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### THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS MET AT THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS, LAUNCESTON ON FRIDAY, 1 NOVEMBER 2013.

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#### INQUIRY INTO GOVERNMENT FUNDING OF AUSTRALIAN RULES COMMUNITY FOOTBALL IN TASMANIA

Ms ANN KEEGAN, Mr GEORGE CLAXTON, Mr BRETT GILLOW, Mr CRAIG YOUNG, Mr ROD PATTERSON, Mr JADE ELMER, Mr DREW ALEXANDER AND Mr GEOFF PAGE, SOUTH LAUNCESTON FOOTBALL CLUB (SLFC), WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** (Mr Dean) - Welcome, everyone. This is the third day of the hearings of the Public Accounts Committee into government funding of Australian rules community football in Tasmania. We had a hearing in Launceston last week and one in Hobart before that. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. If you make any comment after you leave this table you are not covered by parliamentary privilege. The evidence you present is being recorded and the *Hansard* version will be able and published as soon as we get it onto the website. If at any stage we reach a position where you believe the evidence you want to give should be protected because of certain issues, we can take evidence in camera. The committee would be prepared, if we reach that stage, to listen to your reasons and make a determination on whether it should be taken in camera.

**Mr PATTERSON** - I am the president of the South Launceston Football Club. I am joined here today by members of our board: Geoff Page, Brett Gillow, Drew Alexander, Ann Keegan, Jade Elmer, Craig Young, and George Claxton.

I would like to address an AFL statement in today's paper. I received a phone call from Scott Wade on Wednesday night whilst I was at a board meeting. I returned the phone call to Scott whilst I was at that board meeting. The phone call related to what evidence the South Launceston Football Club was going to be giving today. I gave him the statement that the South Launceston Football Club Board had instructed me, as president, only to speak of any evidence the South Launceston Football Club was going to give to this inquiry and not to anyone else - the media or anywhere else.

I related that to Scott. Scott was a little bit disappointed in that, as we have had many open discussions but I did give him the position the board had instructed me.

**CHAIR** - Rod, when that phone call was made?

**Mr PATTERSON** - Wednesday night.

**CHAIR** - Of this week?

**Mr PATTERSON** - Yes. I still have the recording on my phone.

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Yesterday morning, as I was travelling to my Burnie business, Shaun Young from AFL Tasmania contacted me to ask what evidence the South Launceston Football Club was going to give today. I, again, gave him the instruction my board had given me that I am not to discuss any evidence outside the inquiry to anyone. Shaun intimated to me that it would be in my best interests if I did tell him as AFL Tasmania will get on the front foot and they will come out and report on South Launceston, as they have done with their media release last night on their website and in today's press.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - That phone call that you received yesterday, how did you perceive that call? Was it a warning? Was it a threat? What was your perception of it?

**Mr PATTERSON** - There was some intimidation involved in the phone call suggesting that I should provide information of what was going to be discussed today.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Or?

**Mr PATTERSON** - Or AFL Tasmania would hit the media before we were presenting at this inquiry. They would get on the front foot.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - And that is the article that you -

**Mr PATTERSON** - This is what happened late yesterday afternoon on their website and in today's press, so I believe that is what it would be talking about?

**Mr BOOTH** - Did you feel that they were trying to intimidate you not to turn up to the committee or that any evidence you might give here be moderated in some way?

**Mr PATTERSON** - Kim, they were inquiring what we were going to be talking about. In both phone conversations that was the inquiry; we want to know what you are talking about. Are you going to be bagging AFL Tasmania?

**Mr BOOTH** - Did it feel like it was intimidating you or that they were trying to stop you saying things?

**CHAIR** - I think Mike has answered that question about the intimidatory issue.

**Mr BOOTH** - Chair, I am just trying to get to the point whether it had any effect on Mr Patterson in terms of the evidence he will give today.

**CHAIR** - Perhaps if the question could be phrased that way - what impact did it have on the witness?

**Mr PATTERSON** - I contacted my board and again, as you can see, they have been very united. This is not about the president of the South Launceston Football Club; this is about the South Launceston Football Club. I am the president of the South Launceston Football Club, therefore the spokesperson, and everyone who was coming is here.

