer, Victorian Primary Schools Sports Association, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 33.

<sup>642</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004, p. 7.

**Figure 8: Male teams participating in country secondary school football competitions, 1999-2003<sup>643</sup>**



**Figure 9: Female teams participating in country secondary school football competitions, 2001-03<sup>644</sup>**



<sup>643</sup> Football Victoria, *Background to Football Victoria's Regional Country Development Manager structure and development program outcomes*, Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee, 24 May 2004, p. 7.

<sup>644</sup> Football Victoria, *Background to Football Victoria's Regional Country Development Manager structure and development program outcomes*, Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee, 24 May 2004, p. 7.

7.9 Football Victoria has informed the Committee that, unlike male team numbers in country competitions, the number of female teams participating in country competitions has grown between 2001 and 2003. This is demonstrated by the previous chart (Figure 9).

7.10 The Committee heard evidence from the Victorian Secondary Schools Sports Association (VSSSA) about its football competition. The VSSSA differs from the VPSSA in that it only includes government schools. It offers 22 sports, including Australian rules football, and caters for 250,000 male and female students in four age groups – junior (years seven and eight), intermediate (years nine and ten) and seniors (years eleven and twelve). The VSSSA membership comprises 355 government secondary schools.<sup>645</sup> These 355 schools are divided into four zones, and each zone is divided into a country and metropolitan area consisting of 50 districts. Football Victoria Development sponsors the VSSSA Football State Championship, in which schools in each district play each other in a weekly or lightning football competition. Twenty-one of these districts are in rural and regional Victoria, comprising 149 secondary schools. The VSSSA also provides opportunities for secondary school students to participate in an interstate sporting competition through the School Sport Australia national program. The VSSSA sends a country and a metropolitan team to represent Victoria in the under-15s National Football Championships (once known as the National Schoolboy Championships).

7.11 According to Peter Francis, the Regional Manager of Gippsland Power, a TAC Cup team, Gippsland Power has an agreement with the VSSSA to conduct all secondary school and interschool football in the Gippsland region. Mr Francis explained:

*In 2003, 28 individual schools from throughout Gippsland entered 97 teams – that is, 71 boys' teams and 26 girls' teams – in five competition sections. Each of Gippsland Power's three areas of South Gippsland, East Gippsland and West Gippsland conduct round robin days in each of the five sections of the years 7 and 8 boys, years 7, 8 and 9 girls, years 9 and 10 boys, years 10, 11 and 12 girls, and senior boys. In addition a round robin day was conducted in East Gippsland to cater for the smaller secondary schools of Lakes Entrance, Mallacoota and Orbost.<sup>646</sup>*

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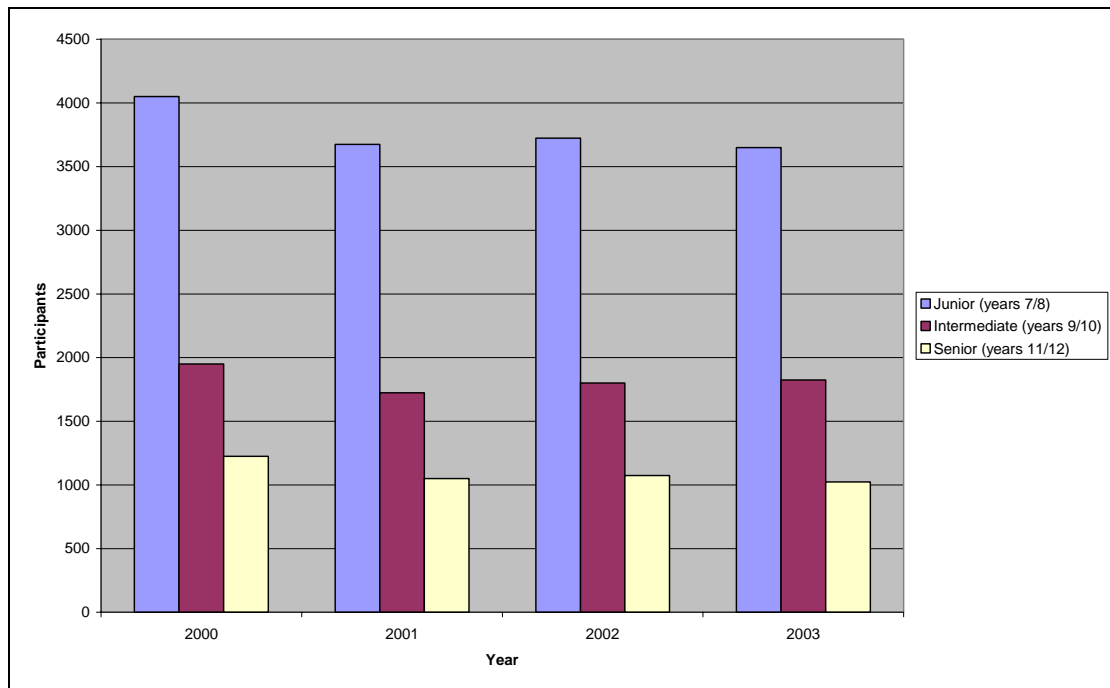
<sup>645</sup> Luke Soulos, National Secretary, Football, School Sport Australia, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 36.

<sup>646</sup> Peter Francis, Regional Manager, Gippsland Power, *Public Hearing*, Leongatha, 7 April 2004, pp. 19-20.



The Committee heard from Brendan Ryan, a secondary school principal from Horsham, that the number of males participating in the VSSSA football competition has declined. This is borne out by participation rates provided to the Committee by the VSSSA.

**Figure 10: VSSSA football competition, male participation, country Victoria, 2000-2003<sup>647</sup>**



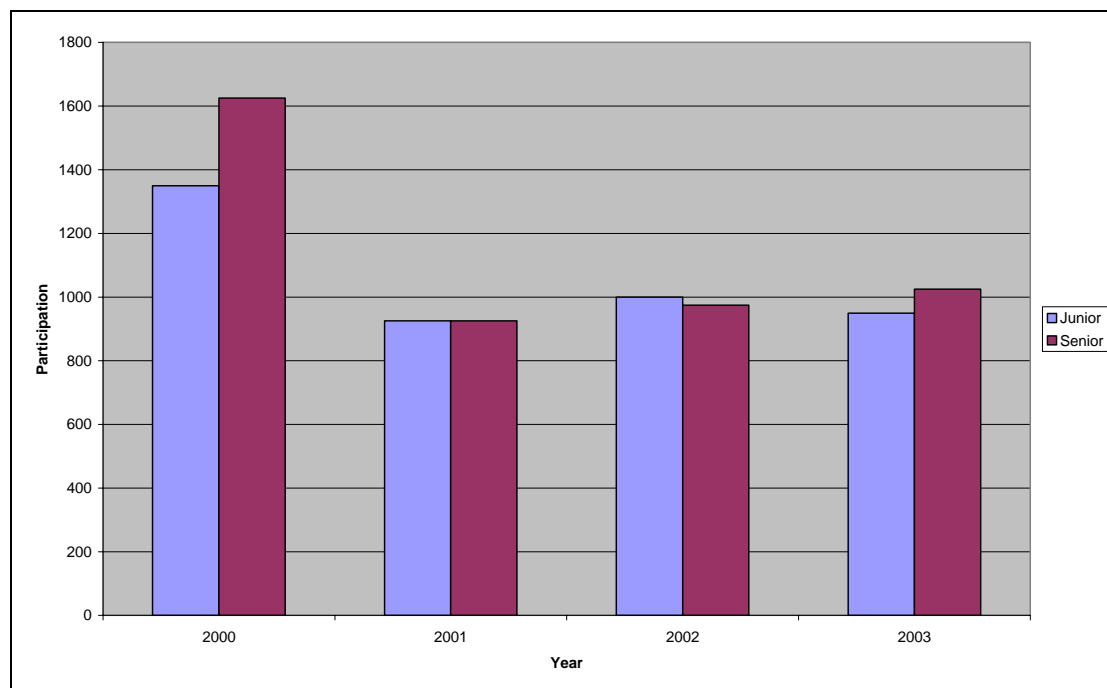
7.12 While changes in participation have been most pronounced in the junior age group, the percentage decrease has been most significant in the senior age group, where there was a 16% decrease in the number of male participants between 2000 and 2003 (compared with a 10% decrease in junior players over the same period).

According to Mr Ryan, while football participation has declined, other sports at secondary school level are either maintaining their numbers or increasing the number of participants.<sup>648</sup> Some of the challenges for male secondary school football are discussed below. Comparable participation rates for the VSSSA junior and senior girls' football competition show a marked drop in participation in 2001 in both juniors and seniors, with participation slowly increasing after that time.

<sup>647</sup> Victorian Secondary Schools' Sports Association, *Submission*, no. 64, 31 May 2004.

<sup>648</sup> Brendan Ryan, individual, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 3.

**Figure 11: VSSSA football competition, female participation, country Victoria, 2000-2003<sup>649</sup>**



7.13 The Committee understands that the non-government school sector in Victoria comprises ‘systemic schools’ – schools that are administered by a central organisation, such as Catholic parish schools, and independent schools, each of which are separate legal entities. As non-government schools operate autonomously and develop their own curriculum and co-curricular programs, it is difficult to generalise about the role and structure of football in non-government schools in rural and regional Victoria. However, the Committee is aware that football has featured prominently in the curriculum of non-government schools across rural and regional Victoria.

***VCFL junior competition***

7.14 Of the 83 VCFL leagues, 35 are junior football leagues, comprising approximately 415 junior football clubs. As discussed in Chapter Two, players aged as young as six years are registered with the VCFL. VCFL player registrations peak in the 11-18 year old age groups, with a sharp decline in player registrations when players turn 19. Information provided by Football Victoria states that “[t]he success of Football Victoria and the VCFL working collectively...towards a common purpose

<sup>649</sup> Victorian Secondary Schools' Sports Association, *Submission*, no. 64, 31 May 2004.

is best illustrated in the growth of junior teams in country Victoria.”<sup>650</sup> Football Victoria has informed the Committee that the number of junior teams (under-9s to under-19s) has increased from 1477 in 1990 to 1840 in 2003, an increase of 363 teams.

7.15 The Committee understands that VCFL junior football competitions are structured in different ways, depending on the needs of local communities and number of interested players. Max Martin, Secretary of the Maryborough Castlemaine District Football League, told the Committee that there is a junior competition run through the Castlemaine and District Junior Football League, which involves nine teams playing in an under-15s and under-12s competition. In addition, there is an under-13s ‘mini-league’ in Maryborough, comprised of children living in and around Maryborough. The number of teams playing in the ‘mini-league’ varies between four and six, depending on the level of interest.<sup>651</sup>

7.16 The Committee was also told that the focus of the Sunraysia Junior Football League is on developing a competition that encourages participation and meets local needs. The Sunraysia Junior Football League currently has five age gradings – under-11s (playing under modified rules and not for premiership points), under-13s, under-13s-Colts, under-15½s and under-15½s Colts.<sup>652</sup> The Committee was told that the under-13s Colts competition was established in 2001 to provide for the growing number of children flowing through the junior system from Auskick and the under-11s competition. The under-15½s Colts competition was established in 2003, also because of player demand. The Colts competitions are designed to cater for children who are interested in playing football but do not necessarily possess the skills to participate in the standard age groupings. The under-13s Colts competition in particular is focused on participation, with players being ‘lent’ to play for other teams if numbers are insufficient and teams being fielded with twelve players a side. Both the under-13s Colts and under-15½s Colts competitions have an interchange bench so that players can transfer between the Colts and the standard competitions. In 2004,

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<sup>650</sup> Football Victoria, *Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee*, 24 May 2004, p. 9.

<sup>651</sup> Max Martin, Secretary, Maryborough Castlemaine District Football League, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 44.

<sup>652</sup> Mildura Rural City Council, *Submission*, no. 13, 3 December 2003, p. 2. An under-18 competition operates through the Sunraysia Football League.

almost 1000 players were registered with the Sunraysia Junior Football League in the under-11s to under-15½s competitions.

7.17 Football Geelong told the Committee that they have had a significant increase in the number of junior teams at the under-14s and under-16s levels because of a decision by Football Geelong to introduce grading into the junior competition.

Michael McMahon, the Chief Executive Officer of Football Geelong, explained to the Committee:

*Because of the large number of teams available to us, we were in a nice situation – and many rural areas would not be able to do this – of being able to format a competition whereby at the start of each year the first four or five weeks of each season are basically a grading exercise. So the formal draw does not actually come out until about week five and those grading games form the basis of dividing the streams into different divisions based on their perceived level of performance.<sup>653</sup>*

Mr McMahon said that this has enabled Football Geelong to reduce the frequency at which teams were being beaten by large margins and improve the football experience for junior players. In comparison, the Huntly Football Netball Club told the Committee that their junior club teams – under-12s, under-13s and under-15s – are “struggling for players”, despite the fact that Huntly is 15 kilometres from Bendigo and in a community that has a reasonable population.<sup>654</sup>

7.18 The Committee was also told that the VCFL junior competition does not provide for standardised age groups across junior and senior leagues. Colin Kelly of the Seymour District Junior Football League told the Committee that the League caters for age groups of under-11½s, under-13½s and under-15½s, which are feeder clubs for major league clubs like Goulburn Valley and Bendigo. Mr Kelly explained that this meant that 15½ year old players may be faced with the prospect of playing opponents who are two and a half to three years older than they are. Mr Kelly maintained that this problem would not occur if there were standardised age groups across junior and senior leagues of under-12s, under-14s, under-16s and under-18s.<sup>655</sup> The Committee notes that the Sunraysia Junior Football League anticipates that its

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<sup>653</sup> Michael McMahon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 8.

<sup>654</sup> Trevor Arnel, Secretary, Huntly Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 28.

<sup>655</sup> Colin Kelly, Executive Committee Member, Seymour District Junior Football League, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, pp. 7-8.

age limits will shortly be amended to under-16s, under-14s, under-12s and under-10s, with two divisions in both age groupings.<sup>656</sup>

### *Talented player pathways*

#### **TAC Cup**

7.19 As mentioned in Chapter Two, the TAC Cup is an elite competition for talented young players. It has been described as “the pinnacle of Football Victoria's talented player program with development programs being conducted at under-15, 16 and 17 age groups.”<sup>657</sup> The TAC Cup competition includes a team representing each of twelve Victorian regions and each TAC Cup team (except for the Murray Bushrangers) is also aligned to a VFL club. The TAC Cup competition came into operation in 1992, when it replaced the previous VFL/AFL under-19s competition. When first established, the TAC Cup competition only comprised metropolitan and Geelong-based sides. Ken Gannon, the Chief Executive Officer of Football Victoria, explained to the Committee that the TAC Cup came into operation for country teams in 1993, when Football Victoria noticed a “severe drift” of regional players to metropolitan Melbourne during 1992.<sup>658</sup> Currently there are five regionally based TAC Cup teams: Bendigo Pioneers, North Ballarat Rebels, Gippsland Power, Geelong Falcons and Murray Bushrangers.<sup>659</sup>

7.20 The Chief Executive Officer of the AFL, Andrew Demetriou, emphasised the importance of the TAC Cup competition to country football. He told the Committee, “[t]alented athletes want the best possible opportunity to pursue their goals and their dreams, and we believe the TAC Cup provides an opportunity for those young athletes to live at home in the country.”<sup>660</sup> The Committee, however, received considerable evidence across Victoria stating that TAC Cup players were often

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<sup>656</sup> Mildura Rural City Council, *Submission*, no. 13, 3 December 2003, p. 2.

<sup>657</sup> Victorian Institute of Sport, 'Football program overview', viewed 8 September 2004, <<http://www.vis.org.au/sportsdetail.asp?SportID=29&SportName=Football>>.

<sup>658</sup> Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 5.

<sup>659</sup> These TAC Cup teams are aligned to the following VFL sides: the Bendigo Bombers, the North Ballarat Roosters, the Springvale Scorpions, and the Werribee Tigers. The Murray Bushrangers are not currently aligned to a VFL side.

<sup>660</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 6.

required to relocate from rural townships to regional centres and were ‘lost’ to their local football club. This issue is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

7.21 Information supplied by Football Victoria shows that an average of 52% of ‘new’ selections for the AFL national draft between 1997 and 2003 came from the TAC Cup competition.<sup>661</sup> The Committee was told that part of the success of the TAC Cup competition can be attributed to its philosophy, which is player development rather than ‘win at all costs’.<sup>662</sup> Peter Francis, Regional Manager of Gippsland Power, told the Committee:

*...the players in the competition are coached in a manner that provides potential draftees with the maximum opportunity to be drafted and to facilitate a successful transition from TAC Cup to the AFL club for drafted players. The TAC competition via the conduct and coaching of the competition prepares and encourages existing players not drafted by an AFL club to continue playing football at a level commensurate to the player’s ability, whether that be VFL or country football.<sup>663</sup>*

The Committee received considerable comment on the TAC Cup competition and its impact on the availability of players for the VCFL competition. This issue is considered in following pages.

