

PUBLIC

THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY ON AFL IN TASMANIA MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON WEDNESDAY, 21 AUGUST 2019.

Mr DAVID O'BYRNE MP WAS CALLED AND EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Dean) - David, you have given evidence to committees on many occasions. All the same privileges and rules apply here today, as you would be aware. David, I will give you an opportunity to make further statements in addition to the submission, or you might want to talk over the submission.

Mr FINCH - Chair, a reminder that the committee is being live streamed.

CHAIR - We are being live streamed today. Thanks for that.

Mr O'BYRNE - Thank you, Chair, and it is a great honour to present to the committee. I congratulate yourself and the members of the upper House on instigating this committee. I am here in my capacity as Labor shadow minister for sport and a retired footballer, who has played in the statewide league at both ends of the state and is very, very passionate about the game in Tasmania. I have a young daughter who is also now playing football for the Sandy Bay Football Club. You have to think about the future and a range of things.

The Labor Party's submission to the committee is before you. I will not go into great detail. I am very keen to take questions and have a conversation with the committee. I understand from the media reports today that you have received evidence from a number of other passionate Tasmanians who feel strongly about this issue and I am sure there are a number of things you would seek to raise with me.

Finally, it is important we put on the record that Tasmania is a proud Australian Rules state. We have produced many state and national champions and Tasmania's aspiration to have a national team in the AFL is warranted. There are many passionate people who are supportive of it but there are also a number of people across our sporting community that feel other sports need to get a fair share or they need to get their hearing as well. It is important that we balance that. The Labor Party's view, looking at sporting engagement and AFL participation, community and social cohesion and economic development, is that it is an economic opportunity for Tasmania to have a team in the top flight in the AFL.

We are supportive of it. We don't sign a blank cheque to this endeavour but the Labor Party has a long history of supporting AFL content and encouraging participation in the sport, supporting both regional communities and metropolitan cities to engage in the sport in Tasmania. We are very keen to see how we can work with others to build a pathway toward an AFL team that is sustainable and supported by the entire state.

Mr FINCH - You have covered each of the terms of reference. We can start at number one and look at the economic benefits. Perhaps you can speak to anything you would like to add, we can ask questions throughout.

PUBLIC

Mr O'BYRNE - AFL footy is a game. There is no doubt it is a game but the AFL is now referred to as an industry in its own right. If you look at Victoria and those places that currently have a team, an AFL team or the industry of the AFL has a massive economic impact in creating jobs and wealth in those communities. Particularly being an island state, for us, in having AFL played at both ends of the state in Tasmania, it has created significant economic benefits in what has traditionally been a quiet time for tourists.

When you look at the economic benefits of an AFL team or AFL content, most clubs are big businesses. Most clubs now have a turnover in excess of \$50 million. If you look at the impact of MONA in the southern economy, there are millions of dollars that MONA produces in wages, attracting tourists and the range of ancillary activities that they conduct. It is not only the gallery, there is hospitality, business, marketing and design; there is a whole creative impact out at MONA.

An AFL team would have a similar independent economic impact. When you think of it as a sport, you are quite right to do that, but you shouldn't ignore the economic impact of a team or having an organisation that would have a minimum or close to \$50 million turnover in Tasmania. It shouldn't be sneezed at.

There is a range of roles that would be created in Tasmania that are not currently here. These are new jobs. Hosting an AFL team would mean that we would have more content in the state. At the moment, we are working at the whim of the AFL in terms of the draw. Sometimes you get some games that do not drag tourists to Tasmania. Some games you do, and the fixturing is an issue. When you have a home team, there is no doubt you will have some large clubs that will have a travelling supporter base with them that would come to Tasmania. I know, as former economic development minister in the previous Labor state government, studies that were conducted into the impact of Hawthorn games in Launceston showed a significant amount of economic impact; turning casual jobs into part-time jobs and part-time jobs into full-time jobs at a time when the visitations had dropped off. Chair, coming from Launceston, you know of the impact of those games on the hotels, hospitality venues, retail and taxis, and the vast majority of those dollars spent will stay in the town, which is crucially important.

The economic benefit is twofold: a club is a big employer - it's medicos, physios, marketing - in direct employment and they would, through their procurement, create a significant amount of economic activity wherever they would be across the state. You have seen all of the marketing, the merchandise and collateral that clubs produce. There is an opportunity for that to benefit Tasmanians. If the government plays a role, you can play a role in ensuring they purchase Tasmanian, buy Tasmania and they brand Tasmania. The games would drag a lot of people to Tasmania, particularly if we had a blockbuster.

Mr FINCH - We have also seen the renewal of those contracts every five years, which tells you that that investigation and scrutiny has been done again and the reference to the previous five years has been taken into account and it has come up trumps.

Mr O'BYRNE - That is right. There is a report in the public domain but I am not sure if it has been referenced at this committee. When we were in government, we assessed the credit card transactions over a weekend when there was a game on in Launceston. Close to 30 per cent of credit card transactions were mainland-based, according to the data that you can capture from mainland-based credit cards. You know people travel. Particularly if you had a team in Tasmania, you would get more Victorian-based clubs playing down here. That is much easier for

PUBLIC

people to travel. When you have Fremantle, West Coast and Gold Coast, sometimes you are not able to get those tourist numbers. Again, with fixturing, you are at the whim of the AFL.

Mr FINCH - In that first term of reference there is the mention of benefits to the community. We talked yesterday and evidence was given that the community is strengthened, there is more activity put back into the community and from the community back into the football team. Would you like to talk about that aspect of what a Tasmanian team might bring to communities?

Mr O'BYRNE - In the two clubs that we have an economic development arrangement with at the moment, it is about content and events in winter. They also, as part of their contracts, play a role in community development in programs, school visits and work with community clubs to have events and inspire young people to take up the game and to keep other people involved in the game. There is a great old saying that you can't be what you can't see. When there is an AFL team and they are doing their work in the community, fundraising for good causes or allowing some of their high-profile AFL stars to speak at events, that does bring community together.

In the introduction of the Labor Party submission we do say that football clubs in regional Tasmania are the heart and soul of many communities. When things are good or bad, the club and the infrastructure the club has in those communities creates enormous wellbeing and strength. It shouldn't be assumed that an AFL team would be community development. It would be a conscious decision. Any club worth its salt would need to ensure they have deep links within the community. There was a preseason event down here during the bushfires and a couple of players from the club visited some of the centres, made themselves known to people and that did lift the community, the presence of the people they see on television and the AFL stars. That would be inherent in a Tasmanian club. I have been talking about a team but I am talking about a club.

