

Mr Paul Baxter
Senior Commissioner
Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission



Dear Sir

I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to your Inquiry relating to the ACT racing industry.

My interest is both as a member of the community and a member of the Canberra Harness Racing Club (CHRC) and one who loves harness racing. Some years ago I served on the Committee of the CHRC, and have had the pleasure of being a former part-owner, within a small syndicate.

During my time living in Canberra which dates back to 1978, I have seen many changes to the harness race meetings in Canberra; back when the bookmakers betting ring was out in the open (not much fun then on a cold winter night!); unlike today where we enjoy comfortable undercover accommodation. I recall an instance where some 5,000 people attended a race meeting back then; a far cry from nowadays where attendances can be measured in the low hundreds.

I have always held a personal view that one day the people of Canberra might see a "multifunctional" racing facility; that is, a venue where all three codes co-exist. It seems to me that people/public like to be entertained. They dress up for the occasion/event; that is, they may not necessarily be hardened racegoers but they like to have a fun time, be entertained, and in a venue which is "family friendly"; that is a venue at which people can bring children. This would suggest the need for a childminding/entertainment facility where patrons can feel free to enjoy themselves in the knowledge that their children are in safe hands. Face painting, for example, is always a winner with children. Such a facility would also create employment opportunities for suitably qualified staff.

A multifunctional venue would seem to be better able to provide for the wider community rather than just the "racing" fraternity. I could envisage race meetings where, for example, a BIG SCREEN/s might be showing the tennis, cricket, football etc; maybe even a concert or performing artists doing music etc. Something which appeals to a wider audience. I feel such an approach would also help remove the agony for the relevant government/controlling bodies having to decide "which codes get what"; more of a "sharing" approach to the use of government funding. Such an approach would allow development of one set of infrastructure as compared with trying to replicate infrastructure for all three racing codes separately resulting in debate about one code getting more than another.

Many people involved in harness racing could well be described as hobby trainers. Often this sees a whole family being involved, which I think is marvellous. I feel that the level of prize money on offer for harness races is insufficient to allow some owners and trainers to cover costs to stay in business. My experience has shown that most trainers do not get fully or even adequately recompensed for their hours of work; hence a lot of work is done "for the love of the game".

In years gone by, Canberra used to have "mini trotters"; i.e. Shetland ponies which were driven by children. This seemed to be a crowd pleaser, something which the children enjoyed doing and was a means of getting children interested and thus helping to continue their involvement in harness racing. I suspect that the rescheduling of race meetings (arranged by Harness Racing New South

Wales as far as I know) from weekends to mostly Monday nights has, sadly, brought about the demise of children's mini trotters events.

My observation is that the harness racing community is a very supportive one; people are certainly not doing it just for the money! The annual Awards Presentation Night held by the CHRC is a good example of the strong community spirit that exists within the CHRC. Long may it continue.

One example of the contribution of harness racing to the Canberra community is that the on-course catering at CHRC meetings is provided by the Lake Ginninderra Sea Scouts who do a wonderful job. Another is the employment created for ground staff, bar staff, office staff, race officials, bookmakers, ACT TAB staff, on-course harness equipment sales, mobile coffee service etc.

I hope the above is of some assistance in your deliberations.

I would be delighted to receive any feedback from you on this matter.

Yours faithfully,

Norm Pushack.