### **AFL under-18s national championships**

7.22 In 2002, the AFL developed a partnership with the National Australia Bank to develop the AFL National Partnership. This includes National AFL Under-16s Championships and the National AFL Under-18s Championships. The National Pathway Program was developed in response to recommendations arising out of the Carter report, which identified concerns with game development.

### ***Competitions and carnivals***

7.23 ‘G Footy’ is an MCC Foundation sponsored football development program managed by Football Victoria Development. There are a number of secondary school football competitions held as part of ‘G Footy’. For year seven and eight students there is the SmokeFree round robin competition, and year nine and ten students can

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<sup>661</sup> Football Victoria, *AFL National Draft Summary 1997-2003*, Presentation to the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee, 24 May 2004. ‘New selections’ excludes AFL players who are re-drafted and club non-selections but includes permanent rookie upgrades.

<sup>662</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 6.

<sup>663</sup> Peter Francis, Regional Manager, Gippsland Power, *Public Hearing*, Leongatha, 7 April 2004, p. 19.

compete for the intermediate cup. In years eleven and twelve, government and non-government school students are eligible to participate in the MCC Herald Sun Shield competition, which involves 16 country and metropolitan secondary schools competing for the opportunity to play on the MCG. The next level of competition is the MCC Herald Sun Country Shield, which involves 15 larger regional schools competing to be the champion school in rural and regional Victoria. The ‘G Footy’ game program also includes the MCC Herald Sun Country Cup, a one day round robin competition held throughout rural and regional Victoria, which involves more than 100 smaller secondary schools.

7.24 The VCFL conducts the WorkSafe Country Championships, which were played as a carnival in 2004. The under-18s teams from the 16 VCFL major leagues competed in the Championships in 2004. As part of the 2004 WorkSafe VCFL Development Program, the VCFL also coordinated the V/Line Under-15 Championships.

### **Mentoring and Development**

7.25 There is a range of mentoring and support programs for young players provided on a formal basis by peak bodies such as the AFL, Football Victoria and the VCFL, and on a less formal basis by individual clubs and leagues. Some of these, including AFL mentoring programs, are discussed in this section. This is not, however, intended to be a comprehensive examination of all football development activities undertaken across rural and regional Victoria. Development activities undertaken by peak bodies for senior footballers, club officials, coaches and umpires and are discussed in Chapter Two.

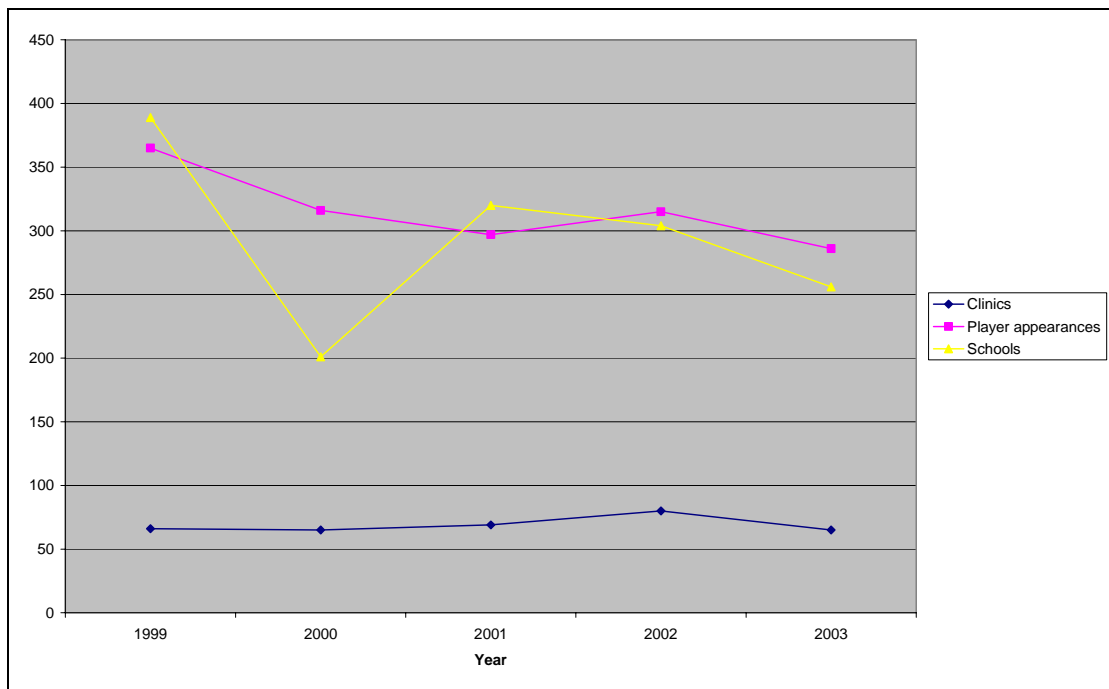
7.26 The Committee understands that the AFL undertakes a range of supporting and development activities, including AFL player clinics, AFL player appearances, community camps and SuperClinics. Glenn Scott, the Chief Executive Officer of the VCFL, told the Committee that assistance and support to country football includes AFL camps, country day games and AFL player appearances.<sup>664</sup> Many of these activities are undertaken collaboratively with Football Victoria (usually through the

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<sup>664</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004.

TAC Cup sides) and the VCFL. The Committee understands that AFL player appearances and player clinics are particularly valuable. Alan Davies, Area Manager North with the VCFL, told the Committee that “there is no doubt that the drawing power of AFL players back in the community helps to increase the participation...of young players in the game.”<sup>665</sup> Information supplied by Football Victoria states that Football Victoria has been working closely with the AFL and AFL clubs to increase the AFL player presence in country areas. Football Victoria has advised that there has been an average of 69 AFL player clinics (excluding AFL community camps) conducted in regional Victoria every year for the past five years, involving 389 AFL players and 294 schools. A breakdown of the number of clinics, player appearances and school visits follows:

**Figure 12: Number of AFL player appearances, clinics and schools attended, country Victoria, 1999 to 2003<sup>666</sup>**



7.27 Peter Francis, the Regional Manager with Gippsland Power, a TAC Cup side, outlined a range of activities that Gippsland Power engages in to encourage and develop involvement in junior football, in conjunction with other peak bodies. The

<sup>665</sup> Alan Davies, Area Manager, North West/Central, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 21.

<sup>666</sup> Football Victoria, *Background to Football Victoria's Regional Country Development Manager structure and development program outcomes*, Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee, 24 May 2004, p. 8.



Committee heard that Gippsland Power is effectively ‘broken in two’, in that it participates in the Football Victoria development program and the TAC talented player pathway. In addition to conducting all secondary school and inter-school football in Gippsland, Gippsland Power and the AFL offered all secondary schools in Gippsland the opportunity to have an AFL player and Gippsland Power staff conduct a training session at their school. Sessions were held at 15 schools throughout the region in 2003. Also in conjunction with the AFL, seven ‘superclinics’ were held in Gippsland for students in grades three and four. According to Mr Francis, 4500 students from 87 schools attended these clinics in 2003. Gippsland Power also works with the VCFL and its affiliates in conducting primary school clinics and contributing to a regional equipment pool. Mr Francis also told the Committee that Gippsland Power staff are available to assist local club coaches and taking training sessions for junior and senior teams.<sup>667</sup>

7.28 However, it appears to the Committee that the high level of support provided by Gippsland Power to school football is not necessarily representative of regionally based TAC Cup clubs as a whole. The Committee found that people appearing before the Committee in Gippsland were more favourably disposed towards their TAC Cup side than in other areas across the state and the Committee believes that this is largely because of the considerable work that Gippsland Power is undertaking in local primary and secondary schools.

7.29 In 2004, Football Victoria Development offered the Jason McCartney ‘Your Destiny is a Matter of Choice’ Youth Leadership Seminar program in Bendigo, Ballarat, Warragul, Euroa and Warrnambool. The program focuses on goal setting, attitude, dealing with setbacks, self image and consequences of actions.

7.30 At the elite club level, the Committee understands that the Essendon Football Club, in consultation with key stakeholders including VicHealth, the Australian Drug Foundation and Netball Victoria, have developed the ‘On the Ball’ program. The objectives of the program are to sustain and increase participation by 12-16 year olds in all facets of football and netball, including playing, umpiring, coaching, administration and volunteering. The program specifically seeks to target young

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<sup>667</sup> Peter Francis, Regional Manager, Gippsland Power, *Public Hearing*, Leongatha, 7 April 2004, p. 20.

people at risk. The program has five key elements, including the schools program. Part of the program involves visiting the Essendon Football Club to undertake a clinic and participate in a forum/workshop.<sup>668</sup> The program was trialled in the Bendigo region during 2004, with the Eaglehawk and Flora Hill Secondary Colleges participating in the trial.<sup>669</sup> In 2005, the Essendon Football Club anticipates that 750 students will participate in the program, at a cost to the Club of more than \$200,000.

7.31 The Committee also heard that some football/netball clubs have initiated club development or mentoring relationships with local schools. The Huntly Football Netball Club told the Committee that it commenced football clinics at the Huntly Primary School in 2003, and that it intends to hold both football and netball clinics at schools in Huntly and other nearby towns.<sup>670</sup> The Yinnar Football Netball Club in South Gippsland similarly conducts football clinics in the local Yinnar and Yinnar South Primary Schools and “club facilities and resources are always available to schools and other community organisations.”<sup>671</sup>

### ***Player numbers and elite player pathways***

7.32 The Committee appreciates the importance of junior football, not only in its own right but as a ‘feeder’ to senior football. As discussed in previous chapters, the viability of country football is largely dependent on the availability of quality players, and there has been a marked decline in the number of senior footballers across Victoria. In addition, the VCFL 2002 Team Census found that there had only been a 10% increase in player numbers in the 13-19 year age groups between 1990 and 2002, compared with 73% growth in younger age groups.<sup>672</sup> Player numbers and the loss of junior players from country football to elite player pathways is therefore an issue of concern.

7.33 During its public hearings, the Committee was told on numerous occasions that skilled junior players are ‘streamed’ through the elite player pathways, particularly the TAC Cup system. Although the Committee is aware that players can

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<sup>668</sup> Essendon Football Club, *Submission*, no. 63, 28 June 2004.

<sup>669</sup> Essendon Football Club, *Submission*, no. 63, 28 June 2004.

<sup>670</sup> Trevor Arnel, Secretary, Huntly Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 27.

<sup>671</sup> Yinnar Football and Netball Club, *Submission*, no. 45, 7 April 2004, p. 3.

<sup>672</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Team Census 2002*.

be drafted directly from the VCFL competition to the AFL – as happened with players Troy Makepeace, Guy Rigoni and Brett Kirk<sup>673</sup> – talented young players are usually “flagged and looked upon by the other leagues”,<sup>674</sup> particularly the TAC Cup, before they are drafted to the AFL. As a consequence, these players are no longer available to play junior football for their local club and, later, to play local senior football. Alan Davies, Area Manager North with the VCFL, told the Committee:

*I believe that in some ways the pathways direction of players now through the TAC Cup and through the draft system, in the views of country teams, has probably done more damage...[i]t has certainly been seen by country teams as taking away their good young players, albeit to play in the Pioneers or along that pathway, that they have been able to develop over the 10 years of football that they have had rather than through their junior team.*<sup>675</sup>

The Committee heard that although the TAC Cup is an under-18s competition, elite player pathways start at age 14. Speaking about the TAC Cup competition, Bruce Hartigan from the Horsham Football and Netball Club said that “the kids know at 14 that if they do not get into that system then after that footy is going to be lost to them.”<sup>676</sup>

7.34 A concern often expressed in evidence to the Committee was that players who enter the TAC system and do not go on to play football at an elite level, such as the AFL and VFL competitions, tend to stay in Melbourne and larger regional centres after participating in the TAC Cup competition. Thus, these talented players do not return home to play in the local VCFL competition. This is a particular issue for country football leagues that are a significant distance from a major regional centre, such as in the North-West and East Gippsland. Speaking about the impact of the TAC Cup competition on football in Mildura, Ken Forbes, a Commissioner with the Sunraysia Football League told the Committee:

*If they are going to make it they have to relocate. It is a 4 hour drive; you cannot play for Bendigo Pioneers and live in Mildura. That is it in a nutshell. So the general public in Mildura would say that the AFL is taking its footballers away. There are a lot of footballers who are at the TAC Cup level,*

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<sup>673</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 5.

<sup>674</sup> Paul Barnard, General Manager, Bendigo Bombers Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 38.

<sup>675</sup> Alan Davies, Area Manager, North West/Central, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 21.

<sup>676</sup> Bruce Hartigan, Chairman, Horsham Football and Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 30.

*and when they are jettisoned they never tend to come back to Mildura; they stay in Bendigo or whatever region they are in.*<sup>677</sup>

7.35 Andrew Griffiths, an interim Regional Manager with the VCFL, also told the Committee that those players who remain in larger regional centres tend to go on to play for that region's major league club (for example, in the Bendigo or Ballarat Football Leagues), rather than return to their league of origin. According to Mr Griffiths, this has a significant effect on leagues in North-Central and North-West Victoria.

*It is a high percentage who do not, and they do not come back. They are being taken away from a club which can ill afford to lose them, and they do not come back. With all due respect, the Bendigo recruiting scouts from the Bendigo clubs go and snap them up once they drop off from the Pioneers, and they are lost to Mallee, North Central and Sunraysia clubs too.*<sup>678</sup>

7.36 The Committee recognises however that although many people appearing during public hearings were concerned about the loss of young players through the TAC Cup competition, they were also supportive of the opportunities that the system provides for talented junior footballers. Eric Bott, the General Manager of the Goulburn Valley Football League, for example, told the Committee that the League is "delighted" with the TAC Cup system although it means player loss to elite football, regional football, and interstate.<sup>679</sup>

7.37 According to Football Victoria, a significant proportion of TAC Cup players return to their club of origin or another football club (although not necessarily in rural and regional Victoria). Football Victoria provided the Committee with a summary of players exiting from the TAC Cup competition between 1997 and 2003. This information refers to players in their eighteenth year who played at least one TAC Cup match or players in their seventeenth year who were drafted to the AFL, and where they played football in the year following their exit from the TAC Cup. Survey data follows:

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<sup>677</sup> Kevin Forbes, Commissioner, Sunraysia Football League, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 33.

<sup>678</sup> Andrew Griffiths, Interim Regional Manager, North Central Region, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 6.

<sup>679</sup> Eric Bott, General Manager, Goulburn Valley Football League, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 55.

**Table 25: TAC Cup Exiting Players Summary 2002-03<sup>680</sup>**

	2003 Country players		2003 All players		2002 Country players		2002 All players	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total number of exiting players	134	100	285	100	141	100	287	100
Players who returned to original club	42	32	94	33	51	36	84	29
Players who transferred to a different VCFL/Metro/VAFA club	17	13	38	13	16	11	36	13
Players who transferred to the VFL	46	34	102	36	45	32	95	33
Players who transferred to the AFL	16	12	32	12	21	15	47	17
Players who transferred interstate	10	7	12	4	3	2	8	3
Other (injured, retired, unknown etc.)	3	2	7	2	5	4	14	5

7.38 The survey results show that, on average in 2002-3, 34% of country players returned to their original club after playing in the TAC Cup and 12% transferred to a different VCFL, metropolitan or Victorian Amateur Football Association club. Ken Gannon, the Chief Executive Officer of Football Victoria, told the Committee:

*Each week country football loses one player for every 180 open-age – 17 and 19 year old, Third XI, Third XVIII players – one in 180 or 0.5% of players in that group. This has much less impact than the previously agreed to model in the zoning days of 120 players per annum relocated to Melbourne by way of clearances and transfers, living in Melbourne and Geelong, full-time playing in the under-19s and reserve grade system.<sup>681</sup>*

Mr Gannon went on to tell the Committee that the success of the TAC Cup is related to giving young players the opportunity to achieve while maintaining their linkage to local football. Mr Gannon explained that an important component of the TAC Cup competition is “the improved quality of country teams by those players staying in their local areas, returning to their clubs and playing better local country football that they’ve learned and developed.”<sup>682</sup> Geoff Burdett from Horsham told the Committee that the TAC Cup “is promoting a lot of good football in terms of what they learn in leadership, time management, nutrition and fitness. That is certainly of benefit to a club when they do go back.”<sup>683</sup> While recognising the benefits for players and their home clubs of competing in an elite-level football competition, the Committee also believes that these benefits are largely illusory for country football clubs in remote

<sup>680</sup> Football Victoria, *TAC Cup existing players summary (1997-2003)*, Presentation to the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee, 24 May 2004.

<sup>681</sup> Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 5.

<sup>682</sup> Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 5.

<sup>683</sup> Geoff Burdett, individual, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 33.

parts of Victoria. Based on evidence received, the Committee believes that TAC Cup players drafted from such clubs are unlikely to return home and play football after leaving the TAC competition.