Male and female teams are absolutely obtainable and would be preferable and desirable. Arguably, a women's team is easier to achieve if you are looking at the finances.

Ms SIEJKA - People may be prepared to transition their membership over to a women's team and still have their men's teams because that loyalty.

Mr O'BYRNE - Regarding membership, Jo, I think there are a number of people who are members of North Melbourne or Hawthorn. It is not their first team, but they want access to their regular seats or priority seats, or grouped up deals they can do with membership these days.

I don't hide that I'm a passionate Collingwood supporter. I apologise to the Saints' fan on the table there. I would be a member of a Tasmanian team straight away. I remember years ago they put out a \$10 membership. I joined up straight up away. I know there are a number of people who are passionate supporters of their current AFL team who would join a Tasmanian club. We are seeing it with Hawthorn. Even non-Hawthorn supporters are members of the club because they want access to the game deals.

CHAIR - Tim Lane said an interesting thing about that in his submission. He was saying that he did a study when the Eagles started in Western Australia. It took the people over there about four games, I think he said, to transition to the Eagles; to leave the club they had supported all their lives. It was their side, their team.

Mr O'BYRNE - That's right. I think you would see that with the Adelaide Crows as well; South Australians were very parochial members of North Adelaide, Norwood, Sturt, West

PUBLIC

Torrens, the local based clubs there. I was studying at university at the time the Adelaide team came in, or a couple of years after. They were members of their SANFL team and but they would also be members of the Adelaide Crows. You would find that many Tasmanians would join a Tasmanian-based team. There is the Tasmanian diaspora as well. Tens of thousands of Tasmanians live in Victoria, New South Wales or Queensland. You could almost do an interstate membership base for them to give them access to games. Potentially, you could do a deal with other stadiums and other clubs to give them access to games as well. I believe Tasmanians will get around a Tasmanian team for sure.

Mr FINCH - Just to underline the point that I was making before, David, with respect to a Tasmanian team, when I talk about the link back into community and back the other way, I am wondering whether it will be more so. Certainly, North Melbourne and Hawthorn have done a good job. They were strong initially; it might have died off to a certain extent. Do you think that link would be stronger if we had a Tasmanian team back to community?

Mr O'BYRNE - There is absolutely no doubt it would be much stronger. At the moment, the Victorian teams fly in for games and for various events. Particularly in the Hawthorn deal, senior people are available for community and corporate events. But when a team is based here 12 months of the year, you get access. There's a whole lot more that you could do with a Tasmanian-based club. It is not the old days where the players were part-time athletes, and had another job. Their job is to prepare for the AFL season and be the best they can. Training is crucial as is their presence in the state. With 40-odd male listed players and close to 30 listed female players playing in the state, they would live here so their access to community would be significantly greater.

It would increase more than tenfold, purely because of their presence. Imagine if we had a Jack Riewoldt or a big name here living in the state, and the kind of inspiration that would create. You know the kind of work that people like Jack Riewoldt do; they do amazing community work. So, having them in the state, playing for their team and really engaging with the community, would be significant. You would be able to get to the east and west coasts and all of the other communities that currently struggle to get access under the current arrangements.

Ms SIEJKA - You must see lots of clubs. We haven't had anyone speak about what clubs' perspective are on it. Someone mentioned yesterday the different supports needed in a community to make a team sustainable and viable, and the young people coming up through the ranks and the competitive leads and that sort of thing. I am interested in -

Mr O'BYRNE - What it takes to actually make a club work?

Ms SIEJKA - Yes, what it takes to make a club work and also the perspective of people you have spoken to. You do have high level of engagement with the clubs.

Mr O'BYRNE - I do. Obviously growing up in footy circles - the Fagans, and the Brendan Boltions of the world. As you grow up, you keep in contact with these people. There is a tremendous amount of support across the AFL industry for a Tasmanian club.

I cannot betray too many conversations across a number of clubs across a number of states; key AFL people who are either currently involved with clubs or have recently moved on but are still involved and engaged in their clubs are very supportive. Also, they are very clear about what it takes to make a club tick and the work that needed to make it sustainable. A lot of clubs are

PUBLIC

very tribal. They are very passionate about their intellectual property and what capacity they have. It's a very competitive environment for getting marketing dollars. So each club has a responsibility to, for want of a better way to say, catch and kill their own to make sure that you get your own sponsorship and your people and build your relationships.

Whilst there is a lot of support, it is emotional support. But, also, people who are involved in business know that we can make this work because it is as national league. You look at Geelong which is a smallish city outside Melbourne, but also the global experience with the Green Bay Packers in the NFL. Once you get to that level, it's television rights and a whole range of things that you can access. A number of people are very supportive, but also there are a lot of experienced people who can assist in making sure that all the moving parts of a club can come together.

Does that answer your question?

Ms SIEJKA - Obviously, without permission you cannot really repeat particular conversations with people, but it was really just to know that we do have loyal fans of clubs in Tasmania already, not necessarily AFL, but the Tasmanian teams. If it was something they were after and wanting and supportive of for the most part -

Mr O'BYRNE - That is a very good point. At the moment there is a real question mark about what would happen to the TSL. As a former statewide league player, I am very supportive of the statewide league, but a number of clubs are concerned about where would their place be. We need to take that into account and ensure viability. You cannot just focus on the elite level and think that in and of itself an AFL team would resolve a whole range of the challenges facing Tasmania.

Ms SIEJKA - To best benefit Tasmanian players, they need to be able to have a viable pathway.

Mr O'BYRNE - That's right. It would be incumbent on the government of the day to not only ensure that the club in and of itself is viable but also that there is a clear strategy to work hand-in-hand with that club. It would be the AFL intent in Tasmania to know what they are doing to support junior development, community football and an elite pathway. Broadly speaking, you cannot go from school football or community football into an elite environment. It would be incumbent on that club to ensure that they build strong relationships with all parts of a development pathway to make sure that it is sustainable. Most of the other predominantly AFL states - and I think this is where Queensland struggles a bit - have an ecosystem where different tiers of community and semi-professional-heading to elite work in concert with each other. A club in and of itself would not resolve that. It would have to be a conscious decision of government and the team or the club and associations to work together to make sure that happens.

CHAIR - Tim Macmichael made a very important point on that yesterday about having to get our other structures right in this state if we are going to lead into the AFL. Our young people must be able to move into the next tier and to the next tier. They need a clear way forward to getting in to that side. We must have our structure right.