I would like to explain our reasons for being here today. As you are all aware, when the period for public submissions was open for the inquiry I registered our interest as a club and indicated that, should you wish to speak with us, we would make ourselves available

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if that is what you wanted. We are very comfortable with the fact that you did want to speak to us and thank you for the invitation to be here today.

The South Launceston Football Club has had a difficult year, to say the least. On the field, the club was very successful, winning the TSL premiership, but off field, as has been reported by the media on many occasions, the club has faced many challenges. As a board, we want today to draw a line in the sand, so to speak, between what has happened both on and off the field during 2013 and where we as a new board want to take the club into the future.

The new board and its new administration have been in place since 2 October. As one of your terms of reference goes to the future and structure of football in Tasmania, we want the footballing public to understand that as a new board we are setting a new direction for the club, both on and off the field, and we want very strongly for the public of Tasmania to know that. We believe it is important that we provide some background and set out for you the circumstances, as we see them, that over the course of 2013 have led to our appointment as a new board of what was, and will be, a strong and proud football club in the future.

To provide a context for this explanation it is worthwhile pointing out that the South Launceston Football Club, which recently won the TSL premiership, should be basking in the post-season haze that naturally follows when any club in any league anywhere in this country achieves the holy grail of football and wins a premiership; however, we are not. Our club won the premiership but has been axed by AFL Tasmania from the league because back in April the club was told it would not be offered a new licence in its own right, therefore excluding the club from the TSL, even though the club is now the league's most successful on-field club during season 2013.

Later today I wish to discuss AFL Tasmania's decision not to grant the club a licence, issues with depleted memberships and our finances, players meetings with AFL Tasmania and other matters. Also in those discussions, the appointment of an interim board to run the club and how that developed.

This now brings me to what has occurred since the new board was appointed on 2 October 2013 and I was appointed president. As a new board, we have taken our responsibilities as directors very seriously. We have been involved in the day-to-day process of getting a club, which effectively has been left without players by AFL Tasmania and without an association to play in. We have applied to the NTFA and have been granted an opportunity to play in that association next year. We have appointed directors to oversee the activities of our club, and appointed coaches and playing staff to oversee the rebuilding of our on-field talent.

As directors we take our responsibilities very seriously in regard to the finances of the club, for obvious reasons. We have taken every reasonable step that prudent directors would take to ascertain that we can operate as a going concern, which we can. We have some liabilities that will need to be managed closely. However, as a board our message to the footballing public is that our financial challenges are manageable and that under this board we believe the club has a very strong future. However, there are some matters that may have surfaced in the period since we became directors that we believe this community should be aware of. These matters are of a serious nature and it is our view

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they should be heard in private. It is also our view that the matters fall within the terms of reference of this committee and we seek your agreement for those matters to be heard in camera.

**Mr BEST** - Mr Patterson, you clearly feel the call was intimidation for you not to give evidence?

**CHAIR** - Brenton, we have covered that. I need to be careful and fair. Mr Patterson covered that on two or three occasions, so unless you want to put another issue to Rod we should move.

**Mr BEST** - Yes, that's fine. I heard an answer to a question earlier on about pressure being brought to bear. I did not hear a question about whether or not the intention of the call was to not give evidence at all.

**Mr PATTERSON** - No, it was not. It was to seek what was being presented.

**Mr BEST** - Okay, pressure to release what was being presented but not pressure to not give evidence.

**Mr PATTERSON** - No.

**Mr BEST** - Thank you.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Rod, you raised some serious matters. Is it your view that you would like this committee to hear that in camera?

**Mr PATTERSON** - That was our opening statement and all other information we would like in camera.

**CHAIR** - What I would like to do first, though, I just ask again if any committee member has any question of Rod or the board in relation to any issues raised so far?

**Mr BEST** - Are you able to share with the committee any reasons why you had trouble with the South Launceston Football Club finances?

**Mr PATTERSON** - I would like to answer that in camera.

*Evidence taken in camera.*