7.39 In terms of its impact on secondary school football, the Committee was told by the VSSSA that, in their opinion, the TAC Cup ‘structured pathway’ provides limited chance of success, and that students who consider they are unlikely to be successful at an elite level will cease playing football (including VSSSA football) altogether in favour of other sports. Although the VSSSA acknowledged that the TAC Cup clubs do assist with secondary school football in many areas,<sup>684</sup> Mr Soulos identified other issues of concern, including conflict between school and TAC Cup commitments and long travelling times for country students involved in the TAC Cup.<sup>685</sup> The Committee was also interested in the comments of Frank Williams, a VCFL regional manager from Ballarat, regarding the competition between government and non-government schools for TAC Cup players. Mr Williams said:

*What has happened in the last few years is that, for instance, Ballarat and Clarendon College offered sports scholarships to Ballarat Rebels footballers so it won the public school football premiership. Last year it was St Patrick’s College; this year it was St Patrick’s again. Eight to 10 sporting scholarships are offered. But a school like Ballarat High School, which has had very strong teams but which cannot compete with that, is robbed of equal competition. As a result many of the public schools have simply dropped out of that competition.*<sup>686</sup>

7.40 During public hearings, the Committee both heard and made suggestions about how the TAC Cup competition could be modified to better accommodate the needs of country football clubs. Committee members were interested in witnesses’ views on the value of an early completion to the TAC Cup competition in mid to late July, with a limited finals series or no finals competition. It was suggested that young players could then go back to their local district teams and leagues for the last six weeks of the season and participate in a local finals competition.<sup>687</sup> The Committee heard from representatives of the Ovens and Murray, Goulburn Valley and Murray Football

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<sup>684</sup> Luke Soulos, National Secretary, Football, School Sport Australia, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 38.

<sup>685</sup> Luke Soulos, National Secretary, Football, School Sport Australia, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, pp. 36-7.

<sup>686</sup> Frank Williams, Regional Manager, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 37.

<sup>687</sup> See for example a question asked by Dr Napthine of Bill Storey-Smith, Secretary/Manager, Central Highlands Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 11.

League that they were strongly supportive of this proposal. Eric Bott, General Manager of the Goulburn Valley Football League, said that the return of TAC Cup players to local competitions “would be so exciting, and it would add to the support of those players.”<sup>688</sup> However, other people appearing before the Committee expressed concern about the impact on local team members. Bill Storey-Smith of the Central Highlands Football League asked:

*...what do you do with the players who have played 16 league games leading up to that time and suddenly find themselves sitting on the bench going into a grand final because of a kid that comes back who is playing in another league?...That sort of scenario can have a devastating effect on any sport because those sorts of kids become very disgruntled and you lose them very quickly to the game of football.*<sup>689</sup>

Ken Gannon also informed the Committee that Football Victoria does not support a shortened TAC Cup season.<sup>690</sup>

7.41 Andrew Demetriou told the Committee that the AFL has agreed, through its strategic plan, to review the TAC Cup competition to ascertain the effectiveness of the current program and identify opportunities for improvement.<sup>691</sup> The Committee strongly encourages the AFL and Football Victoria to take concerns about the impact of the TAC Cup competition on grassroots and secondary school football into account when undertaking the review.

### ***Football in schools***

7.42 During public hearings and in submissions, people involved in country football expressed concern about the status of football in schools and broader role of physical education and sport, and the capacity of teachers to train and nurture students in Australian rules football. This section discusses those three issues in turn.

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<sup>688</sup> Eric Bott, General Manager, Goulburn Valley Football League, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 52. See also Peter Brear, Operations Officer, Ovens and Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 7; Alan Dennett, General Manager/Treasurer, Murray Valley Football League, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 32.

<sup>689</sup> Bill Storey-Smith, Secretary/Manager, Central Highlands Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 11. See also Bruce Hartigan, Chairman, Horsham Football and Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 30.

<sup>690</sup> Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 5.

<sup>691</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 6.

### **Participation and support**

7.43 The delivery of sport and physical education in primary and secondary schools is governed by the Curriculum and Standards Framework. The Curriculum and Standards Framework provides the basis for curriculum planning in Victorian schools from prep to year ten. It sets out the major areas of learning to be covered and describes learning outcomes to be achieved by students. Its content is organised into eight key learning areas which are agreed nationally. One of the key learning areas is 'Health and Physical Education'. In 1994, the State Government introduced a policy which ensures that all students from prep to year ten participate in weekly timetabled sport and physical education classes.

7.44 Based on the comments received during public hearings, many people living in rural and regional Victoria are concerned that some schools are not giving sufficient emphasis to football in their delivery of sport and physical education programs, which in turn affects the number of people playing football in rural and regional Victoria. Steve Matthews, the Community Facilitation Manager with Swan Hill Rural City Council, told the Committee:

*In light of the fact that I think we recognise the very important role that football plays in community life, there needs to be a greater emphasis on the positive values of playing sport, and particularly football and netball, in the schools. Years ago that is all we did, and I understand and recognise that it is important that a wider range of sports are covered, but not to the total exclusion of football and netball, which is sometimes the case.<sup>692</sup>*

Another witnesses, Rod Ward of the Ballarat Football League, told the Committee that "[w]hile agreeing on curriculum diversity, it should embrace our own culture and include Australian rules football."<sup>693</sup>

7.45 The Committee has been told that there are a variety of reasons why schools may choose not to offer or promote Australian rules football as a sporting option. Brendan Ryan, a former director of junior football development with the VCFL and current principal at a secondary school in Horsham, suggested to the Committee that

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<sup>692</sup> Steve Matthews, Community Facilitation Manager, Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, pp. 14-5.

<sup>693</sup> Rod Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Ballarat Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 4. See also Trevor Arnel, Secretary, Huntly Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 28; Kenneth McLean, Chief Commissioner, Wimmera Football League, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 12.



these could include concerns about risk of injury because football is a contact sport, lack of adequately trained teaching staff, lack of adequate team numbers and a high proportion of female teachers who are unlikely to have experience in playing (and teaching) football.<sup>694</sup> Luke Soulos, of School Sport Australia, also told the Committee that “it is felt that students get plenty of football through the community and therefore the attitude of there being no need to do it at school as well takes over.”<sup>695</sup> Whilst recognising the legitimacy of most of these concerns, the Committee believes that many of these perceived impediments to promoting and playing football in schools can be overcome through the development of collaborative relationships in football delivery and through the use of modified-rules games.

7.46 Ian Kett, the Executive Director of VicFit, told the Committee that, from a public health perspective, the development of linkages between schools, communities and local sporting clubs is essential to increasing participation in sporting activity.<sup>696</sup> The Committee heard evidence from the VPSSA and VSSSA that they have been very effective in developing collaborative relationships to encourage football participation. Steven Fisher, the Peninsula Zone Officer for the VPSSA, told the Committee that he has been active in seeking to link school football teams with local country teams. Mr Fisher told the Committee:

*...the Rosebud Primary School Auskick clinic, the Eastbourne Primary School Auskick clinic and the Rosebud Football Club have developed this partnership. We use the school facilities, we use the footy club facilities, we use the footy club players, and we use the teachers and all the parents from the school as well. On Saturday we had 112 kids at the local footy playing in five separate grid games. Each child had two parents there, and some had their grandparents as well. We estimated there were about 300 extra people at the footy. In fact, you could not get a car park there at the start.*<sup>697</sup>

7.47 Mr Fisher said that the development of collaborative relationships with schools has the potential to be of significant benefit to junior football leagues and clubs. He explained, “[t]he thing we could perhaps suggest to country football leagues is they try to align themselves with schools and provide us with expertise and

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<sup>694</sup> Brendan Ryan, individual, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004.

<sup>695</sup> Luke Soulos, National Secretary, Football, School Sport Australia, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 37.

<sup>696</sup> Ian Kett, Executive Director, Victorian Council on Fitness and General Health, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 42.

<sup>697</sup> Steven Fisher, Peninsula Zone Officer, Victorian Primary Schools Sports Association, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 35.

umpires for our district, zone and school carnivals. Then they would have ready access to every kid who lives in their area.”<sup>698</sup> The Committee was interested to note that the Robinvale Football Netball Club and the Sunraysia Junior Football League have a junior development officer who coaches the school sides, attends junior training and junior games, and acts as a role model for school children and junior players. The Committee believes that this is an exciting and positive development.<sup>699</sup>

7.48 Leisure Networks, a Barwon-based sporting association, also told the Committee that it was involved in a number of initiatives to improve community involvement and engagement in sporting activity. These include the development of a club network, in which 86 sporting clubs (including ten football clubs) meet monthly to discuss cross-sport issues. Another initiative, developed in partnership with Football Geelong, is a program to conduct ‘personal training sessions’ for parents whilst their children attend football training.<sup>700</sup> The Committee also notes that Football Victoria Development has established the Club/School Fostership program, which seeks to create nurturing relationships between local football clubs and schools, where local clubs provide football resources to schools, and schools promote player pathways through local football clubs. At a trial at Daylesford Secondary College in March 2004, the program linked over 300 students with the Central Highlands Sports Assembly, the Hepburn Shire and local clubs and umpiring groups.

7.49 The Committee considers that there is enormous benefit in schools, communities, sporting associations and sporting clubs working together to develop initiatives to increase interest and involvement in football, both in schools and in the community. However, the Committee also understands that such initiatives are largely driven by one or two individuals and, as Mr Fisher told the Committee, local programs can “fall in a heap” if key personnel leave. A number of possible recommendations to promote community partnerships have been suggested to the Committee, including the employment of zone officers through the Department of

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<sup>698</sup> Steven Fisher, Peninsula Zone Officer, Victorian Primary Schools Sports Association, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 34.

<sup>699</sup> Wayne Shawcross, President, Robinvale Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 37.

<sup>700</sup> Jill Evans, Executive Officer, Leisure Networks Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, pp. 31-2.

Education and Training to develop football linkages in each region, and pooling VSSSA and Football Victoria resources to develop competitions.<sup>701</sup>

7.50 The Committee does not wish to make recommendations that would remove schools' ability to tailor their physical education and sporting programs to their individual needs. The Committee is also concerned to ensure it does not stifle activity that is already occurring at a local level by prescribing how and through what means community partnerships should be developed. However, the Committee also understands that there is a need for local initiatives to be supported by peak bodies. While bodies like Football Victoria Development and TAC Cup clubs are providing assistance developing school and community football, the Committee was told by Luke Soulos that "the AFL needs to work in developing programs in the 13-17 year old age group. The AFL does a hell of a lot in Auskick, but then it seems to drop away between 13 and 17. Perhaps they need to give more emphasis in years to come in that age group, in schools particularly and in the community."<sup>702</sup> The Committee believes that the AFL receives considerable benefit from student participation in football at school and that it is well positioned to increase support in this area. For this reason, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 26: That the Australian Football League increase its involvement in, and support for, school football competitions.**

**Recommendation 27: That the Australian Football League ensure that Football Victoria Development and the Victorian Country Football League are adequately resourced to enable them to work in partnership with schools, country football clubs and community groups to encourage and promote football in schools, particularly in schools in rural and regional Victoria.**

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<sup>701</sup> Steven Fisher, Peninsula Zone Officer, Victorian Primary Schools Sports Association, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 35; Luke Soulos, National Secretary, Football, School Sport Australia, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 39.

<sup>702</sup> Luke Soulos, National Secretary, Football, School Sport Australia, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 38.

## **Physical education in the curriculum**

7.51 As discussed earlier, physical education and sport is currently one of eight compulsory school curriculum areas. The Committee recognises that football in particular, and all sports in general, will suffer if the delivery of physical education and sport is not mandated in schools. This was impressed upon the Committee by David Parkin, a coaching ambassador and lecturer:

*The only curriculum area that is compulsorily mandated at the moment is P.S.E.[Physical and Sport Education]; choice of schools is a close second now. In the past the Victorian education ministry has attempted to have physical sport education 'unmandated'. I think that would've been an absolute disaster....*

*I've been in this area now for forty years, and when governments – in particular education departments, or whatever – have seen fit to 'unmandate' it and to leave it to a school-based decision, it's the first to go and the last to be taught at all curriculum areas. And I would be devastated if we were chased down that road.<sup>703</sup>*

The Committee is aware that the State Government is currently giving consideration to curriculum reform. Under the proposed new framework, the existing eight key learning areas will be replaced by three separate but related 'pillars' – 'core knowledge, ideas and skills from broad disciplines', 'other essential skills', and 'personal and social skills'. 'Physical development' is included under the third pillar. The *Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004 Consultation Paper* states that the new curriculum "will be delivered and supported by appropriate content selected by schools to meet the demands of their students and local communities."<sup>704</sup> In an environment of increasing physical inactivity among children and rising obesity levels and associated health problems, the Committee is concerned that the proposed new curriculum framework may enable schools to 'opt out' of providing physical education and sport. If physical education and sport became optional in schools it would have a highly deleterious effect on the health and fitness of school students and on football participation in rural and regional Victoria.

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<sup>703</sup> David Parkin, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, pp. 22-3.

<sup>704</sup> Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004 consultation paper*, 2004, p. 4.

7.52 David Parkin told the Committee there is strong evidence that children benefit most from experience across a wide variety of sports. Mr Parkin explained that “it’s suggested now that champions in fact don’t focus or specialise early and have broader-based experience.”<sup>705</sup> The Committee therefore sees significant benefit in schools providing children with generalised movement courses. The Committee also believes that modified-rules sporting programs in primary and secondary school, such as Auskick, Netta Netball and the AFL Recreation Game (a modified non-contact game for people of all ages), are vital to complex skill development and lifelong engagement in sporting activity. As previously discussed, the Auskick program is regarded as a world class sport development program for young people. The Committee therefore believes that all schools should be actively involved in delivering both generalised movement courses and appropriate modified-rules games, based on the Auskick model, at primary and secondary level.

For these reasons, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 28: That physical education continues to be mandated as a compulsory part of the school curriculum, and that the physical education curriculum contains two components:**

- (i) generalised movement; and**
- (ii) modified games for skill acquisition.**

**Recommendation 29: That the State Government develop a generalised sports program, based on Auskick, to be offered through Victorian primary schools.**

### **Teacher training**

7.53 Since 1994, the Department of Education and Training has been funding the Physical and Sport Education (PASE) professional development package. PASE Plus courses are delivered by trained PASE teachers in cooperation with the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER). Football Victoria Development is the major provider of football teacher training courses for ACHPER.

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<sup>705</sup> David Parkin, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 24.

Football Victoria conducts a Level 1 Primary Teachers Coaching Course each year with PASE Courses and Professional Development sessions available on demand via the 19 full time Football Development Managers throughout the state. Topics include basic skill development, skill drills, games and activities, and training in modified games. For secondary schools, Football Victoria Development provides Level One Secondary School Teacher coaching courses. The course content is delivered by presenters with experience in AFL, VFL, TAC Cup and community football environments. Some of the topics covered include team play and tactics, game structure and position play, contact skills and skill development training.

7.54 Although football training is available to primary and secondary teachers through Football Victoria Development, the Committee was nevertheless told by the VSSSA that “the biggest problem we have in schools is that we are lacking coaches and expertise.”<sup>706</sup> According to David Parkin, part of the difficulty lies in the fact that teachers have many, often competing, priorities and unless individual teachers have “an aptitude, an interest or a commitment themselves to the area”, they are unlikely to participate in specialist football training.<sup>707</sup> Ian Kett, the Executive Director of VicFit, identified lack of resources for physical education as a contributor.<sup>708</sup> Frank Williams, a VCFL Regional Manager from Ballarat, told the Committee that teachers’ level of interest in football is such that they are reluctant to actively seek out training, and for this reason football needs to be embedded in the curriculum. Regarding training, Mr Williams said that “[if] you come in and do it for the schools, they will facilitate it. But unless it is done for them, and unless it is an integral part of the curriculum it is not going to be effective.”<sup>709</sup> The Committee also understands that many teachers in rural Victoria are required to travel long distances to undertake football training courses and the time and cost associated with this may be a disincentive to participation.

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<sup>706</sup> Steven Fisher, Peninsula Zone Officer, Victorian Primary Schools Sports Association, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 34.

<sup>707</sup> David Parkin, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 23.

<sup>708</sup> Ian Kett, Executive Director, Victorian Council on Fitness and General Health, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 42.

<sup>709</sup> Frank Williams, Regional Manager, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 37.

7.55 A number of witnesses told the Committee that the gender imbalance in the teaching profession, whereby female teachers outnumber male teachers, is also an important factor. This is because women have not traditionally played football and therefore do not have the necessary skills or enthusiasm to teach football as part of a physical education and sporting program.<sup>710</sup> Glenn Scott, the Chief Executive Officer of the VCFL, said:

*We would like to see the return of football into the schools. This not just the VCFL saying this; many people have noticed that because of the decrease in male teachers over a number of years now the influence is not quite there. Without trying to draw a parallel between whether males would be better to teach footy than females, we think that if long term strategies are put in place to encourage male teachers to be there it would have a greater influence in getting our youth involved in football.*<sup>711</sup>

The Committee is aware that the 2002 report of the Commonwealth Standing Committee on Education and Training, *Boys: Getting it Right*, found that, nationally, the proportion of male primary teachers fell from 26.3% to 21.3% between 1991 and 2001, and that the situation is not likely to reverse itself.<sup>712</sup> This prediction has proven accurate, with ABS statistics showing that the proportion of male primary teachers had fallen to 20.9% in 2003.<sup>713</sup> However, the Committee also recognises that teaching has traditionally been seen as a female profession, particularly in the primary sector, and that there has always been a greater proportion of female teachers as compared with male teachers. In the Committee's view, the focus should be on ensuring that those teachers who are currently working in the education system receive appropriate training in sport and physical education, including football. The Committee recognises that the number of women teachers who have played or trained in football is likely to be relatively low, and sees merit in encouraging women in particular to undertake football development courses, in addition to general sports development and physical education training. The Committee recommends:

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<sup>710</sup> See for example Keith den Houting, Chief Executive Officer and Secretary/Treasurer, Golden Rivers Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 10; Ian Kett, Executive Director, Victorian Council on Fitness and General Health, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 42; Michael McMahon, Chief Executive Officer, Football Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 9; David Parkin, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 21; Brendan Ryan, individual, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 6; Victorian Secondary Schools' Sports Association, *Submission*, no. 64, 31 May 2004, p. 2.