Mr O'BYRNE - I do not disagree with that. That is absolutely right, but if the AFL wanted us to have a team we would have one already. It is purely their decision. It is their league.. Sometimes I get a little grumpy with them saying that if Tasmania wants a team, you have to get

PUBLIC

50 000 members, you have to do this, and you have to do that. All of those things are right. We need to make sure we have our house in order and the creation of that governing body is a good step to bring all the leagues and football associations together so there is a single conversation about how we support each other and how we develop this. Sometimes I push back and say don't blame us for not getting a team when we don't.

Mr FINCH - The bar wasn't set that high for the Suns or for -

Mr O'BYRNE - Essentially if you look at the money, they are pouring more money into the Western Sydney Giants and the Gold Coast Suns and now the Mars Explorer program. The reason why they have teams is not because the Gold Coast signed up 50 000 members and their junior development program. Gold Coast Suns did not get a team because of that; they have a team because they needed content on the eastern seaboard for the television deal. Queensland is a market for them, so let's not pretend the Gold Coast and Western Sydney got their house in order and then they got a team.

They have a team because of the AFL wanting to grow the national code and to grow crowds. I get defensive when the AFL says if you do that you might get a team, when we know that is not the reason we do not have a team.

Mr FINCH - I have a sense our diminution in interest in Aussie rules football has been overseen by AFL in the past and the way they have handled the situation here in Tassie. We are in fact working against something that was dealt with very badly in the past by AFL.

Mr O'BYRNE - The point made about the health of the game in Tasmania is crucially important. We have a responsibility in government and working with all codes to ensure the pathway is healthy, the clubs are supported, and the sport can continue.

Mr FINCH - A point I want to make when you were talking about the support we receive, we know the Mick Malthouses and various ones are talking up our situation. Caroline Wilson has to be commended as on Monday night's program on national television she was again throwing up the challenge about Tasmania being part of the national league and having a standalone team in the competition. She has been a real die-hard supporter of Tasmania.

Mr O'BYRNE - Just because we ask for a team it does not mean we need to be given one. The AFL is right: it does need to be sustainable and we do need to have a professional business case approach. My view would be is AFLX has fallen over, games in China are not successful, and if they were looking for a legacy piece to reinvigorate the heart and soul and remind people AFL football or Aussie rules football in Australia is essentially a community-based game, establishing a Tasmania team could be their legacy piece. I would argue the creation of a Tasmania team would restore faith, because there is a big discussion around whether the game is industry, business, or is it a game people can get around and love. A decision to have a Tasmanian-based AFL team - once we do our work to ensure it is a business case and sustainable - will restore people's faith in the game.

Mr ARMSTRONG - I touch on your point, Kerry. I watched that program last night with Jeff Kennett and Caroline Wilson. She reckons he is working in the background to undermine the Tasmanian team getting into the AFL because they are getting their dollars from the Tasmanian government for Hawthorn, which is probably their major sponsor. She actually came out pretty

PUBLIC

strong in the media and said Jeff Kennett is working against Tasmania getting an AFL team. Did you see it, Kerry?

Mr FINCH - Yes.

Mr O'BYRNE - He is the president of a club that has a sponsorship deal with Tasmania and it works to their benefit; he will be working with the best interests of the Hawthorn Football Club.

Mr FINCH - It is like John Gay working for Gunns doing what he thought he had to do for the shareholders.

Mr ARMSTRONG - You would not if you didn't.

Mr O'BYRNE - Let us be clear, Tasmania and Hawthorn have had an excellent relationship in what they have done in Launceston, with the economic activity they have created in Launceston. It is a relationship that we should not just discard. It has been a good relationship for Hawthorn and Tasmania that has worked extraordinarily well, and if we are not able to get a decision on an AFL club in Tasmania, we need to make sure we do not end up with - when everyone says to tell the AFL club to go back to Victoria, that does not actually create any pathway, assist us or take us further down the track. We will just be a state without a club, without any games and the economic benefit.

At the moment, Hawthorn and Launceston is maybe 10 per cent community football development, and 90 per cent economic development for events. It is an event strategy and I think that is pretty clear.

Ms SIEJKA - You said the investment is marginal at best. You were talking in your submission a lot about the economic and tourism potential, but you also mentioned that reasonable investment is warranted. From what I am picking up, we are not just talking in financial terms in investment. It is also developing people in the community.

Mr O'BYRNE - That is right. You have a number of young Tasmanians who may not be able to end up being someone who plays the game, but sports administration, physiotherapy, training, there is a whole range of roles an AFL club would provide opportunities for young Tasmanians to be engaged in.

Ms SIEJKA - Some of the investment would be in particular training we do not offer at the moment.

Mr O'BYRNE - That is right. There is a whole range of degrees offered on the mainland that are not offered down here. But if you have a critical mass, all of those things, there is a whole range of opportunities and other roles that open up if you have the creation of a club with that kind of money. This will lead to university, vocational educational trainers, and schools will respond and a whole lot of opportunities, absolutely.

Mr FINCH - David, I highlighted yesterday that 20 years ago, Collingwood had 90 on their staff.

CHAIR - They now have about 110, and Russell Hanson might be able to tell us more about that later on.

PUBLIC

Mr FINCH - It is about one football team.

Mr O'BYRNE - There is no doubt they are one of the bigger clubs, so in terms of the government investment, ideally what you would want is our existing investment in both the Hawthorn arrangement and the North Melbourne arrangement directly and indirectly. How this transfers to a new team, and a new club, and what that would look like once you are in the league and start to create the revenue from marketing, the revenue from tickets, the revenue from a whole range of different sources - you would hope the government could then move slowly away. You would move from an underpinning to an underwriting circumstance. The business case needs to be sustainable. It is almost like once you pay your ticket to get in, you are in, and then you make the money in the environment within which you are in.

There are a whole lot of national sponsors who may not be naturally attached to Tasmania, but say, 'Actually, we need to get into the AFL marketing zone because this is where we can make a lot of our money. We need to market our product or whatever we do in the AFL. We can't seem to get into Hawthorn, Carlton, Collingwood, or whatever, but we can back a Tasmanian team'. They may be a company based in Queensland but we will take their money because that money is coming from Queensland to Tasmania and underpins a Tasmanian club. A \$50 million revenue would be a minimum - imagine the multiplier effect of someone who receives a wage from that club and the \$50 million. They would spend money in restaurants, supermarkets and the multiplier effect would be significant.