<sup>711</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 7.

<sup>712</sup> Standing Committee on Education and Training, *Boys: getting it right*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2002, p. 154. In March 2004, the Commonwealth government introduced the Sex Discrimination Amendment (Teaching Profession) Bill 2004 to amend the Sex Discrimination Act to provide a permanent exemption for the provision of gender specific scholarships that can be offered to teaching students.

<sup>713</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Schools*, no. 4221.0, 2003, p. 31.

**Recommendation 30: That the Department of Education and Training develop and implement a training program to encourage all teachers to obtain practical experience in physical education and selected sports, with the intention that:**

- (i) most teachers acquire general physical education and sports coaching skills; and**
- (ii) these programs be made available through regional centres to ensure all teachers are able to undertake physical education training programs where necessary.**

**Recommendation 31: That the Department of Education and Training actively encourage all teachers, particularly those without a strong sporting background, to become involved in physical education and development programs for selected sports, including Australian rules football.**

### **AFL appearances and clinics**

7.56 Earlier in the chapter, the Committee reviewed some of the activities that AFL clubs and players engage in to nurture and support junior football, in schools and in the community. The Committee heard that the presence of AFL players in rural and regional Victoria is vital to ensure young people become interested and remain involved in football. Brett Anderson, the VCFL's Area Manager for the South-West, endorsed this view:

*The continued support of activities involving AFL players such as community camps, clinics and AFL practice matches that we currently have running in country Victoria is something that we should try to maintain. This can create enormous interest and can only help increase participation levels, particularly for juniors.*<sup>714</sup>

Previously, the Committee noted that the number of AFL clinics, player appearances and school attendances has declined over time. The Committee also heard that often, when AFL players were available to attend such events, they were usually rookie players, rather than well-known footballers. James McFarlane, the Secretary of the

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<sup>714</sup> Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 27.



Mallee Football League, told the Committee that an ‘Auskick roadshow’ was held in Hopetoun in 2003 and more than 400 children attended. Mr McFarlane said that ex-AFL player Robert Dipierdomenico was the only known football identity, with the remainder of the players in their first year of being drafted. Mr McFarlane said “[t]o come to these areas with people who are unknown, you might as well not come. It was very disappointing to the organisers and more disappointing to the kids that attended.”<sup>715</sup>

7.57 The Committee has received assurances from the AFL that the number of appearances by rookie and senior players in rural and regional Victoria will be increased in future, in accordance with the new collective bargaining agreement between the AFL and the Australian Football League Players’ Association. While AFL player appearances are of considerable importance to the development of, and interest in, junior and children’s football, the Committee also heard that senior country football clubs and leagues were also in favour of receiving greater exposure to these players. Issues surrounding AFL player appearances are discussed in detail in Chapter Eight.

### **Conclusion**

7.58 The health of country football is inextricably linked to that of junior and youth football. Playing Auskick and other modified rules games, participation in junior football competitions and exposure to football in school are vital to ensuring that children learn to appreciate, enjoy and be part of Australian rules football. While junior and youth football are valuable in their own right, they are also an important source of potential players for senior country football competitions and for the AFL. For these reasons, and in order to encourage young people to continue to be involved in healthy physical and social activity, the Committee believes that a greater focus should be placed on ensuring that teachers across Victoria receive appropriate training in sports coaching skills, including football. This training needs to be affordable and accessible for teachers working in rural and regional Victoria, and also should be actively promoted amongst women teachers. The Committee believes that the benefits of engagement in sport and physical activity have been demonstrably proven

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<sup>715</sup> James McFarlane, Secretary, Mallee Football League, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 4.

and it is therefore essential that physical education remain compulsory in the school curriculum. Although the Committee recognises the role of elite player pathways in providing development opportunities for talented young players, the Committee has heard a range of concerns about the impact of the TAC Cup program in particular on local competitions. The Committee also believes that the AFL could be more active in encouraging and promoting football in schools. In the next chapter, the Committee explicitly considers issues concerning peak bodies, such as the AFL, Football Victoria and the VCFL, and makes recommendations designed to improve these and other organisations' support for country football at all levels.

## Chapter Eight

### Issues for consideration: peak bodies

#### *Introduction*

8.1 In this chapter, the relevant functions and roles of peak country football bodies are discussed. The major purpose of this chapter is to focus on a range of issues identified through the course of this Inquiry, and to suggest ways in which peak bodies, including the Australian Football League (AFL), Football Victoria and the Victorian Country Football League (VCFL), could better support country football.

8.2 The Committee noted throughout the course of its hearings that there was some confusion over the roles and functions played in football by each of the peak bodies in Victoria, such as the AFL, Football Victoria (and Football Victoria Development) and the VCFL. A number of witnesses regarded the TAC Cup competition as a VCFL initiative, for example, although the TAC Cup is run through Football Victoria. Another view expressed occasionally was that the VCFL was largely funded by the AFL and so represents that organisation's interests above those of country football. However, the Committee notes that the VCFL is largely self-funded, with 84% of its revenues generated through sources external to the AFL and Football Victoria. The potential benefits to each peak football organisation of improving awareness of their activities are discussed throughout this chapter. Given the extent to which confusion over the roles of peak bodies is evident in country Victoria, the Committee would also like to encourage the VCFL, Football Victoria and the AFL to consider working in concert to promote their respective roles and activities in country Victoria.

#### *The Australian Football League*

8.3 Australian rules football has established itself as Australia's premier football code, and the AFL has assumed a pre-eminent place as the flagship of Australian rules football. The success of the AFL competition is a source of pride across Australia, and for Victorians in particular, as it is widely acknowledged that Victoria is the birthplace and heartland of Australian rules football. Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer of the AFL, described the outstanding success of the national football competition with the following observation:

*...media coverage is one measure of the popularity of the AFL. I think they were recently promoted as having about 600 people in the media covering AFL football, which I think is three times federal politics.<sup>716</sup>*

8.4 While the Committee shares this interest in the national competition, and is proud of its success, it recognises that the high profile of the AFL has also generated certain expectations from grassroots supporters about the scale of AFL football operations. Often, it is seen as the responsibility of the AFL and AFL clubs to support Australian rules football at all levels, not just at the elite levels of competition. The Committee understands, for example, that some struggling country football clubs may find it difficult to comprehend why little support seems forthcoming from the AFL when the media contains reports of AFL and AFL club revenues in the order of tens of millions of dollars, with some elite player payments approaching half a million dollars or more:

*Several AFL clubs in recent years have had financial problems and some still have them despite the huge money from TV rights, sponsorships and so forth. I invite members of the committee to look up an article... in the Herald Sun of last weekend where the huge growth in player payments and other costs of the Carlton Football Club, as an AFL example, were listed. This just showed the tremendous amount of money being available not only for players and the tremendous rise which had come out in the last few years in player payments, but also the much enlarged staff.... You might say it is remote from Tatong and Swanpool and those places, but it is all football money and it is a bad trend when those costs in Melbourne are going up all the time. Country people might well think perhaps we have to find some more money on a pro rata basis here as well.<sup>717</sup>*

8.5 The AFL told the Committee that the perception that country football receives no support from the AFL is unfounded, and that game development throughout country Victoria is well supported by the AFL, particularly in comparison to other sporting codes.<sup>718</sup> However, the Committee also heard from a number of witnesses that the AFL and AFL clubs could do more to acknowledge the contribution of country Victoria to Australian rules football – for example, by promoting its contribution to country football more effectively, facilitating player appearances in

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<sup>716</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 10.

<sup>717</sup> Bill McCarthy, individual, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 39.

<sup>718</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 2.

country Victoria and providing more explicit support to volunteers currently engaged in football.<sup>719</sup>

## **AFL support for country football**

8.6 The Committee heard from Mr Demetriou that the AFL, through Football Victoria, contributed \$5.5 million in 2002-2003 to various football development activities in country Victoria.<sup>720</sup> As noted in Chapter Four, this comprised funding for the TAC Cup competition, Regional Development Officers, training programs, VCFL grants and transfer fees, coaching and umpiring programs, and development programs such as Auskick. However, while the Committee recognises this substantial contribution to country football by the AFL and its affiliated bodies, it was notable throughout the course of the Committee's hearings that a large number of people throughout country Victoria regard the AFL's contribution to country football as largely focused on junior development and elite player pathways, to the exclusion of senior, grassroots football.<sup>721</sup>

8.7 Another observation was that, as country Victoria contributed around 30% of listed players to the AFL competition, and as country Victorians were very supportive

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<sup>719</sup> Oscar Aertssen, Regional Manager, North West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 22; Keith den Houting, Chief Executive Officer and Secretary/Treasurer, Golden Rivers Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 10; Alan Dennett, General Manager/Treasurer, Murray Valley Football League, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 32; Allen Dillon, President, Huntly Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 29; Peter Doig, Director of Football Operations, Swan Hill Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 15; Salvatore Ficarra, Chairman, Central Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 3; Graeme Kurzman, Vice-President, Kilmore Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 25; Chris Lewis, Manager, Sport and Recreation, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 5; Kenneth McLean, Chief Commissioner, Wimmera Football League, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 13; Ken Oberin, Recreation Coordinator, Shire of Campaspe, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 49; Graeme Pigdon, President, Lexton Plains Football League and Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 15; Jim Ure, President, Central Goulburn Football League, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 4; Mark Williams, Secretary/Treasurer, Horsham Football and Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 38.

<sup>720</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 2.

<sup>721</sup> Oscar Aertssen, Regional Manager, North West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 21; Alan Dennett, General Manager/Treasurer, Murray Valley Football League, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 33; Allen Dillon, President, Huntly Football Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 29; Andrew Griffiths, Interim Regional Manager, North Central Region, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 6; Terry Kiley, President, Mallee Football League, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 2; Luke Soulos, National Secretary, Football, School Sport Australia, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 38; Jim Ure, President, Central Goulburn Football League, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 4; Neville Whitley, President, Geelong and District Football League, *Public Hearing*, Modewarre, 9 March 2004, p. 24.

of AFL clubs and the AFL competition, rural and regional Victoria should receive more recognition, support and resources from the AFL in return.<sup>722</sup>

8.8 As noted in previous chapters, the Committee recognises that football organisations affiliated to the AFL in Victoria, particularly Football Victoria, do make a significant contribution to country football and that, in the case of Football Victoria, the major proportion of its funds are directly derived from the AFL and AFL clubs. The VCFL, in turn, receives approximately \$458,000 per annum (around 16% of its operating budget) from the AFL and AFL clubs, largely via Football Victoria, to run its programs and initiatives. As noted above, the complex structural relationship of these three bodies – the AFL, Football Victoria and the VCFL – did not appear to be universally understood in country Victoria. The Committee suggests that some of the criticisms levelled at these bodies may be alleviated if more work was done to publicise their activities and responsibilities. This point was acknowledged by Mr Demetriou when he appeared before the Committee:

*...I have acknowledged in my presentation that we [the AFL] are probably guilty of not articulating well enough what the AFL does, particularly in country Victoria, and particularly with the amount of funding and the programs that we support – and in some instances initiate. It is a challenge for the AFL to make sure that the message about the AFL and its programs is well understood by communities.*<sup>723</sup>

However, while the Committee recognises the AFL's substantial contribution to game development and talented player pathways in rural and regional Victoria, the Committee also accepts the argument raised by a number of witnesses that the AFL could do more to support senior, grassroots country football.

8.9 Participation in football by country people of all ages and abilities is an important component of the success of football in country Victoria. The Committee has noted that football participation declines markedly when players reach their late teens, and is concerned that the increasing emphasis of peak body development activities on elite player pathways may create an environment in which 'ordinary'

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<sup>722</sup> Glen Linke, Secretary, Mininera and District Football Netball League, *Public Hearing*, Warrnambool, 10 March 2004, p. 14; Steve Matthews, Community Facilitation Manager, Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 16; Graeme Pigdon, President, Lexton Plains Football League and Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 4; Mark Williams, Secretary/Treasurer, Horsham Football and Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 37.

<sup>723</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 5.

players decide not to play football as they realise that the elite competition is beyond their ability.<sup>724</sup> It is evident that participation in senior country football by players of all abilities makes an important contribution to the way many country communities perceive themselves, and arguably, high rates of adult participation in football may make a substantial contribution to junior football participation. In previous chapters, however, the Committee has noted that senior grassroots football is facing substantial challenges in country Victoria, particularly regarding infrastructure improvements, facility maintenance and volunteer recruitment and responsibilities. For this reason, the Committee would like to encourage the AFL and AFL clubs to increase their support for senior grassroots football in country Victoria. The Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 32: That the Australian Football League give consideration to the special needs of country football when allocating funding, similar to the way that consideration is currently given to the special needs of developing states such as the Northern Territory, Queensland and New South Wales.**

### **AFL and AFL club activities and programs**

8.10 The Committee recognises that the AFL convenes some programs in rural and regional Victoria, which are of benefit both to country football and country communities. Among these programs are the AFL Community Camps, in which each AFL club runs general programs on an annual basis in selected rural and regional locations, or in places that ordinarily have limited access to AFL football clubs. In 2004, Community Camps were held in country Victoria by the Carlton Football Club (Ballarat), Richmond Football Club (Mornington Peninsula), Melbourne Football Club (Echuca), and Essendon Football Club (Warrnambool). These programs are valuable to football volunteers and football club administrators and managers. The Committee notes that these Community Camps were very well received in country Victoria and that they were strongly supported by the VCFL and Football Victoria. The Committee therefore commends the AFL and AFL clubs for introducing this

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<sup>724</sup> Bruce Hartigan, Chairman, Horsham Football and Netball Club, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 30.

initiative, given the value of Community Camps to Australian rules football throughout Australia.

8.11 The AFL and AFL clubs also convene AFL club practice matches in country Victoria, and the Committee heard from witnesses these were also valuable to local communities.<sup>725</sup> However, the Committee notes that on occasion some AFL clubs expressed considerable reluctance to participate in these practice matches, usually due to what they perceived as sub-standard conditions of some country football grounds. This was the case in March 2004, when the Hawthorn Football Club threatened to pull out of future practice matches if penetrometer readings were not provided by the AFL prior to the match, due to concerns over injuries to two of the club's players.<sup>726</sup> Following this complaint, a practice match between the Collingwood Football Club and Melbourne Football Club was moved from Bendigo to Collingwood due to similar concerns about ground hardness.<sup>727</sup> The Committee understands that planning country practice matches is a complex task, but also notes that they are of considerable benefit to rural and regional Victoria. The Committee would like to encourage AFL clubs to look upon participation in country practice matches and attendance at associated functions as an opportunity to increase their community profile and contribute to the development of football in country Victoria. Furthermore, the Committee believes that the AFL should act more proactively in the future to ensure that scheduled country practice matches proceed. Toward this end, the AFL should assess the suitability of selected rural and regional grounds for AFL practice matches and actively assist local football organisations to bring those football grounds up to an appropriate standard.

8.12 The Committee has previously noted the 'On the Ball' program run by Essendon Football Club in consultation with VicHealth and the Australian Drug Foundation (see Chapter Seven), and regards such programs to be an appropriate way for AFL clubs to engage both with football and wider social issues in country

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<sup>725</sup> Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 3; Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, pp. 20-1; Michael Harrison, General Manager, Hampden Football Netball League, *Public Hearing*, Warrnambool, 10 March 2004, p. 11.

<sup>726</sup> 'Hawks threaten to boycott regional matches', *ABC Sport*, 1 March 2004, viewed 1 November 2004, <<http://www.abc.net.au/sport/content/s1056510.htm>>.

<sup>727</sup> Len Johnson, 'Practice games to fall on hard times', *The Age*, 6 March 2004, viewed 1 November 2004, <<http://www.realfooty.theage.com.au/articles/2004/03/05/1078464638464.html>>.



Victoria. In 2004, the Hawthorn Football Club collaborated with MBF Insurance and the VCFL on the HighMarks scholarship program, in which ten country youths aged 14 to 16 years spent three days with the Hawthorn Football Club receiving training and vocational guidance. The Collingwood Football Club, in association with Bega and the Victorian Primary Schools Sports Association, also support a primary school football competition and provide certificates and ‘footy packs’ to those children who participate:

*The other thing that is happening is that the Collingwood Football Club and the Bonland corporation are starting to sponsor school football, and part of that sponsorship is [for] providing equipment, jumpers et cetera — particularly in the country areas with the smaller schools.<sup>728</sup>*

8.13 The Committee recognises that AFL clubs also undertake promotional visits and football clinics at various times during the year, such as when the Collingwood Football Club visited Mildura, Wonthaggi, Phillip Island and Wangaratta earlier in 2004.