CHAIR - We talk about direct employment and I think that is why Collingwood and Melbourne are around the 100 mark, but then we would have the indirect employment Jo referred to on top of this. I do not know how many would be in the indirect side of things.

Mr O'BYRNE - There would be hundreds of jobs.

Ms SIEJKA - The key would be to try to make them Tasmanian as much as possible.

Mr O'BYRNE - That is right, and I use the example with MONA. It is a different pursuit but, ultimately, they employ over 100 people and bring a number of people to them. So if you are going to work in the minor environment you virtually have to be here. You can work offsite but the ideal goal would be these roles would be based in Tasmania, you would bring them to Tasmania. There is a whole range of other things sparked because of that activity. You are actually adding to the economic pie of Tasmania.

Mr FINCH - That term of reference number two, David, refers to whether the Tasmanian taxpayer or the AFL should subsidise the AFL-based clubs playing in Tasmania. Could you focus on the Tasmanian taxpayer and what you feel their thoughts may be?

Mr O'BYRNE - It is a really good question. I am sure every politician in the Tasmanian Parliament hears this regularly, that there are choices to be made about health, education and sport and where the taxpayer's money is going. It is a legitimate question to be asked. The investment in AFL at the moment is an economic development investment. As taxpayers, we fund and support events like Dark MOFO -

Mr FINCH - Symmons Plains.

PUBLIC

Mr O'BYRNE - Symmons Plains, there is a whole range of events. The government thinks strategically about the need to build the economy in Tasmania. We know that creates revenue and it creates jobs and opportunities for Tasmanians. We have a dual responsibility to provide good, decent services but also ensure, where we can, that we have a stronger and larger economy that more people can access. We know that if people access better jobs, there are better decisions in their lives, there are more opportunities and choices. It is a balance. If this was purely a sporting investment and you were thinking about participation or supporting a sporting code, there would be significant question marks about the size of government investment.

While it does have a benefit for the sport, it does help and assist in participation and getting people involved in their sporting clubs, particularly AFL, the current arrangement is predominantly about tourism. It is an event strategy bringing people to Tasmania, filling the stadiums and the restaurants and creating jobs in Tasmania. You can't have an endless stream of taxpayer dollars underwriting and underpinning any sport. It has to be a reasonable investment and the return needs to be clear so that Tasmanians can see the benefit. I think they see the benefit. A number of Tasmanians don't feel sport is of any benefit to them. That is completely fine and that is why governments support artistic endeavours. You have the Supercars in Launceston but the government does a range of things to support economic activity.

Mr ARMSTRONG - You were talking about taxpayers' money going into the North Melbourne and Hawthorn football clubs. When you are out in the community, you have some people who support it and some vehemently opposed to it. Would there be more support from Tasmanian taxpayers for a Tasmanian side based in Tasmania?

Mr O'BYRNE - I think the answer is yes. There has always been this tension about giving money to Victorian clubs, which then go back to Victoria with that money. They bring a lot of money with tourists and a whole lot of other stuff, but I think that would dissipate if it was a Tasmanian-based team. We are seeing that with the Hurricanes, with cricket and other sports that have elite pathways. If you look at hockey, they have a men's and women's teams in the national league, which is fantastic for Tasmania. People would say that is a genuine investment in a Tasmanian team.

You have to act with responsibility. I completely understand what people are saying. You have ambulances being ramped, firefighters being put on call to cover ambulance or paramedic-style duties. There are legitimate questions to be asked and no sport gets a blank cheque. It needs to be justified and you need to get the balance right.

CHAIR - Going to point four, this is to do with the possible solutions to the AFL's perception of Tasmanian being geographically and politically divided. That is a point that Gillon McLachlan made when he was departing Tasmania last year. I listened to him on radio saying we had issues here we needed to sort out. You have touched on that in your submission, which is good.

Mr O'BYRNE - As a boy born in Launceston, who played footy in Launceston, moved south and played footy down in the south, I suppose I have seen it from both sides of the coin.

Mr FINCH - Everybody hated you.

Mr O'BYRNE - That's right. I turned on the Launceston mates and I was a northerner in the south, that's right. There are two things I will say. First, parochialism: we saw it in the last

PUBLIC

federal election, the 'southern-based AFL team'. We know that is rubbish but I thought it was irresponsible to do that. We were trying to build a path toward one state, one view and let's get together to do it. I wrote to the Premier in the middle of 2018, as shadow sports minister, to say that we need to work together on this. We have now, through the Treasurer, Peter Gutwein, been briefed on their work. We thought that was really inappropriate and I was very disappointed. That was an easy button to push.

It is easy for people on the mainland to blame and use that as an excuse as to why we can't get a team. It is easy to let people argue amongst themselves than come to the table and provide a resolution to the issue. We have seen the Hurricanes' example, which has been used a number of times. Launceston people do turn out for their sport, they love their sport and they have embraced those games. Parochialism is a part of our history and it is part of Tasmanian politics.

The great thing about sport is it's one of the things that can bring us together. A genuine Tasmanian-based team playing at both ends of the state, with the map or the Tassie devil or however we represent ourselves on the guernsey. It is a unique opportunity, culturally and socially, to try to bridge that divide. To say it's not there is not being realistic. There is always a level of north, south, north-west and, in some respects, it is eastern shore, western shore in Hobart. It is north Launceston, south Launceston.

Mr FINCH - It is Western Bulldogs, its Hawthorn.

Mr O'BYRNE - Yes, that is right. It is Collingwood, Carlton. You either take advantage of it and use that energy to build something bigger than some of the parts, which I think a Tasmanian team can, or you fall back and use it as an excuse not to get something. Parochialism is something that can be enhanced in this and it can unite. A genuine Tasmanian team can unite.

CHAIR - We have to convince AFL House, Gillon McLachlan, that we are unified and we do have a firm position and we are not divided, as statements have been made.

Mr O'BYRNE - The AFL is divided. You have different presidents with different views and they disagree with the commission. Every code, every community, has divisions. It is about what pieces of infrastructure you build to bring people together, and that would be the first thing that would go.

CHAIR - I refer to Tim Lane's submission. He is saying the position on headquarters and some of those issues should be a matter for the AFL, that they should determine that, not us. How do you see that? How should it be determined?

Mr O'BYRNE - There is no doubt that where a team would be headquartered is a key question to be answered. I don't think we should sign away our rights to that decision, particularly if the government is playing a key role. I understand that the new committee that has been established to build the business case is working on a survey of AFL players. Some people are saying we should have it in Launceston because it is in the middle, where everyone can go. Crowd is one impact, crowd is one factor that you need to consider, but there is a whole range of other things.

What does a club need to be sustainable? Finances, marketing, design, access to elite infrastructure, medical support and a whole range of things, so you want to make sure Tasmania can become a destination club for players. We are seeing with Gold Coast no-one wants to go

PUBLIC

there or stay there other than the people who like surfing and other stuff, but a whole lot of players leave that, so the players' voice in this is crucially important about where they would see that. Sometimes you are focused on where the team will be based, but there are pre-season games, season games, finals and it may be Launceston is where you play the finals, because it is about getting crowds there. Maybe Launceston is where we have all of the finals, and York Park or UTAS Stadium will be our final's venue, but this is stuff we need to work through. You need to get that right. I would not necessarily believe we just sign away our right to make that decision. It may be a 'get out of jail' card for some people, but we should not sign away that right.

CHAIR - We should never forget, David, like some are saying that Hobart is our capital.

Mr O'BYRNE - Yes, Chris Fagan has made some comments on this. He is a west coast boy who played premierships for Devonport and coached down here in the Mariners, and is of the view you need it to be in a capital. We have not formed an official view. The work of the committee in terms of surveying players and where they want to be would be crucial information to know. You need to attract the talent and be competitive.

Mr FINCH - Do you think the suggestion that the AFL Players Association be a part of that decision-making or have input would be a good idea?

Mr O'BYRNE - The AFL Coaches Association and the Players Association are the people who have to live and breathe a club. Their views would be really important in factoring it. I do not think I have ever met anyone who has not loved Tasmania when they have come down and they see all points of the compass, so getting their views would be important.

CHAIR - Yes, it is a good point.

Mr ARMSTRONG - You would have read Saturday's paper about the super stadium they want to build here in Hobart. It would be an ideal place to build because you have traffic incoming from every direction - east, south, and west - parking on the Domain and walking distance from accommodation, restaurants, the bus to MONA or Wrest Point, ferry access. You have everything going for it there.

Ms SIEJKA - One day.

Mr O'BYRNE - One day, they promised it. It just needs the underground bus mall.

Mr ARMSTRONG - You have ferry access to MONA. I am a firm believer if we want to attract players to come to play in a Tasmanian side, the base has to be in Hobart. You could play games in Launceston, but the base needs to be in Hobart.

Mr O'BYRNE - It is a good question, Robert. I did see that floated and not the first time it has been raised. A lot of people are talking about something on Macquarie Point or in that area where they can build a new stadium. We acknowledge we have two really important assets at the moment in terms of Blundstone Arena and UTAS Stadium, where successive governments, over a number of years, have built up both stadiums and invested a lot of taxpayer dollars to make that work. I would like to see the business case on a waterfront stadium and what it would mean for our existing investments and infrastructure, but a lot of what you say makes sense.

Mr ARMSTRONG - There could be conference centres and everything built into that area.

PUBLIC

Mr O'BYRNE - It may mean what happens is another sport takes up that opportunity, like an A-League licence or basketball team. All of the things you say in terms of space is right, but we do not start with a clean slate. If we were trying to find a way to get to Melbourne, we would not necessarily start in Tasmania, you would probably start in Sydney, so you could walk. Do you know what I mean? We have an existing infrastructure investment and relationships that need to be considered. If you were starting with a clean slate, yes you would model the Melbourne Cricket Ground next to a central business district, the Sydney Cricket Ground next to a CBD -

Mr ARMSTRONG - That actually happened in Melbourne too. They went out to Waverley Park, which did not work. Bellerive - clearly there are problems in getting to Bellerive. Sometimes government might have - whether it's a federal government and I imagine it would be - to bite the bullet and say it is not working as well as it should. AFL Park did not work in Waverley. I went out there once; you got on a train or a taxi and it was ridiculous for a game of football.

Mr O'BYRNE - It seemed like a good idea at the time, but Melbourne is a much larger catchment area. They can sustain two ovals or two large venues and have more than two as they have Rod Laver Arena and a whole range of others. Your point is well made. I would like to see the business case and think we have existing infrastructure and adding extra costs or steps in to have a team may make it harder.

Mr ARMSTRONG - They were talking about Commonwealth money?

Mr O'BYRNE - It is a point well-made and not the first time.

CHAIR - We will try to move quickly into the others because we are just about out of time.

Ms SIEJKA - We have touched on a lot of them.

CHAIR - We have touched on them and on number five - the impact of the future participation rates. On number six, if Tasmania was to establish an AFL team, when would be the optimal time for it to commence? You have touched on this in your submission.

Mr O'BYRNE - You need to have a decision in a period of time to establish all the infrastructure and what you would need to build up a team. There is a number of people who are looking at the television rights deal with scheduling, where games are telecast and how the television deal money is allocated to various clubs. The AFL is already in negotiations as we speak. There is a massive change in the media market in terms of most people now are not necessarily in front of a television in their home; they have mobile devices and moving around which might change the landscape.

You need at least two- or three-years' notice of a team to allow it to build and all the back of house stuff established to make an on-field team successful. Two or three years is a reasonable period of time to build a list, look at draft preferences, salary cap issues and those things. It would be at least two or three seasons before you would be able to have a team up and going.

Mr FINCH - A time line to work to.

PUBLIC

Mr O'BYRNE - You have to have a time line. One of the problems is the commitment for an AFL team is somewhere in the future. Until you have a date and a commitment you really cannot do anything, apart from put together business cases, schematics, ideas and plans. Once you have a commitment and then a date, you have something to work to build your team and then get into it.

Ms SIEJKA - You spoke about politicians working together, so obviously across parties.

Mr O'BYRNE - This is absolutely crucial. The recent federal election was very disappointing and Tim Lane or a number of mainland Tasmanians said it actually put Tassie's case back and was devastating.

It is important we work together on this. As I reported to the committee earlier, we have written to the Premier and have been briefed on this new committee they have established. A bipartisan approach is the only way we are going to have the AFL to take at least the issue of parochialism and politics off the table. The more issues we take off the table and the more hurdles we take out of the way the closer we are of having a team.

Mr FINCH - It was interesting the positivity our Premier Will Hodgman and Treasurer Peter Gutwein are showing towards the development of this idea was quite at odds with the way the political process worked during the election period.

Mr O'BYRNE - It was jarring and completely 180 degrees different from the noise they had been making. I do not want to continue the battle, but their silence was deafening on that. They should have come out, called it out but they didn't. We will move on, we want to make it work.