8.14 The Committee considers all these initiatives to be particularly valuable, and encourages other Victorian AFL clubs to seriously consider offering similar programs, or programs that extend support to junior and senior football clubs, in country Victoria.

### **Player appearances**

8.15 One issue raised repeatedly before the Committee concerned the attendance of AFL club players at various functions and development activities held in country Victoria. Some witnesses suggested to the Committee that player appearances by AFL players were becoming increasingly rare in rural Victoria.<sup>729</sup> As discussed in Chapter Seven, the Committee heard that player appearances in country Victoria were of considerable value to local clubs, schools and communities. However, on

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<sup>728</sup> Ken Wingjan, Executive Officer, Victorian Primary Schools Sports Association, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 40.

<sup>729</sup> Alan Dennett, General Manager/Treasurer, Murray Valley Football League, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 32; Leigh Elder, General Manager, Ovens and Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Wangaratta, 15 April 2004, p. 7; Terry Kiley, President, Mallee Football League, *Public Hearing*, Sea Lake, 24 March 2004, p. 4; Kenneth McLean, Chief Commissioner, Wimmera Football League, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 13; Ken Oberin, Recreation Coordinator, Shire of Campaspe, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 49; Brendan Ryan, individual, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 6; Rod Taylor, President, Mid Gippsland Football League, *Public Hearing*, Leongatha, 7 April 2004, p. 4; David Young, President, Loddon Valley Football League, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 11.

occasion, ‘unnamed’ players would attend in place of high-profile, recognised players which was disappointing for the local community.

8.16 The Committee also heard that on a number of occasions AFL players that were scheduled to appear in country Victoria cancelled at the last minute, as their club had called a last-minute training session, or because they had other commitments.<sup>730</sup> Moreover, a number of witnesses told the Committee that they were unable to arrange player appearances because a travel ‘time limit’ had been set so that if players were asked to appear at any place that required more than 2½ hours travel from Melbourne, they would have to be flown to the location (at the expense of the group that invited the player), or decide not to attend:

*If you are an AFL footballer your club will not allow you to travel any further than 2½ hours in a car.... If it is any further than 2½ hours you must pay money to get an aeroplane for them. If we wanted a footballer to come up here to conduct training or to speak, we have been told that the AFL will not allow its footballers to sit in a car for any longer than 2½ hours. We are on the borderline; we are 3 or 3½ hours from Melbourne.*<sup>731</sup>

8.17 While there was some criticism of the way in which some player appearances were arranged, there was general agreement that AFL player appearances were highly valued and that player appearances generated substantial local interest in Australian rules football for old and young alike. Where AFL players – particularly high profile players – were able to attend events in country Victoria, the local football community was inevitably pleased:

*...in that side [of former Murray Football League players] that we selected last year we invited them all up to our presentation night; Brian Gleeson and all those older type players, it was not a problem. They came up and gave everything. The younger players... wanted money to attend. Francis Burke, who was captain of that side, spent all Good Friday at the Barooga game, went on to the night game at Finley, then had to open a newsagency on the Saturday morning. That is the type of person that the AFL should be holding up in front of all the rest of them and saying, ‘This is what a 300 game footballer does for country football’. Shane Crawford was on a pushbike going to Sydney when we held the presentation night. Shane rang and said, ‘I will be in Gundagai. If I am running late or anything goes wrong and I am in Albury, can you send a car across? I will gladly come across to be there for the night’. There is the difference with true, home grown country footballers.*<sup>732</sup>

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<sup>730</sup> Brendan Ryan, individual, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 6.

<sup>731</sup> Salvatore Ficarra, Chairman, Central Murray Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 3.

<sup>732</sup> Alan Dennett, General Manager/Treasurer, Murray Valley Football League, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 32.

8.18 The Committee recognises that AFL players are, in many respects, the icons of Australian rules football and their appearances are valued by football participants and country communities. According to the 2004 AFL *Collective Bargaining Agreement* (CBA), all AFL players will be required to make themselves available for 21 half day (four hour) appearances for promotional activities (15 appearances scheduled by the player’s club, and six scheduled by the AFL), to be directed at:

- increasing participation in, and development of, Australian Football;
- increasing match attendance;
- increasing AFL and AFL club membership;
- building and improving community relations; and
- promotion of AFL or the AFL club to AFL Protected Sponsors or AFL club Protected Sponsors...<sup>733</sup>.

8.19 The Committee notes that the current CBA (2004) amends the previous agreement, which required players to make themselves available for 17 appearances per year, including twelve appearances for their respective club and five appearances for the AFL. The previous CBA did not specify how long each appearance would be.<sup>734</sup>

8.20 The Committee also notes that the current CBA does not explicitly require players to spend one day (or part thereof) in country Victoria, although the Committee was reassured by Mr Demetriou’s commitment that “...all [Victorian AFL] players will spend one full day in country Victoria in 2004.”<sup>735</sup> The current CBA introduces a system of fines for players who fail to honour appearance commitments, which the Committee hopes will ensure that players attend all of their scheduled appearances.<sup>736</sup> However, one area of concern for the Committee, in light of evidence it heard during the course of this Inquiry about player appearances cancelled due to ‘last minute club training sessions’, is the provision that “...in the event that an AFL club imposes

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<sup>733</sup> Australian Football League & Australian Football League Players' Association Incorporated, *Collective bargaining agreement*, Australian Football League, Melbourne, 2004, pp. 26-7.

<sup>734</sup> Australian Football League & Australian Football League Players' Association Incorporated, *Collective bargaining agreement 1998-2003*, Australian Football League, Melbourne, 1999, p. 37.

<sup>735</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 3.

<sup>736</sup> Australian Football League & Australian Football League Players' Association Incorporated, *Collective bargaining agreement*, Australian Football League, Melbourne, 2004, p. 28.

activities on a Player which prevents the Player from fulfilling an allocated appearance, the Player will not be held responsible for the non-appearance nor will he be subject to penalty.<sup>737</sup> Whereas players are subject to fines for failures to attend scheduled appearances, the Committee is unaware of any similar penalties for AFL clubs. Mr Demetriou also assured the Committee that no restrictions were placed on travel time for player appearances, and that the AFL had made provision for air travel to be provided in some cases.<sup>738</sup> Again, the Committee is reassured that Mr Demetriou has made a commitment to ensure each AFL player is scheduled to spend one full day in country Victoria per year.

### **AFL media coverage**

8.21 A number of witnesses raised concerns about the extent of AFL media coverage during the course of this Inquiry. Brendan Ryan, a former director of junior football development with the VCFL, told the Committee that the AFL's policy of not broadcasting AFL matches into country Victoria on free-to-air television on Saturday afternoons was a good one, and suggested that the AFL maintain this policy in future. However, a number of witnesses stated that the extensive coverage of AFL competition football by the media had a negative effect on country football, as it reduced interest in local football competitions. Di Trotter, Executive Officer of the Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, told the Committee:

*Football is being overexposed. At the very elite level every match is programmed live, on television, the radio and with pre-match and post-match reports splashed all through the pages of the paper – not just the sporting pages either – and members of the public are becoming onlookers and not participants.<sup>739</sup>*

Craig Keating, a witness from Heywood, also suggested that, as a result of extensive AFL media coverage, local businesses were more reluctant to sponsor local football, as they felt the expense could not be justified in terms of the advertising exposure sponsorship generated:

*I find I cannot justify the sponsorship dollars as easily as I could once. You do not do it because it is great business sense; you do it because it helps your*

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<sup>737</sup> Australian Football League & Australian Football League Players' Association Incorporated, *Collective bargaining agreement*, Australian Football League, Melbourne, 2004, p. 26.

<sup>738</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 6.

<sup>739</sup> Di Trotter, Executive Officer, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 21.

*associations and makes your customers feel warm and fuzzy. It is much harder to justify now because the leagues and clubs are not able to gain the exposure that gives my business a wider access to consumers. So the fact that it is all AFL has made that sponsorship almost worthless — it is not just that the clubs cannot find sponsors, but it is harder to justify it.*<sup>740</sup>

8.22 However, Mr Demetriou told the Committee that media coverage of the AFL benefited country football through indirect means such as increased revenues to the AFL (a proportion of which is directed toward country football) and as a means to stimulate further interest from children who played Auskick.<sup>741</sup> Mr Demetriou also suggested to the Committee that AFL media coverage was associated with more tangible benefits to country football, such as increased spectator attendances:

*Since we entered into the current broadcast rights agreement, the information we have had from Football Victoria and the VCFL is that attendances at local football have increased. In many instances, country leagues had record gate takings to their finals in recent years, which we are thrilled about. That could be because of the popularity, again. It could be because of the media coverage. It could also be because we work closely with Football Victoria – to give you an example – to leave certain days free for finals. For example, we play preliminary finals now on Friday and Saturday nights, which allows football to be played during the day so you can watch the AFL games, which I think is a good thing.*<sup>742</sup>

8.23 The Committee acknowledges and commends the AFL for scheduling its preliminary finals in 2004 to avoid clashes with local football competitions and encourages the AFL to maintain this policy in future.

### **Modified AFL draft**

8.24 A number of witnesses told the Committee that levels of support and resources provided to country clubs by AFL clubs were greater under the zoning system previously practiced by the AFL, and that the AFL should consider reintroducing that system.<sup>743</sup> Some witnesses explained that, under country zoning, AFL club players and staff would regularly visit country football clubs. Witnesses also said that

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<sup>740</sup> Craig Keating, individual, *Public Hearing*, Warrnambool, 10 March 2004, p. 21.

<sup>741</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 10.

<sup>742</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 10.

<sup>743</sup> Robert Gersh, Mayor, Shire of Hindmarsh, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 17; Ken Oberin, Recreation Coordinator, Shire of Campaspe, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 20 May 2004, p. 49; David Parkin, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 25; Wayne Shawcross, President, Robinvale Football Club, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 23 March 2004, p. 38.

material support was offered to country football clubs on occasion and the alignment of country zones to specific clubs created an atmosphere of loyalty to that club:

*When I went to Collingwood Tony Farrugia— he was the general manager at Hawthorn after a while — was in charge of our zoning and our going to the schools and the clinics and we had a graph on the wall of who went where. We made them go — all the players had to do that. It does not happen anymore.<sup>744</sup>*

8.25 During the course of this Inquiry, the Committee considered a suggestion that the AFL draft be modified to accommodate a revived form of country zoning. For example, AFL clubs could be offered an opportunity to swap their third or fourth round draft picks after the first round of the draft, for a draft pick from their allocated zone. In 2001, the Carter Report indicated that, while the current AFL draft system was a positive development and produced benefits through equalisation of the competition, it would be desirable to encourage AFL clubs to invest more substantially in grassroots development. In this context, the Carter Report noted that AFL clubs would most likely demand access to tangible benefit for participating in such activities – and that access to players was of particular interest to those clubs:

*‘As a CEO [of an AFL club], I can see the benefits in brand development and building supporter bases. But I also have to persuade the football department, and what they care about is access to players.’<sup>745</sup>*

8.26 While it is possible that the reintroduction of a form of country zoning would provide some incentive for AFL clubs to invest in country football, witnesses before the Committee also argued that zoning would have a negative effect on the AFL competition, or that the logistics of zoning would be too difficult to implement in an appropriate manner. Some witness noted that the previous zoning system was in place when the competition only included Melbourne clubs, and that as the AFL is now a national competition, it would be very difficult for all clubs to negotiate and agree on the allocation of zones. Paul Daffey, a journalist with an interest in country football, suggested that the introduction of a zoning draft pick would compromise the draft system, which was already undermined by the father/son rule.<sup>746</sup> Mr Demetriou told the Committee that “all our advice is that to introduce zoning to AFL football is

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<sup>744</sup> Tommy Hafey, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 50.

<sup>745</sup> Quoted from AFL Commission Review Group, *Investing in the future of Australian Football*, 2001, p. 48.

<sup>746</sup> Paul Daffey, individual, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 36.

illegal, and that where you live shouldn't determine where you should work."<sup>747</sup> While the Committee understands this sentiment, it acknowledges that under the current draft system players are also afforded little choice as to where they work, particularly at initial recruitment.

8.27 The Committee notes that some AFL clubs do run programs that support game development in specific parts of Victoria. However, the Committee also notes that this activity is not common among Victorian AFL clubs. It appears that little progress has been made in recent years to involve AFL clubs more substantially in football development activities, despite a statement in the Carter Report that “[f]inding ways to get the [AFL] clubs and players more constructively involved in promoting game development is a challenge that football cannot afford to ignore.”<sup>748</sup> The Committee considers that the introduction of an AFL zoning system for country Victoria would be an effective way to encourage all AFL clubs to invest more substantially in grassroots football development. Consequently, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 33: That the Australian Football League examine ways of strengthening links between AFL clubs and rural and regional areas, so that AFL clubs provide clubs and players from those areas with support, assistance and mentorship; and that as an incentive for AFL clubs to provide such assistance, the Australian Football League consider introducing a mechanism to allow these AFL clubs preferential draft picks from their allocated rural and regional area, to be selected after the completion of round one of the draft, in exchange for their round three or four draft picks.**

### ***Football Victoria***

8.28 Of the three main peak bodies for football in country Victoria – the VCFL, AFL and Football Victoria – the roles and functions of Football Victoria appeared to be the least fully understood by the community. The Committee notes that many witnesses attributed a number of the functions of, and programs run by, Football

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<sup>747</sup> Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 10 May 2004, p. 7.

<sup>748</sup> AFL Commission Review Group, *Investing in the future of Australian Football*, 2001, p. 48.

Victoria to either the AFL or the VCFL (see above). Consequently, of all the peak football bodies in Victoria, Football Victoria could benefit most from increased promotion and awareness of its functions in the wider Victorian community. The Committee recognises that Football Victoria is responsible for a number of programs in Victoria generally, and country Victoria in particular. Football Victoria's Auskick, school, and umpire development programs were among the most obvious examples of effective programs convened in country Victoria. The TAC Cup is another example of a successful Football Victoria program, although while witnesses generally acknowledged the benefit of the TAC Cup for talented player development, opinions on its value to country football in general were equivocal.

8.29 The Committee recognises that the main focus of Football Victoria is the management of its VFL and TAC Cup competitions, management of state-wide issues affecting football (such as risk management and volunteer protection) and its development activities through Football Victoria Development and Football Victoria Umpires Development.<sup>749</sup> Football Victoria Development essentially focuses on youth development and programs are largely targeted toward junior participation and recruitment, school development and support programs, and talented player identification and training. Football Victoria Development is also responsible for organising coach accreditation programs throughout Victoria, which include programs for both volunteers and staff working for senior football clubs and leagues.<sup>750</sup> However, while the Committee understands that these functions of Football Victoria Development have been prioritised by Football Victoria, it was also apparent to the Committee that many witnesses expected increased developmental support for all grades of football in country Victoria.

### **Football Victoria Development Managers**

8.30 Football Victoria employs 19 Development Managers across Victoria, with twelve of those managers responsible for services in country Victoria. According to Football Victoria, the core functions of Development Managers include:

- conducting coach education courses;

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<sup>749</sup> See Chapter Five for discussion on issues surrounding umpire development.

<sup>750</sup> Football Victoria Development, 'Coaching', viewed 28 July 2004, <<http://svc227.bne117v.server-web.com/vfdf/vfdfcoaching.htm>>.



- managing the regional branch of the Australian Football Coaches Association;
- managing the AFL Auskick program;
- conducting secondary school programs; and
- coordinating AFL player clinics.

Secondary functions of Development Managers include:

- working with VCFL officials to manage the region VCFL Under-15 Representative Team participating in the VCFL Under-15 Championships; and
- assisting the TAC Cup Region Manager with the operations of the TAC Cup Under 18 Team and related talented player development programs.<sup>751</sup>

8.31 A number of witnesses told the Committee during the course of this Inquiry that the ‘secondary’ functions of the Development Managers – particularly regarding TAC duties – were often prioritised over their ‘core functions’, and that as a result, talented player development was impeding the capacity of Development Managers to provide services to grassroots development activities (see also Chapter Seven):

*...the development officers spend their Saturdays driving all over the countryside with the elite team. They are looking after them — and I know they need to be looked after — but they are not available on Saturdays at the local clubs. I know that the development officers would like to be able to do that, but because of the commitment in that area they realise that they need to support those programs. A lot of the local clubs would tell you that they want to see these development people at the grassroots footy and involved at that level, rather than always having these commitments at the more elite level.<sup>752</sup>*

8.32 Peter Francis, Regional Manager of Gippsland Power, a TAC Cup team, told the Committee that “Football Victoria aims to provide 50% of the AFL draftees each year, which it has been able to achieve so far.”<sup>753</sup> The Committee is aware that the effective development of players for the AFL competition is a key role of Football Victoria operations, and that the majority of its funding from AFL clubs – and a substantial proportion of its funding from the AFL – is provided with the expectation that it fulfil this purpose. However, the Committee is concerned that Football Victoria ensure its Development Managers’ core functions (coaching accreditation, Auskick, schools programs) are not supplanted by their secondary functions (particularly, their

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<sup>751</sup> Football Victoria, *Background to Football Victoria's Regional Country Development Manager structure and development program outcomes*, Presentation to parliamentary committee: Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee, 24 May 2004.