CHAIR - Are there any other general questions of David on any issues. We are out of time but thank you. You raised important points and issues that will assist this committee and we appreciate that.

Mr O'BYRNE - Thank you very much.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.

PUBLIC

Mr RUSSELL HANSON WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - There are just a few issues to go through.

This is a public session and this is being broadcast live. You need to be aware of that as well. Just a couple of other things. We sent out some documentation to you and hopefully you did read that before your arrival here today. Whilst you are here you have parliamentary privilege on any of the issues that you discuss and any of the answers that you give, but once you leave here you are possibly on your own. Here you have that support. What you say will be documented by Hansard. It will be recorded and will also be posted online. If we get to a stage at any time where you would like to tell the committee something in confidence, in camera, please identify that that is what you would like to do. The committee would decide on that.

Russell, you have provided a submission. Quite frankly it is a brilliant submission. It is very strong and tight. The committee accepted the amendments you provided. They are now included in your submission. Would you like to make a statement on your submission and/or say anything additional that you might like the committee to hear at this stage? Then we will go on to some questions.

Mr HANSON - I would like to make a statement. I have copies if you wish to have them.

CHAIR - If you would like to provide those that would be good.

Mr HANSON - Thank you for the opportunity to be here today in support of my submission on the inquiry on AFL in Tasmania. I also have a little more for you - a bit of a background on me.

I am a country boy. I played football at school. I played a bit of football with Claremont and Lindisfarne. I did not play it very well, but I absolutely love the game.

My working life: I have had 15 years with Myer. I was credit manager to begin with in Hobart, then I went to Launceston and was an admin controller here for three years. I had 15 years with FitzGerald's and ended up being the finance and admin director and that included a couple of years in Adelaide with Harris Scarfe. Before Sir Donald Trescowthick decided to sell Co-Op Motors I had one year as managing director of that firm.

After that I was head hunted by the national body of the Wilderness Society to be their CEO. The reason they were after somebody like me was the fact that in 1996 they were effectively bankrupt. At that time, they had a turnover of \$1 million; the net surplus for the year was a negative \$126 000; the net assets were actually minus \$1000; the funds to campaign across the whole country with was \$200 000; and the membership was 7000. Ten years later we had \$12 million turnover. We had half a million dollars surplus, which was after three years of \$1 million surpluses. We had net assets of \$4.5 million. We were spending \$4.5 million on campaigning, and the membership had gone from 7000 to 51 000. In 2001, during my time at the Wilderness Society, I received a Centenary Medal for services to them.

Now, to make a statement on this whole thing. I remember very well when the AFL was formed in 1990. It was formed on the basis of being inclusive to all Australians. I remember well

PUBLIC

the Executive Chairman, Alan Schwab, in that very year saying Tasmania should be in the AFL and 1995 would be the logical date. Unfortunately, this was the first of many lies, half-truths, misleading, condescending commentary on Tasmania for the next 29 years. The AFL has spent that 29 years without a hint of being inclusive with Tasmania.

The last two regimes of the AFL started with Andrew Demetriou as the CEO in 2003, the same year as Gillon McLachlan became the General Manager of commercial operations, later CEO in 2014. Mike Fitzpatrick became the chairman of the commission in 2007 and in 2017 was replaced by Richard Goyder. These four powerbrokers, since 2003, have ensured that Tasmania has never had a look in. I do not understand this absolute negativity. These four people oversee an organisation with four key values and purposes, which should in the base of their decisions and how they actually operate. When you look at them, they are currently failing miserably on three of those four core values. It's very similar what happened to the banks. There is one value that has crept in, unfortunately, and that is greed. That is the reason why Tasmania does not have a team.

Of the three of the four values they are failing on they are self-assessing themselves as being tax exempt, which I find totally unbelievable when they are operating outside of their values. The very issue of being a tax-exempt body is to work for the betterment of the game. I do not believe the AFL is working for the betterment of the game by leaving Tasmania, a football heartland, in the cold. They are using megabucks from television rights to try to buy new support.

I want to touch on a couple of issues. The night before last, Caroline Wilson was on *Football Confidential*. She was having a go at former Victorian premier Jeff Kennett for his attitude with a letter he sent to the members effectively saying it was about time that Tasmania got over it. When this project team finishes and the select committee finishes, he does not want to hear any more about it because it is affecting Hawthorn. She took grave exception that and good on her.

Last night on WIN News, Jeff Kennett, as usual, could not resist retaliating, and he did. He said, 'Hawthorn supports what is happening at the moment for the Tasmanian team'. They are not trying to undermine or jeopardise, but he went on to say, 'Tasmania hasn't even found a sponsor yet. The government will have to put \$20 million a year in for 20 years.'. It is rubbish. One of the reasons it is very difficult to go out and find a sponsor is if a sponsor asks when you start. We don't know. The AFL won't tell us. We can't get a board, we can't do anything until such time as we have a time line.

The other thing I would like to come back to is that a couple of weeks ago the issue of attendances at games in Tasmania came up and it flowed on to where the team was going to be based. Attendances cannot be looked at in raw numbers. We have a scenario that Hawthorn has double the members of North Melbourne. Hawthorn's Victorian games always get attendances, on average, 30 per cent greater than North Melbourne. North Melbourne, I am a member, are lowly-rated in attendance, lowly rated in members and they don't attract crowds. It is as simple as that. The only way we will know what the crowd situation will be is when we have one team for Tasmania.

Everyone, I think, has agreed that we will share games and rightly so. There are 11 games, sort out the odd one later on. Sharing games sorts out the problem of the north-west being able to access football. There is absolutely no reason that attendances or the north-west or anything else should have anything to do with where the team is based. It should be absolutely about the team, the team's success, the medical facilities, but the most important thing is players, their welfare and

PUBLIC

retention. The Gold Coast Suns are a live example. No-one wants to be there. We don't want Tasmania to be like that or it will just collapse.

Just to finish off there, I have met with Brett Godfrey. He has challenged me to go away and come up with a rock-solid case that we will add value to the AFL, one that hopefully cannot be disputed and one that proves beyond doubt that we will be viable, sustainable, successful and we will add value. I have been at it for a week since I met him. It is virtually complete. I have had discussions with Jim Wilkinson. I am not going to release it for another two days, until I read it another 20 or 30 times and triple check every figure that is in it. It will then be released to Brett Godfrey and it will be released to you.

Mr FINCH - At the same time, are you suggesting?