<sup>752</sup> Brendan Ryan, individual, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 7.

<sup>753</sup> Peter Francis, Regional Manager, Gippsland Power, *Public Hearing*, Leongatha, 7 April 2004, p. 19.

support of the TAC Cup Region Managers). For example, the Committee previously noted (in Chapter Five) that in 2004, just 25% of Football Victoria's coach accreditation courses were held in rural and regional Victoria. Given that twelve of Football Victoria's 19 Development Managers are located in country Victoria, it would appear that some core functions of the Development Managers are being neglected in favour of their secondary roles. Consequently, the Committee urges Football Victoria to investigate its current policies regarding the roles of Development Managers to determine whether they have sufficient time and resources to work effectively, and if not, consider whether the appointment of additional staff to assist TAC Cup Region Managers would enable Development Managers to focus more effectively on their core duties.

### **Football Victoria support for senior grassroots football**

8.33 During the Inquiry, the Committee heard from some country football leagues and clubs that the focus of Football Victoria development programs on youth and talent was too limited and more provision should be made for the support of senior football. While the Committee recognises that the introduction of the VCFL's four Area Managers was intended to fulfil this function, and that Football Victoria was supportive of these appointments, the Committee also heard that the sheer size of the regions VCFL Area Managers are responsible for limits their ability to be as 'hands on' as they would like:

*We know they are running round in cars, the area managers, to do something, but when do you see them? You do not see them. They have four or five for the whole state, so it is pretty impossible to get around to the individual clubs, and that is where we need help, down here.*<sup>754</sup>

8.34 In 2002, Football Victoria produced a strategic plan which included among its objectives the aim to "continuously develop and improve all facets of Australian football throughout Victoria."<sup>755</sup> As the representative of state football interests, Football Victoria also aims to "achieve ongoing collaboration with and between stakeholders to build and maintain an effective football structure in Victoria."<sup>756</sup>

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<sup>754</sup> Jim Ure, President, Central Goulburn Football League, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 3.

<sup>755</sup> Football Victoria, *Strategic plan*, Presentation to the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee, 24 May 2004.

<sup>756</sup> Football Victoria, *Strategic plan*, Presentation to the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee, 24 May 2004.

While youth development activities are a specific objective of Football Victoria, the Committee notes that Football Victoria's objectives are not limited to youth and talent activities. The Committee recognises that Football Victoria provides some services to senior grassroots football by means of its coaching accreditation courses, umpire development programs and strategies, and in other professional development programs. Nevertheless, the Committee has heard evidence through the course of this Inquiry that country football leagues and clubs would appreciate more support from football's peak bodies. Consequently, the Committee encourages Football Victoria to review its support programs for senior grassroots football, to ensure that its service coverage is adequate for the needs of football at all levels.

### ***The Victorian Country Football League***

8.35 The Committee received evidence that the VCFL produces a range of programs to support its constituent clubs and leagues and to provide opportunities for game development in country Victoria through the encouragement of youth participation and talent pathways. Programs initiated and run by the VCFL are outlined in Chapter Two. In general, it appears to the Committee that the level of support given to game development by the VCFL throughout country Victoria is generally adequate. The Committee notes that the VCFL also actively supports junior and game development. Junior clubs and leagues typically receive assistance and funding through allocations from the VCFL Regional Boards, which are in turn funded through distributions of AFL club player transfer payments (\$225,000 in the 2003-04 season). Competitions and carnivals for youth football are also organised and supported by the VCFL. The Committee notes that the VCFL provides some incentives for VCFL clubs to run football training programs in schools, which are likely to have considerable benefit not only to Victoria's young people (through learning football skills, for example), but also to the VCFL clubs that elect to run those programs (through increased profile of their club in the community, for example).

## **Game development and club development**

8.36 The Committee was told by Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer of the VCFL, that while game development was progressing satisfactorily in Victoria, club development was in need of greater assistance from peak bodies.<sup>757</sup> Mr Scott said that the VCFL was endeavouring to focus more on the provision of support for existing clubs, and people who were already involved in grassroots football.<sup>758</sup> During the course of this Inquiry, the VCFL increased its full-time Area Managers from three to four, and reduced the number of regions in the VCFL from 14 to 10. The Committee received favourable feedback on the VCFL's Area Managers, who were generally regarded as valuable contacts for advice and support on a range of issues affecting clubs and leagues within country Victoria.

8.37 Senior football clubs and leagues affiliated to the VCFL receive a range of support services through VCFL Area Managers and Regional Boards, including the provision of funds for the formation of new clubs and mergers of existing clubs through subsidies on guernsey purchases, computer expenses, and assistance and advice on club organisation and structure. The VCFL also contributes to funding for Football Victoria's country Umpire Development Manager. The Committee notes that the VCFL provides various programs to facilitate the adoption of its information technology program, including rebates to leagues of \$3 for each online registration of a senior player and \$1 for each online registration of a junior player.

8.38 While the Committee heard some complaints from league representatives that the requirements of its online registration program represented an onerous responsibility for league volunteers, the Committee is pleased that the VCFL offers direct financial assistance to its affiliated leagues for the implementation of this program. Some witnesses appearing before the Committee indicated that the online registration program introduced by the VCFL contained some 'bugs' during its initial implementation, but the Committee also understands from the VCFL that many of these problems have since been eliminated and, over time, the online reporting system

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<sup>757</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 5.

<sup>758</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 5.

will continue to improve as shortcomings are identified and fixed. The Committee recognises that the increased capacity for the VCFL to maintain accurate records of registrations as a direct result of its information technology program is an important component of its management responsibilities.

### Consultation with other peak bodies

8.39 The Committee heard from some witnesses that consultation between the VCFL and other peak bodies had improved in recent years. This is particularly the case with the relationship between the VCFL and Football Victoria, which has reportedly improved. Mr Scott explained to the Committee:

*The AFL and Football Victoria have strongly supported the management and direction of the VCFL. I think that continues to strengthen. In my four years with the VCFL I have noticed a hell of an improvement in the way the organisations are working more closely together.<sup>759</sup>*

8.40 While the Committee notes that some progress has been made toward increased consultation by the VCFL with other peak bodies, the Committee also heard that this consultation was not as regular, or structured, as it could be. The Committee notes that consultation between Football Victoria and the VCFL concerning the specific activities of rural and regional staff is largely informal and irregular. Thus, as noted by Mr Scott, there may be some duplication of effort by both the VCFL and Football Victoria in country Victoria:

*We had a meeting with Football Victoria only a couple of weeks back just looking at the funding channels and the levels of funding, because many of them have been established for quite a few years, and now with us having full time area managers out there — in their own area Football Victoria have country development managers — we need to look at perhaps where the resources can be finetuned. Is there any duplication? Is there now a need because of the infrastructure we have got that we need further support, and is that support available out of taking it out of maybe metropolitan areas? But the relationship that we now enjoy I am sure is going to allow us to address that in the time ahead.<sup>760</sup>*

8.41 The Committee notes that Football Victoria and the VCFL are endeavouring to consult one another in a more comprehensive fashion in future and strongly

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<sup>759</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 4.

<sup>760</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 8.

encourages those bodies to introduce a formal process by which to engage in consultation on a regular basis.

8.42 Kate Palmer, Chief Executive of Netball Victoria, also told the Committee that with the amalgamation of football and netball in country Victoria, there is an increasing need for the VCFL to engage more actively in consultation with the peak state netball organisation, Netball Victoria. However, Ms Palmer noted that although this relationship is developing, there are still opportunities for increased consultation between the VCFL and Netball Victoria, and between football and netball representatives from clubs and leagues within the VCFL:

*Although Netball Victoria views the partnership between football and netball highly, a number of issues need to be addressed. Firstly, if the VCFL values this partnership, they must give consideration to the impact of football restructures on netball clubs and players. Netball must be consulted. Our experience is that netball may be consulted, but their opinions are not highly valued. And we have evidence that where feasibilities are conducted, netball is not included. If the VCFL promotes the establishment of netball in existing leagues and clubs – as I understand they do – consideration must be given to a number of issues. The impact of change on existing competitions is, is the strategy in the best interests of the future of football and netball; it is about providing safe playing surfaces and adequate change rooms and showers for females, ensuring that committee structures are reviewed to allow equitable decision-making.<sup>761</sup>*

8.43 Ms Palmer also drew the Committee's attention to issues surrounding netball talent pathways within the VCFL. According to Ms Palmer, in some cases football and netball leagues and clubs did not do enough to encourage their netball players to explore talent pathways offered by Netball Victoria, or scheduled competitions that clashed with state netball development activities.<sup>762</sup> Netball Victoria was also concerned that the VCFL make more efforts to consult it when the VCFL or its component leagues made any decision about the structure and/or scheduling of country football competitions.<sup>763</sup> Evidence received from Netball Victoria suggested that, on occasion, the effect of changes on netball was not considered during decision making processes.

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<sup>761</sup> Kate Palmer, Chief Executive, Netball Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 19.

<sup>762</sup> Kate Palmer, Chief Executive, Netball Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 19.

<sup>763</sup> Netball Victoria, *Submission*, no. 22, 8 December 2003, pp. 1,6,9; Kate Palmer, Chief Executive, Netball Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 24 May 2004, p. 20.

8.44 The Committee was also told that consultation by the VCFL with local government peak bodies, such as the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Victorian Local Governance Association, could be improved. This is of particular importance given that local governments throughout Victoria have different requirements. Consultation with peak bodies would also assist in ensuring that the VCFL and local government authorities are providing consistent information about developments affecting the administration of country football, such as the introduction of new food handling requirements.

8.45 The Committee notes that, to date, consultation with other government bodies, such as the Department for Victorian Communities, by the VCFL has been conducted on an ‘as needs’ basis. However, the Committee notes that the VCFL successfully worked in cooperation with the State Government to identify potential grant recipients through the water assistance scheme, announced in mid-2004.

8.46 Overall, the Committee notes that while the VCFL’s internal consultation with affiliated leagues, clubs and members is relatively good, there is considerable potential for the VCFL to consult more widely and more effectively with peak state and national bodies, local, state and federal government departments and organisations.

### **Transparency and accountability of VCFL operations**

8.47 As noted above, it is evident to the Committee that in some cases the role and functions of the VCFL and other peak bodies in football is sometimes misunderstood. A number of witnesses suggested to the Committee that the VCFL was “out of touch” with issues facing country clubs because it was based in Melbourne and so was not in a position to understand what was happening out ‘on the ground’:

*If the AFL, Football Victoria and the VCFL are genuinely concerned about the survival of our great game in the country, they must visit clubs and show more support, be prepared to listen and assist where they can. After all the majority of elite footballers commence their football career in the country. Consideration should also be given to moving the VCFL administration to the country. This would, I hope, make the VCFL more accessible to all concerned.<sup>764</sup>*

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<sup>764</sup> Graeme Pigdon, President, Lexton Plains Football League and Netball Association, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 15.

8.48 Some witnesses suggested to the Committee that the allocation of funds and resources within the VCFL could be more transparent to its members, so that its members were able to identify where their affiliation fees were allocated.<sup>765</sup> The allocation of fees to insurance payments and to VCFL administration was of particular interest to some witnesses. Others also commented that they would like to know more about the roles of VCFL staff and management, as well as the levels of remuneration they received:

*In relation to the insurance component, I am told by various football clubs and leagues that they cannot find out from the VCFL how much of the money that is paid — about \$40 — goes to insurance: how much might go to the insurance broker, and how much is used for insurance in general.... Comparing notes, I saw a pie chart once for netball and they gave me the exact amount that went in insurance — \$38. In Tennis Victoria it is 25 per cent. That is an anomaly that should be fixed up for the benefit of all the players in the clubs.*<sup>766</sup>

8.49 The Committee recognises that information on the allocation of affiliation fees and other payments to the VCFL, if made available to the public, would be of considerable interest to people involved with grassroots country football. Some of the confusion about the role of the VCFL may also be alleviated if such information was provided in an accessible form on a regular basis. Moreover, the Committee notes that the public profile, and public perceptions of accountability within the VCFL, could benefit if the role and job descriptions of various paid positions within the VCFL were made publicly available.

8.50 The Committee congratulates the VCFL for its recent policy to consult widely on any proposed changes to its structure, organisation, or processes. During the course of this Inquiry, the Committee was pleased to note that the VCFL convened a meeting of league representatives to discuss the ongoing viability of the VCFL salary cap regulations and recommend possible solutions to difficulties currently experienced within the VCFL regarding the salary cap. The Committee also notes that the VCFL's submission to the Inquiry was based on extensive consultation with VCFL leagues and clubs, and that this submission was endorsed by a number of club and league representatives who spoke to the Committee. However, the Committee

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<sup>765</sup> Peter Liepins, individual, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 27; Bill McCarthy, individual, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 37; Jim Ure, President, Central Goulburn Football League, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 3.

<sup>766</sup> Bill McCarthy, individual, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 37.



also heard some complaints from witnesses during the course of this Inquiry on what they perceived as arbitrary decisions occasionally made at VCFL board level:

*Two weeks before our season commenced, the VCFL released an increase of \$20,000 you were permitted to pay on your players. That sort of adhocery needs to change.<sup>767</sup>*

8.51 The Committee understands that the decision to increase the salary cap at short notice was somewhat unusual in the context of the VCFL's ordinary consultation processes. Nevertheless, the Committee would like to encourage the VCFL to persist in its policy of adequate consultation with stakeholders in future, where possible, and to provide affiliated leagues and clubs with adequate time to consider and comment on any changes in policy proposed by the VCFL board and management.

### **League and club (re)structures**

8.52 Some witnesses expressed an opinion that the VCFL should act with more authority to ensure that leagues were structured to enable clubs of similar ability to play one another and so avoid having clubs with different resources competing in the same league.<sup>768</sup> Other witnesses argued that the VCFL should act more decisively to restructure leagues so as to reduce other burdens, such as travel time, on their component clubs:

*It is important that clubs and leagues are receptive to the ideas of restructure in order to get clubs playing in competitions that are suitable for them for the following reasons: towns of similar size and population should make up the league; travel time should be limited as much as possible; and financial considerations should also be taken into account. Just because a club has played in a particular league for many years is not reason enough alone to say it should stay in that particular league indefinitely.<sup>769</sup>*

8.53 The Committee notes that while the role of the VCFL is to facilitate competitions, events and programs for its affiliated clubs and leagues, authority remains vested in country leagues and clubs. For this reason, the VCFL is not in a position to compel or force any club or league to undertake any action without consent. Furthermore, the Committee recognises that the process of restructuring

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<sup>767</sup> Eric Bott, General Manager, Goulburn Valley Football League, *Public Hearing*, Shepparton, 14 April 2004, p. 51.

<sup>768</sup> Peter Liepins, individual, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 27; Jim Ure, President, Central Goulburn Football League, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 14 April 2004, p. 3.

<sup>769</sup> Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 19.

leagues and competitions is a difficult one, particularly considering the intense feelings and loyalties country communities often have toward their respective football clubs.

8.54 The Committee notes that the introduction of dedicated staff by the VCFL, in the form of its Area Managers, appears to address the issue of league and club restructuring in a constructive fashion. Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East, of the VCFL, told the Committee that:

*Prior to this[VCFL East Area Manager] role there have been a number of efforts to do some of these [club and league] restructures...[t]hey had nobody on the ground to do it. My role is to look after the east of the state, and I am passionate about that. I make sure that a lot of these things work for the betterment of football. But the clubs and their supporters are also passionate about what they want to do, and it is up to me to be able to discuss, negotiate and work with them as to exactly what is best for their clubs.<sup>770</sup>*

8.55 Another issue raised before the Committee concerned the differentiation of ‘metropolitan’ and ‘country’ boundaries by Football Victoria and the allocation of certain clubs and leagues to VCFL or metropolitan clubs (see also Chapter Two). Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer of the VCFL, suggested that an assessment of the affiliation of some clubs and leagues that were positioned on the borders of metropolitan and country regions could be undertaken in future:

*I think the time is pretty close to being here to review the boundaries. I have no doubt that the time when the VCFL established the Mornington Peninsula as part of the country football league was back when parts of the Mornington Peninsula were country areas.... I think there is a damn good case not to do it by piecemeal but to sit down and say, ‘Where does that belong, and where does that belong?’ and have it wrapped up properly, because that will clear up any grey areas once and for all when people are trying to establish who they are, what they are looking after and what they are getting for that versus the other parts of metropolitan Melbourne.<sup>771</sup>*

8.56 The Committee recognises, however, that leagues within the Mornington Peninsula and Yarra Valley have long historical links to the VCFL. These leagues have not expressed a desire to change their affiliation, despite receiving support from Football Victoria as ‘metropolitan’, rather than ‘country’, clubs. On the other hand, the Committee is aware that some clubs affiliated to metropolitan leagues, such as

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<sup>770</sup> Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 6.

<sup>771</sup> Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 31 May 2004, p. 10.

Kilmore Football Netball Club, would prefer to affiliate to the VCFL. The Committee hopes that, as dialogue between the VCFL and other peak football bodies (particularly Football Victoria) improves, some of these issues can be resolved in a manner that is acceptable to all involved.

### **Alternative sources of revenue – football tipping proposal**

8.57 In its submission to the Inquiry, the VCFL suggested that a gaming program, similar to that currently trading as the ‘Tipstar’ competition, could be introduced by the Government in cooperation with the VCFL with the express purpose of providing a revenue stream to country football clubs.<sup>772</sup> Craig Keating, of Heywood, suggested that the organisation of the current Tipstar competition could be modified by Tattersall’s, in cooperation with a peak football organisation, to allow country football clubs to promote, sell and/or purvey the Tipstar competition. Football clubs could be encouraged to participate by means of a sales commission. Mr Keating also proposed that individual Tipstar participants could be given the opportunity to nominate a country club to receive a commission fee.<sup>773</sup> The Committee also noted a proposition that existing funds currently derived from the Tipstar competition by the State Government be substantially directed toward grassroots country football in Victoria.

8.58 The Committee considered proposed modifications to the Tipstar tipping competition very seriously. The Committee believes that if the Tipstar competition were to be run through local football groups, as a means of increasing Tipstar competition revenue that could then be directed back to country football, it would require higher dividends for participants (eg. returns of 90 to 95%), a sense of local ownership, and for the State Government and the AFL to forgo their licensing fees and profit shares in the competition. Some other issues that the Committee identified as requiring consideration prior to undertaking any change to the existing structure and operation of Tipstar included:

- a realistic appraisal of expected revenue from a national tipping competition;
- a considered assessment of any administrative burden on club and league volunteers in light of possible returns from the competition;

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<sup>772</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Submission*, no. 10, 15 August 2003, p. 72.

<sup>773</sup> Craig Keating, individual, *Public Hearing*, Warrnambool, 10 March 2004, p. 22.

- whether existing, ‘informal’ competitions currently run by country clubs (which return all profits to the clubs that run them) would be compromised by the existence of a national competition; and
- whether the impersonal nature of a national competition would result in minimal interest from potential participants.

8.59 Given the complexity of the regulatory environment in which gaming competitions operate and the need to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the feasibility of modifying Tipstar’s operation to further support country football, the Committee believes that direct discussion between immediate stakeholders about the proposal is required, rather than direction from the Committee itself. Consequently, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 34: That Tattersall’s and the State Government undertake discussions with Football Victoria to consider ways in which the Tipstar football tipping competition could be modified to provide revenue to country football clubs by providing a mechanism for local football clubs to sell and promote Tipstar to their supporters and members.**

### **League and club team composition regulations**

*Football — the very game itself is simply by its nature part of the problem. Traditionalists of the sport agree that the game must have 18 players on the field and that seniors, reserves and under age teams must all participate on the day. With towns in the Wimmera having diminishing populations clubs cannot continue to supply the numbers required, forcing them to amalgamate with neighbouring clubs or disband.<sup>774</sup>*

8.60 The Committee has described in previous chapters some of the difficulties experienced by smaller country communities in seeking to recruit sufficient players to field teams for their respective football competitions. While the Committee recognises that these pressures are not found across all country Victoria, it is clear that difficulties encountered by some clubs to obtain and retain players can threaten the survival of local football teams in small communities. The Committee heard that

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<sup>774</sup> Di Trotter, Executive Officer, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Public Hearing*, Horsham, 11 March 2004, p. 21.

regulations imposed at VCFL or league level, such as the requirement for a reserves football team for each club, can prevent some communities from maintaining a football club. For example, Trevor Bourke told the Committee that the Bairnsdale Football Club was voted out of the Latrobe Valley Football League due to its inability to field a reserves team.<sup>775</sup> John Stoward, local football enthusiast and historian, also told the Committee:

*...there have been instances, particularly in the Otways and certainly I am sure in the more remote parts of Victoria — is it not better to have a team, if you have a hard core of 14 or 15 locals? I saw it happen a number of times in Tasmania in my decade there. They had enough to have one team out of very small hamlets. They could not field reserves and juniors; they folded. Even if the juniors played, there was nowhere then to come back to play for the area they grew up in. So I doubt the wisdom of clubs laying it down so strictly that: you have to meet all these criteria or you are not in. I think they have to be a little bit pragmatic about it. That is something where I think there should be a bit more flexibility.*<sup>776</sup>

8.61 While the Committee recognises that these issues obviously depend on league composition (including the leagues to which football clubs are affiliated), discussed above, the Committee is also of the opinion that a flexible approach to the organisation of country football by the VCFL and leagues would prevent small communities from having to forgo their football team for want of a reserves team. The Committee is pleased to note that in the case of the Caramut Football Club in the Mininera District Football League, concessions were made by other clubs in the League to allow Caramut to play without a reserves team and with its senior team supplemented by other clubs' reserves players.<sup>777</sup> The Omeo and District Football League also runs its competition with no reserves grade football. With examples such as this in mind, the Committee urges the VCFL and country football leagues to seriously consider amending regulations on club participation, where appropriate, to reflect the changing nature and composition of country communities.

8.62 Another related issue considered by the Committee concerned regulations surrounding interchange numbers. While the AFL game rules allow teams with as few as 14 players to take the field, there are restrictions on the number of interchange

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<sup>775</sup> Trevor Bourke, individual, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 6 April 2004, p. 32.

<sup>776</sup> John Stoward, *Submission*, no. 39, 20 January 2004, p. 20.

<sup>777</sup> Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South West, Victorian Country Football League, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 27 April 2004, p. 19.

players that are permitted for games (maximum of four).<sup>778</sup> The Committee heard from a number of witnesses that reserves teams in some clubs were often supplemented by older and younger players and players who would not normally be considered fit enough to play football (see Chapter Five). The Committee considers that there is some scope for increased flexibility regarding interchange numbers in football competitions, particularly in reserves football. For example, one suggestion put to the Committee was that an unlimited interchange bench could be permitted for reserves football. An increased emphasis on flexibility on the interchange bench within country leagues may have considerable benefit, for example, by allowing players more time to rest during a game or by ensuring that everyone who turns up to play is assured of a game.

8.63 The Committee notes, however, that existing VCFL regulations do make provision for individual leagues to introduce some flexibility regarding players within their competitions. Keith den Houting, Chief Executive Officer and Secretary/Treasurer of the Golden Rivers Football League, told the Committee:

*...we have in place an arrangement whereby, say, your club and my club might meet on the day; my club is a bit short, so we have a day permit whereby 2, 3 or 4 from your club can play for my club. It is a concept that we adopted sometime back because there is a problem with numbers in the reserves, and we also have a large range of ages; our under-17s play reserves regularly, and we also have older people over the age or 45.<sup>779</sup>*

### **Conclusion**

8.64 This chapter has drawn attention to some aspects of peak football body operations that the Committee believes could be profitably addressed by those organisations. While a number of issues have been explored in this chapter, the Committee also acknowledges that peak football bodies in Victoria have been largely successful in their efforts to maintain the vitality of Australian rules football, particularly in respect of talent development initiatives. However, the Committee also believes that current and future changes in rural and regional Victoria will require a concerted approach from all parties – including peak bodies, but most crucially the grassroots football leagues and clubs across Victoria – in order to maintain the place

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<sup>778</sup> Victorian Country Football League, *Handbook*, Victorian Country Football League, Melbourne, 2004, p. 170.

<sup>779</sup> Keith den Houting, Chief Executive Officer and Secretary/Treasurer, Golden Rivers Football League, *Public Hearing*, Kerang, 23 March 2004, p. 11.

of football in country communities. The Committee hopes that some of the suggestions put forward in this chapter and in the report as a whole may contribute to the ultimate goal of assuring continued football participation in rural and regional Victoria.





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## Appendix 1 – List of submissions received

No.	Name	Organisation	Date received
01	Ms Glenda Hirth	Individual, Panmure	07/10/2003
02	Mrs Pat Gilchrist, Administrator	Victorian Country Tennis Association	14/10/2003
03	Mr Bill McCarthy	Individual, Shepparton	22/10/2003
04	Mr Bill Reed	Individual, Cranbourne	06/11/2003
05	Ms Wendy Barnes, President	Cavendish Football Netball Club	06/11/2003
06	Mr Daniel Hogan, Chief Executive Officer	Murrindindi Shire Council	07/11/2003
07	Mr Chris Lewis, Manager, Recreation and Open Space	Greater Geelong City Council	19/11/2003
08	Mr Mark Johnston, Board Chairman	Bendigo Football League	19/11/2003
09	Ms Marilyn Flett, Secretary	Foster Football Club	20/11/2003
10	Mr Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer	Victorian Country Football League	08/15/2003
11	Mr Lindsay Merritt, Chief Executive	Warrnambool City Council	28/11/2003
12	Mr Mick Holding	Individual, Numurkah	28/11/2003
13	Mr Ray Lyons, Manager, Leisure Services	Mildura Rural City Council	03/12/2003
14	Mr Terry Stroud	Warragul Industrials Football Club	03/12/2003
15	Mr Noel Hayes	Individual, Snake Valley	03/12/2003

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16	Mr Eric Bott, General Manager	Goulburn Valley Football League	02/12/2003
17	Dr Rob Moodie, Chief Executive Officer	VicHealth	04/12/2003
18	Mr Craig Niemann, Chief Executive Officer	Loddon Shire Council	05/12/2003
19	Mr Neil Jacobs, Chief Executive Officer	Hindmarsh Shire Council	05/12/2003
20	Mr Nello Marino, Program Manager, Smartplay	Sports Medicine Australia – Victorian Branch	05/12/2003
21	Mr Robert Rowett	Individual, Malvern East	05/12/2003
22	Ms Kate Palmer, Chief Executive  AnneMarie Phippard, Association Development Officer	Netball Victoria	08/12/2003
23	Mr Des Bilske, Chief Executive Officer	Gannawarra Shire Council	08/12/2003
24	Mr David Drane, General Manager	Victorian Country Football Umpires Association	08/12/2003
25	Mr Don McKenzie, Corporate Manager, Economic Development	Greater Shepparton City Council	09/12/2003
26	Mr Ken Jacobs, Chief Executive Officer	Cricket Victoria	09/12/2003



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27	Associate Professor John Saunders, Deputy Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences  Mr John-Paul Blandthorn, Student Researcher	Australian Catholic University	09/12/2003
28	Mr Philip Gluyas	Individual, Sunshine	09/12/2003
29	Ms Myra Bourke, Manager Community Services	Glenelg Shire Council	11/12/2003
30	Ms Di Trotter, Executive Officer	Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly	12/12/2003
31	Mr Jack Huxtable	Individual, Morwell	15/12/2003
32	Mr Steve Matthews, Community Facilitation Manager	Swan Hill Rural City Council	16/12/2003
33	Mr Rod Clough, Manager, Parks and Recreation	Macedon Ranges Shire Council	16/12/2003
34	Mr Kevin Howlett	Individual, Chelsea Heights	15/12/2003
35	Mrs Claire Browne, Secretary	Panmure Football Netball Club	18/12/2003
36	Mr Justin Kelly, Secretary	Wangaratta Rovers Football and Netball Club	23/12/2003
37	Mr Peter Elliott, Director, Corporate Services	Northern Grampians Shire Council	14/01/2004
38	Mr James Neary	Individual, Murmungee	15/01/2004
39	Mr John Stoward	Individual, Torquay	20/01/2004

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40	Mr Shane Carbines, Chairman	Geelong Football Umpires' League	09/03/2004
41	Mr Alan Davies, Area Manager, North- West Central	Victorian Country Football League	23/03/2004
42	Mr Garry Squires, President	Orbost Snowy Rovers Football Club	06/04/2004
43	Mr Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East	Victorian Country Football League	06/04/2004
44	Mr Luke Robinson, President	East Gippsland Football League	06/04/2004
	Mr Ron Schrader, President	Bairnsdale Football Club	
45	Mr Russell Cheffers, President	Yinnar Football and Netball Club	07/04/2004
46	Mr Colin Kelly, Spokesperson	Seymour and District Junior Football League	14/04/2004
47	Mr David Drane, General Manager, Umpiring	Victorian Country Football League / Victorian Country Football Umpires Association (supplementary)	14/04/2004
48	Mr Alan Dennett, General Manager / Treasurer	Murray Football League	14/04/2004
49	Mr Bruce Tuhon, Senior Vice-President	Picola and District Football Netball League	14/04/2004
50	Mr Andrew Crowden	Individual, Wangaratta	15/04/2004
51	Mr Graeme Pidgon, President	Lexton Plains Football League and Netball Association	27/04/2004

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52	Mr Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South- West	Victorian Country Football League	27/04/2004
53	Mr Bill Storey-Smith, Secretary / Manager	Central Highlands Football League	27/04/2004
54	Mr Cameron Dole, Coach	North Ballarat / University of Ballarat Roosters Women's Football Team	27/04/2004
55	Mr Ian Forbes, Secretary	Omeo District Football League	29/04/2004
56	Mr Eric Bott, General Manager	Goulburn Valley Football League (supplementary)	05/05/2004
57	Mr John Howie, Chair  Ms Julie Sarll, Chief Executive Officer	VicSport	10/05/2004
58	Mr Kevin Monk, President  Mr Beres Fitch, Vice-President	Bendigo Umpires Association	20/05/2004
59	Mr Neill Sharpe, General Manager	Riddell District Football League	20/05/2004
60	Mr Wayne Bird, Chief Executive Officer	Basketball Victoria	03/06/2004
61	Mr Mark O'Brien	Casey and Bayside Lending Services	22/06/2004
62	Mr Philip Gluyas	Individual, Sunshine (supplementary)	22/06/2004

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63	Mr Simon Matthews, Communications and Community Affairs Manager	Essendon Football Club	28/06/2004
64	Mr Luke Soulos, National Secretary – Football, School Sport Australia	Victorian Secondary Schools' Sports Association	31/05/2004
65	Mr Peter Francis, Regional Manager	Gippsland Power Football Club	07/04/2004
66	Mr Ron O'Dwyer, Spokesperson	AFL X-Men	25/08/2004
67	Mr Paul Daffey	Individual, West Melbourne	05/05/2004

## Appendix 2 – List of witnesses

### 9 March 2004 – Modewarre

Mr Chris Lewis, Manager, Recreation and Open Space	<b>Greater Geelong City Council</b>
Mr Michael McMahon, Chief Executive	<b>Football Geelong</b>
Ms Denise Trickey, Chief Executive Officer	<b>Colac and District Football Netball League</b>
Mr John Stoward	<b>Individual, Torquay</b>
Mr Neville Whitely, President	<b>Geelong and District Football League</b>
Mr Bill Fulton, General Manager Mr Shane Carbines, Chairman	<b>Geelong Football Umpires League</b>

### 10 March 2004 – Warrnambool

Mr Terry McAdam, Recreation Services Officer	<b>Glenelg Shire Council</b>
Mr Phil Currie, Leisure Services Coordinator	<b>Southern Grampians Shire Council</b>
Mr Michael Harrison, General Manager	<b>Hampden Football Netball League</b>
Mr Norman Facey, Executive Member Mr Ivan Murrell, President	<b>Western Border Football League</b>
Mr Glen Linke, Secretary	<b>Mininera and District Football Netball League</b>
Mr Wayne Nunn, President Mr Phillip O'Keefe, Chairman	<b>South West District Football Netball League</b>
Mr Craig Keating	<b>Individual, Heywood</b>
Mr Paul O'Brien, Director, Resident Services	<b>Warrnambool City Council</b>

**11 March 2004 – Horsham**

Mr Brendan Ryan	<b>Individual, Horsham</b>
Mr Kenneth McLean, Chief Commissioner Mr Barry McTaggart, Football Manager	<b>Wimmera Football League</b>
Cr Robert Gersh, Mayor Mr Neil Jacobs, Chief Executive Officer	<b>Hindmarsh Shire Council</b>
Ms Di Trotter, Executive Officer	<b>Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly</b>
Mr Bruce Hartigan, Chairman Mr Mark Williams, Secretary / Treasurer	<b>Horsham Football and Netball Club</b>
Mr Geoff Burdett*	<b>Individual, Horsham</b>

**23 March 2004 – Kerang**

Mr Howard Rosewarne, Administration Manager Mr Salvatore Ficarra, Chairman	<b>Central Murray Football League</b>
Cr Keith den Houting, Chief Executive Officer and Secretary / Treasurer Mr Barry Knowles, Chairman	<b>Golden Rivers Football League</b>
Mrs Rhonda Laity, Past President	<b>Golden Rivers Netball League</b>
Mr Steve Matthews, Community Facilitation Manager	<b>Swan Hill Rural City Council</b>
Mr Alan Davies, Area Manager, North-West Central Mr Oscar Aertssen, Regional Manager, North-West	<b>Victorian Country Football League</b>
Ms Angela Hird*	<b>Individual, Kerang</b>

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\* The Committee also called for 'comments from the floor' at the conclusion of public hearings in rural and regional Victoria. This witness took part during the 'comments from the floor' session.