Mr HANSON - I am suggesting within 24 hours. It may well be by the end of this week. It will be entitled, 'The Betterment of the Game: a compelling case', and I believe it is.

Mr FINCH - This submission we have received from you, Mr Hanson, is the best submission that I have seen given to a committee investigation. I encourage people who are interested in this process, particularly those who are watching us with the live stream, to go to the website that contains the submissions and to look at the work you have put in to this. The work continues for you. You are to be commended for the hours upon hours put into this submission. It was very enlightening for us and I am sure it has given us a lot of surety about the path down which we have gone and the way the board has gone, and that there is a case for Tasmania to have a Tasmanian team. I am probably playing my hand here in respect of being an unbiased committee member but I was very impressed with this submission. Thanks, Russell.

CHAIR - We are very pleased, Mr Hanson, that you became involved in this and in the initial discussions with us as to the setting up of this committee. This has brought you right out into the front of the whole thing.

Mr HANSON - My wife was not pleased.

CHAIR - Let's continue with term of reference four. You touched on that a while ago. You heard what David O'Byrne said about that position, that the AFL, the players, et cetera, ought to have some say in some of these issues. Can you expand on that, as to how you see it?

Mr HANSON - Can you refresh me on the wording on term of reference (4)?

CHAIR - Yes, it was the possible solutions to the AFL's perception of Tasmania being geographically and politically divided. How do we manage that?

Mr HANSON - I absolutely believe we can and I have it in my submission. I have it in what I have handed out today, and I have it in what will be released shortly. The beautiful thing is that we accept the fact that games are going to be shared, nobody is arguing about that, so that is brilliant. The state is going to have a boom time and everyone is going to get a benefit in the flow-on effect.

As to the parochial side of it, I have lived in Launceston, I have lived in Hobart, I have lived in Adelaide and have seen what they are like with Victorians. I have family in north and south, I have friends and I know there is angst out there. How do we beat that? The sharing of the games

PUBLIC

beats it, to begin with. There is no doubt in my mind that where the team is based will create a problem. I heard David say that we shouldn't hand that over, we should be big enough to make the decision ourselves.

After seeing what happened in the election, I have great doubts. I am petrified that political expediency would take over and when that happens we create another parochial problem in the state. So much concentration should go on player welfare and player retention. Who are the experts in that? We're not, we haven't got a team. There are 18 clubs that are experts and they are looked after by the AFL and the AFL Players Association. They are the experts. They are pulling their hair out with what is happening with the Gold Coast. Would we really want that to happen in Tasmania? No, and I don't think they would. I personally don't have a problem with handing over that one issue, and the third part about it -

CHAIR - Over to the AFL, the players -

Mr HANSON - Yes, the AFL and the AFL Players Association, which obviously includes the players. They come back with firsthand experience in their recommendations as to what should happen. When that is made, we, as Tasmanians and politicians, should say that we will accept what that decision is. I would want to see it in the licence, and then we all move on.

There will be disappointment but we also know there's going to be a lead-in time. I am aiming for 2025, two more years of Hawthorn and North Melbourne, run out their contracts, then we have three years of other AFL content. We do not renew Hawthorn and North Melbourne. The very fact of what is happening in the background with those teams will continue the angst and we will never get over it, so get them out.

The AFL, with the way they have treated us for the period of time that they have, they pay for the three years of AFL content and they send clubs to us other than Hawthorn and North Melbourne.

CHAIR - In that intervening period we would get our own team, is that what you are saying?

Mr HANSON - That is correct. Everything I am currently working on is for 2025, game one. That is, two years of North Melbourne and Hawthorn and then three years of a content paid for by the AFL. In addition to that, and what will be in this document later in the week, I am saying we should be starting to set up an asset base for the Tasmanian Football Club because we have nothing in the bank at the moment.

One of the ways is that the AFL pays for those three years, the government puts the current \$7 million straight into the bank account each year for the Tasmanian team. Additionally, my budget shows that the government has to put more money in than they currently do, but not dramatically. It is certainly not \$20 million. If we are fully committed, why don't we add to the pie at \$4 million a year from next year through to year 2025? We are going to end up with \$40 million to \$50 million for the start of a Tasmanian team. We need all of that and I can't wait.

Mr FINCH - I have a sense, Mr Hanson, agree or disagree, that this will be a uniting force; if we were to secure a Tasmanian team, it is something that will unite Tasmanians.

Mr HANSON - It certainly will and if we take out our ability to start fighting each other, which I am recommending, we all get a slice of the cake with the games and we have three years

PUBLIC

to get over any hurdles. Hawthorn is well supported; there will be people who are going to be upset about that and one of them is one of my best friends in Launceston. No, that is why they have to go at the end of 2021. We have three years that we all get to recuperate and then everyone is onside.

CHAIR - You have covered this well. The report you are going to make available to this committee will directly bear on the benefits of a Tasmanian AFL team to the broader Tasmanian economy and community. Is there anything further you would like to say about what it will do for the economy of this state?

Mr HANSON - You are talking about the report that is currently happening.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr HANSON - No, I don't think it will. I think we pretty well covered it here. After I was finally able to nail down what the true PricewaterhouseCoopers flow-on effect number was, and I did that with Events Tasmania, and the numbers was \$28.5 million. Unfortunately, Hawthorn is the one that uses \$37 million or \$38 million and it is like anything - you say it often enough and everyone believes it. Initially, I had to respond as to what a Tasmanian team would be, using the same parameters. After we got the reality that it \$28.5 million, I then did the change. Yes, the numbers are less but they are still fascinating. There is definitely an economic benefit.

CHAIR - Tim Lane also raises that issue in his submission, that the figure was one of those you need to be very careful with, some of those figures that were handed around as to what the current set up with North Melbourne and Hawthorn was doing for the state.

Mr HANSON - I think we have a reality check now and people are starting to talk about the correct numbers, and then we extrapolate those to our numbers. They are fantastic.

Mr FINCH - Can we explore the idea of, not the general sponsorship, this major sponsor. The challenge came from Jeff Kennett about a major sponsor. Can you suggest where a major sponsor might come and any idea of what the benefits might be to a major sponsor hooking up with AFL Tasmania team?