**23 March 2004 – Robinvale**

Mr Geoff Jones, Administration Manager Mr Kevin Forbes, Commissioner Mr Neville Ward, Commissioner	<b>Sunraysia Football League</b>
Mr Wayne Shawcross, President Mr Simon Rule, Vice-President Mrs Marion Leslie, Secretary / Treasurer	<b>Robinvale Football Club</b>
Mr Daryl McClure	<b>Robinvale and District Cricket Association</b>

**24 March 2004 – Sea Lake**

Mr Terry Kiley, President Mr James McFarlane, Secretary	<b>Mallee Football League.</b>
Mr Andrew Griffiths, Interim Regional Manager, North Central	<b>Victorian Country Football League</b>
Ms Beverley Cummings, President	<b>Mallee Netball Association</b>
Mr Peter Doig, Director of Football Operations	<b>Swan Hill Football Netball Club</b>
Mr Greg Martin, Secretary	<b>Sea Lake Nandaly Football Netball Club</b>
Mr Chris Brown, Director, VCFL; Past President, Mallee Football League; and past president, Walpeup-Underbool Football Club	<b>Individual, Underbool</b>

**6 April 2004 – Lakes Entrance**

Mr Graeme Allen, Area Manager, East	<b>Victorian Country Football League</b>
Mr Luke Robinson, President Mr Rodney Twining, Secretary	<b>East Gippsland Football League</b>

## **Inquiry into Country Football**

Mr Ronald Schrader	<b>Individual, Bairnsdale</b>
Mr Garry Squires, President	<b>Orbost Snowy Rovers Football Club</b>
Mr Peter Ward, Former Secretary	<b>East Gippsland Umpires Association</b>
Mr Trevor Bourke*	<b>Individual, Nicholson</b>

### **7 April 2004 – Leongatha**

Mr Rod Lucas, Secretary Mr Rod Taylor, President	<b>Mid Gippsland Football League</b>
Mr Chris Soumilas, General Manager Mr Rod Ferguson, President	<b>West Gippsland Latrobe Football League</b>
Mr Russell Cheffers, President	<b>Yinnar Football and Netball Club</b>
Mr Peter Francis, Regional Manager	<b>Gippsland Power Football Club</b>
Mrs Marilyn Flett, Secretary*	<b>Foster Football Club</b>
Mr Glen Wright, Vice-President*	<b>Leongatha Football Club</b>
Mr Chris Howard*	<b>Individual, Leongatha</b>
Mr Jack Huxtable*	<b>Individual, Morwell</b>

### **14 April 2004 – Seymour**

Mr Jim Ure, President	<b>Central Goulburn Football League</b>
Mr Colin Kelly, Executive Committee Member	<b>Seymour District Junior Football League</b>

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\* The Committee also called for 'comments from the floor' at the conclusion of public hearings in rural and regional Victoria. This witness took part during the 'comments from the floor' session.



Mr David Drane, General Manager, Umpiring	<b>Victorian Country Football League and Victorian Country Football Umpires Association</b>
Mr Paul Cox, President	<b>Seymour Football Club</b>
Mr Graeme Kurzman, Vice-President*	<b>Kilmore Football Club</b>
Mr Peter Liepins*	<b>Individual, Seymour</b>

**14 April 2004 – Shepparton**

Mr Vivian McGee, President Mr Alan Dennett, General Manager / Treasurer	<b>Murray Football League</b>
Mr John Hand, Chairman	<b>Murray Football League Independent Tribunal</b>
Mr Bill McCarthy	<b>Individual, Shepparton</b>
Mr Paul Briggs, President	<b>Rumbalara Football Netball Club</b>
Mr Eric Bott, General Manager Mr Ian Fitzsimmons, Chairman	<b>Goulburn Valley Football League</b>
Mr Brian McKee, President*	<b>Mulwala Football Club</b>
Cr Neil Repacholi, Mayor* Cr Marion Riley, Councillor*	<b>Campaspe Shire Council</b>
Mr Bruce Tuhan, Senior Vice-President*	<b>Picola and District Football Netball League</b>

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**15 April 2004 – Wangaratta**

Mr Fred Baker, Secretary	<b>Ovens and King Football League</b>
Mr Leigh Elder, General Manager Mr Peter Brear, Operations Officer	<b>Ovens and Murray Football League</b>
Mr Sandy Thomas, Regional Manager, North-East	<b>Victorian Country Football League</b>
Mr Peter McCudden, Secretary	<b>Wangaratta and District Cricket Association</b>
Mr Andrew Crowden	<b>Individual, Wangaratta</b>
Mr Ken Jasper*	<b>Member for Murray Valley</b>
Mr Philip Gambold*	<b>Individual, Whitfield</b>
Ms Irene Frampton*	<b>Benalla All Blacks Support Club</b>

**27 April 2004 – Ballarat**

Mr Rod Ward, Chief Executive Officer	<b>Ballarat Football League</b>
Mr Reg Haintz, President Mr Bill Storey-Smith, Secretary / Manager	<b>Central Highlands Football League</b>
Mr Graeme Pigdon, President	<b>Lexton Plains Football League and Netball Association</b>
Mr Brett Anderson, Area Manager, South-West	<b>Victorian Country Football League</b>
Mrs Jo Dash, President	<b>Ballarat Netball Association</b>
Mr Cameron Dole, Coach	<b>North Ballarat / University of Ballarat Roosters Women's Football Team</b>

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\* The Committee also called for 'comments from the floor' at the conclusion of public hearings in rural and regional Victoria. This witness took part during the 'comments from the floor' session.

Mr Max Martin, Secretary and Public Officer*	<b>Maryborough Castlemaine District Football League</b>
Mr Frank Williams, Regional Manager*	<b>Victorian Country Football League</b>

**10 May 2004 – Melbourne**

Mr Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer Mr David Matthews, General Manager, Game Development	<b>Australian Football League</b>
Dr Rob Moodie, Chief Executive Officer	<b>VicHealth</b>
Mr David Parkin	<b>Individual</b>
Dr Mardie Townsend, Senior Lecturer, School of Health and Social Development Dr Jo Salmon, School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences	<b>Deakin University</b>
Mr Paul Daffey	<b>Football writer</b>
Mr Nello Marino, Program Manager, Smartplay Ms Kay Copeland, Executive Officer	<b>Sports Medicine Australia - Victorian Branch</b>
Ms Julie Sarll, Chief Executive Officer Mr John Howie, Chair	<b>VicSport</b>

**20 May 2004 – Bendigo**

Hon Damian Drum MLC, Board Member	<b>Bendigo Football League</b>
Mr David Young, President	<b>Loddon Valley Football League</b>
Mr Craig Niemann, Chief Executive Officer	<b>Loddon Shire Council</b>
Mr Kevin Monk, President Mr Beres Fitch, Vice-President	<b>Bendigo Umpires Association</b>

## **Inquiry into Country Football**

Mr Allen Dillon, President Mr Trevor Arnel, Secretary	<b>Huntly Football Netball Club</b>
Mr Paul Barnard, General Manager Mr Warren Driscoll, Chairman	<b>Bendigo Bombers Football Club</b>
Mr Neill Sharpe, General Manager	<b>Riddell District Football League</b>
Mr Max Martin, Secretary	<b>Maryborough Castlemaine District Football League</b>
Mr Keith Oberin, Recreation Coordinator*	<b>Campaspe Shire Council</b>
Mr Desmond Dickson*	<b>Individual, Bendigo</b>
Mr Jeff Cummins*	<b>Individual, Junortoun</b>
Mr Daniel Ellis, President*	<b>Sandhurst Football Club</b>

## **24 May 2004 – Melbourne**

Mr Ken Gannon, Chief Executive Officer Mr Kevin Mitchell, State Director, Umpiring Mr David Code, Operations Manager Mr Michael Daniher, Manager, Development and Planning	<b>Football Victoria</b>
Ms Kate Palmer, Chief Executive Ms AnneMarie Phippard, Association Development Manager	<b>Netball Victoria</b>
Ms Debbie Lee, President	<b>Victorian Women's Football League</b>
Ms Jill Evans, Executive Officer Ms Caroline Jordan, Regional Sports Assembly Program Coordinator	<b>Leisure Networks</b>

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\* The Committee also called for 'comments from the floor' at the conclusion of public hearings in rural and regional Victoria. This witness took part during the 'comments from the floor' session.

Mr Ian Kett, Executive Director	<b>Victorian Council on Fitness and General Health (VicFit)</b>
Mr Bill Stronach, Chief Executive Mr John Rogerson, Director, Good Sports	<b>Australian Drug Foundation</b>
Ms Kylee Bates, Manager	<b>Volunteering Victoria</b>
Dr Frank Pyke, Executive Director	<b>Victorian Institute of Sport</b>

**31 May 2004 – Melbourne**

Mr Glenn Scott, Chief Executive Officer	<b>Victorian Country Football League</b>
Mr Ken Jacobs, Chief Executive Officer	<b>Cricket Victoria</b>
Mr Edwin Parker, Secretary	<b>Victorian Country Cricket League</b>
Dr Peter Hertan, Executive Director, Sport and Recreation Victoria Mr Michael Cahill, Group Manager, Industry Development, Sport and Recreation Victoria	<b>Department for Victorian Communities</b>
Mr Steven Fisher, Peninsula Zone Officer Mr Ken Wingjan, Executive Officer	<b>Victorian Primary Schools Sports Association</b>
Mr Robert Bowtell, Executive Officer Mr Trevor Wilson, Football Sub-committee	<b>Victorian Secondary Schools Sports Association</b>
Mr Luke Soulos, National Secretary – Football	<b>School Sport Australia</b>
Mr Rob Spence, Chief Executive Officer Mr Peter Walsh, Policy Director Ms Rosemary Hancock, Policy Officer	<b>Municipal Association of Victoria</b>
Mr Tom Hafey	<b>Individual</b>



## Extract from the proceedings

The minutes of the proceedings of the Committee show the following divisions which took place during the consideration of the draft report.

***Monday 15 November 2004***

### **Recommendations**

#### **Recommendation 14**

That in the order of \$2 million per annum over 5 years be made available by the State Government to develop and provide a comprehensive, integrated program to assist volunteers in community sport in the following areas:

- (i) sports administration;
- (ii) understanding and managing volunteer liability insurance issues;
- (iii) alcohol and food handling competencies;
- (iv) awareness of current grants and resources available to sports organisations;
- (v) general sports administration and organisation skills acquisition;

and that programs should be run in rural and regional centres across Victoria to ensure reasonable access for all people.

Motion: That the words “That in the order of \$2 million per annum” be replaced with “That \$2 million per annum”. (Denis Naphine)

Question: That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the recommendation.

AYES: Ben Hardman (Chair), John McQuilten, Robert Mitchell

NOES: Denis Naphine, Craig Ingram

And so it was resolved in the affirmative.

#### **Recommendation 22**

That the State Government establish a new multi-million dollar grants scheme for the upgrade of football and netball facilities in rural and regional Victoria, to be allocated over four years. Grants should be made available to rural shires on the basis of \$2 for every \$1 raised locally and to regional cities on the basis of \$1.50 for every \$1 raised

locally, and the State Government should negotiate with the AFL for a matched funding contribution.

Motion: That the words “That the State Government establish a new multi-million dollar grants scheme” be replaced with “That the State Government establish a new \$20 million dollar grants scheme”. (Denis Naphine)

Question: That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the recommendation.

AYES: Ben Hardman (Chair), John McQuilten, Robert Mitchell

NOES: Denis Naphine, Craig Ingram

And so it was resolved in the affirmative.

## **Chapter Five**

Question: That Chapter Five, paragraphs 5.1 to 5.81 stand part of the report.

AYES: Ben Hardman (Chair), Craig Ingram, John McQuilten, Robert Mitchell

NOES: Denis Naphine

And so it was resolved in the affirmative.

## **Chapter Six**

Question: That Chapter Six, paragraphs 6.1 to 6.69, stand part of the report.

AYES: Ben Hardman (Chair), John McQuilten, Robert Mitchell

NOES: Denis Naphine, Craig Ingram

And so it was resolved in the affirmative.

**The report was adopted by the Committee on Monday 15 November 2004.**



## INQUIRY INTO COUNTRY FOOTBALL – MINORITY REPORT

Denis Naphine, Member for South West Coast

Peter Walsh, Member for Swan Hill

Netball and football are the very heart and soul of many communities in rural and regional Victoria.

Local netball and football provides very valuable physical exercise for many young and not-so-young people. Local netball and football clubs also give country communities a great sense of local pride and community spirit.

Country netball and football teams bring the whole community together as families and individuals participate both on and off the field as players, officials, volunteers, sponsors and supporters.

These clubs encourage and develop skills in a range of on and off field activities which are valuable in building local communities, including management and administration, volunteer co-ordination, sports medicine, responsible alcohol serving, safe food handling procedures and the need to work as a team.

Local country grass roots sporting clubs, like netball and football clubs, encourage strong participation across all ages and all abilities. Most of these clubs have junior teams, skills development and participation programs for younger children as well as teams for adults and, in some cases, veteran's competitions. The benefits of this participation and increased fitness are difficult to measure but the long term health benefits of regular physical exercise are well recognised.

In addition local netball and football clubs are often the social hub of many country communities as well as being a vital component of the local economy.

The recommendations from this Inquiry, and the subsequent Government response to these recommendations, are therefore of vital importance not only to country netball and football, but also to many country communities.

Therefore it is essential that this Inquiry present to the Parliament and the State Government recommendations that are firm and definitive which will be of positive short, medium and long term benefit to netball and football in rural and regional Victoria.

Recommendations 14 and 22 as contained in the majority report fail the test of decisiveness.

They should be replaced by the following:

Recommendation 22:

That the State Government establish a new \$20 million grants scheme for the upgrade of football and netball facilities in rural and regional Victoria. Grants should be made available to rural shires on the basis of \$2 for every \$1 raised locally and to regional cities on the basis of \$1.50 for every \$1 raised locally. That this \$20 million

be new money, in addition to currently available sport and recreation grants, and that these funds be provided at the rate of \$5 million per annum over 4 years. In addition that the State Government seek matching capital funding for this program from the AFL.

Recommendation 14.

That the State Government provide \$2 million per annum over 5 years to develop and implement a comprehensive, integrated program to assist volunteers in community sport in the following areas:

(i) sports administration; (ii) understanding and managing volunteer liability insurance issues; (iii) alcohol and food handling competencies; (iv) awareness of current grants and resources available to sports organisations; (v) general sports administration and organisation skills acquisition; and that programs should be run in rural and regional centres across Victoria to ensure reasonable access for all country people.

We also wish to express our disappointment that the Labor members on the Committee repeatedly used their numbers by voting as a block to prevent the Committee from investigating key issues in the inquiry and from making strong definitive recommendations on vital matters.

In particular the Labor members used their numbers to: -

(i) Defeat motions to include netball in the terms of reference for this inquiry thereby restricting the Committee in its study of vital issues affecting netball in country Victoria and its significant link to local football.

(ii) Defeat motions to add clear direction and real substance to key recommendations particularly those recommendations which put forward specific funding proposals to improve infrastructure for country netball and football and to improve recruitment and support for volunteers.

(iii) Deny the Committee the opportunity to meet with Tattersalls, the operator of the State Government Tipstar football tipping competition, in an open public hearing to discuss the opportunities to improve this competition and at the same time provide a benefit to country netball and football clubs.

Finally the Committee has quite rightly highlighted in Section 7.50 the very real and urgent concern with the current State Government attack on the importance of, and need for regular physical education in our schools.

Physical Education must be retained as a core learning area in our curriculum to promote physical activity, promote healthy activities, promote sports skills development, reduce obesity and in the context of this report help young people to understand the great benefits of participation in competitive sport.

INQUIRY INTO COUNTRY FOOTBALL – MINORITY REPORT  
Craig Ingram, Member for East Gippsland, Deputy Chair

I have welcomed the opportunity to participate in the country football inquiry as Deputy Chair.

As an active participant, both as a player and in administration positions in country football clubs, it was clear even before the inquiry commenced that the major impact on country football / netball and sport generally is the availability of players due to the changing demographics, population decline and the aging population of country areas.

The committee's time may have been better spent looking at the additional barriers and costs in running businesses in rural and regional areas. For example, why the commonwealth and state Grants Commissions provide 30% of their grants on an "as of right" basis in direct conflict to their purpose of equalising the availability of services and infrastructure.

Whilst I support the report and believe that it has adequately addressed the issues facing the future of football in rural Victoria, I am disappointed that we could not get agreement on one of the key recommendations (No. 22) on the establishment of a grant scheme for country football / netball facilities. I believe that the recommendation should have contained a dollar amount, which was unfortunately not supported by the majority of the committee.

I believe that there was a genuine attempt in the main to ensure that the outcomes of the report were supported by all members of the committee.