Mr HANSON - I have provided documents to the project team purely on the basis that we should be out there chasing sponsors now. One of them is a little package: Brett Godfrey, the co-founder of Virgin Australia, with Sir Richard Branson. How do we get to Richard Branson? If we were ever going to get to him, we get to him through Brett Godfrey. I am upfront in saying that. Richard Branson is somebody who likes to do something out of the ordinary, so why don't the Virgin Group become the founding sponsor of the Tasmanian team? Forget about aeroplanes to the moon or wherever they are going, you could become an absolute hero and have a legacy that you solved a problem for Tasmania and you were the leading light. They've got a bit of attention.

The second idea is to examine all the car companies and which of those do not support an AFL team. We have Mitsubishi and Subaru.

Ms SIEJKA - Subaru is big here.

PUBLIC

Mr HANSON - Very popular. One of the beautiful things about these two, they have only just moved to five-year warranties. I am talking about a team in five years. We engage them now and we virtually say to them, 'You can have five years free advertising to do whatever you like, provided you keep using the name Tasmania, to have a countdown; five years to the Tassie team and your brand, new five-year warranty. Your marketing people can have an absolute ball.'

There are two proposals and this is all with the project team now. Why aren't we out there trying to find it? One of the reasons is that they will all say to us, 'When is the team going to happen?'. The AFL knows that we cannot get traction until such time as they give us a time line. An AFL absolute time line must be achieved.

Mr FINCH - I am wondering about Mars, which came forward a couple of years ago as a prospective sponsor of an AFL team. Would they still be interested in receiving a submission?

Mr HANSON - I am sure they would be. They were looking at \$4 million over three years. Going back to 2008, that was big money. Now, we are probably looking for a major sponsor in the area of \$2 million to \$3 million, and then you have the various tiers of sponsors. I have looked at that as well; all the teams, how many majors they have, how many tier-twos, threes or fours, and where we would possibly fit. Mars got excited before but they took their money to Carlton because we got shifted by the AFL. If the AFL said, 'You're going to get that team and you start in 2005', or whatever the time is, the people of Tasmania and everyone involved would just go crazy. It would be contagious. It would be unbelievable. We are not the Gold Coast or Greater Western Sydney, who don't give a damn about football.

CHAIR - Do we have any idea what the size of the sponsorships are for the other clubs? They are not going to let us know about that, but do you have any idea?

Mr HANSON - I know the numbers in total. I can tell you we give Hawthorn \$4 million and we give North Melbourne a couple of million. It is very difficult, other than to say that as much as I hate what they are doing to us, in some respects you cannot blame them for the \$4 million they get. In two years' time they could lose \$4 million a year, so no wonder Jeff Kennett is working so hard to undermine us.

Our major sponsor needs to be \$2 million to \$3 million. If we had a major closer to the \$3 million and four others in tier two, hopefully getting as close as possible to a million a pop, and then probably go down to \$500 000, then \$200 000 and \$100 000. It is at the lower end where you are bringing a lot of the Tasmanian companies in. I don't see there is a Tasmanian company that is going to be at the top end.

I want us to be creative where we just score somebody that will be stunning.

Ms SIEJKA - I have questions about the participation side of things when we get there.

CHAIR - Any further questions?

Mr FINCH - Only the point that needs to be made is that marketing an AFL team with Virgin is not just about what happens in Tasmania in response to that marketing. That advertising is an Australian opportunity, plus there is that exposure when the game is televised overseas. It is not just about a return from Tasmanian supporters.

PUBLIC

Mr HANSON - That is right. I am flying really high with the Virgin one. I am after Branson. Even if it is stepped back to Virgin Australia. Currently they are a major sponsor with GWS; I think they are a sponsor with Carlton as well. Virgin Australia is Carlton; they have Hyundai as well. They are involved with about two or three clubs, but if we know we are five years away from a team there is no way known that GWS and those have contracts for five years. I have no problem in us going in and trying to steal the sponsorship. Why wouldn't we? We have a connection.

Ms SIEJKA - I am interested in participation. You have a lot of information in here, but one of the things we have discussed a little is everything that goes with a team. Part of that is people developing up through the ranks and being ready to play at this level. Looking at the different participation rates that the varying states have - and forgive me if it is in there and I have missed it - have you looked at South Australia and Western Australia, where clubs have gone in. Has the participation rate increased and to what capacity in those states?

Mr HANSON - No, I haven't.

Ms SIEJKA - The different participation rates are interesting. Per capita we are smaller population but our participation rate is still higher than Victoria. I think that is correct.

CHAIR - Yes, it is.

Ms SIEJKA - We talk about the potential benefits to the community and building capacity in the community, and I guess part of that would be increasing the people playing and the support networks in order to support that team.

Mr HANSON - When the AFL and the television rights became a juggernaut, they started to expand every major competition. Let's just talk the football heartland, all the competitions went backwards. What saved them was that they all had a team and now they all have two teams.

Ms SIEJKA - It would be interesting to know the number of people who are playing with the AFLW now who had perhaps never considered playing. You would think that there would be some increase or some capacity.

CHAIR - Mr Hanson, you are quite prepared to take that on notice and come back to us?

Mr HANSON - Yes, I will have a look and see what I can find there. Ms Siekja, if I have a specific question about your question, can I come back to you and ask that?

Ms SIEJKA - Yes, of course. I found the comparison of participation interesting in your submission.

Mr HANSON - The stunning part is we were top of the tree in 2005.

Ms SIEJKA - Also the thing that comes up in whichever area we are talking about is the sustainability and building the capacity of the community and others. That analysis would be useful in any case put forward.

Mr HANSON - With what we currently have now, we don't have a pathway. The AFL will not give us the pathway. The Tasmanian Football Board with Jim Wilkinson and AFL Tasmania

PUBLIC

are clearly working on grassroots and the pathways. They are there, in the schools. Then there are the regional leagues and the statewide league.

I have a question about the statewide league. It is not a statewide league. We are going to get a VFL team in 2021. Why don't we be creative and say, 'Now is the time to cut the statewide league, and go back to the NWFU and TFA and TFL'. It's not because we are going back to the glory days, it's because we are now going to have a structure through to an AFL team. We are looking after the three divisions. They all know they are fighting to get into the VFL team, which we haven't got. Then the VFL team, they know that they have the potential of the Tasmanian team and the other 18 AFL teams. We have put a pathway in. We can solve the little hiccup that we have now with the way the state competition work,.

Mr FINCH - We had a discussion with Tim MacMichael about his long involvement with football. He was talking about a structure where, not only did you have your local competitions and leagues, you went back to the NWFL, the NTFA and the SFL and play their teams in their regions. Over that you had four teams that would be aligned to the university. They would be under 23 teams, one for the north-west coast, one for the north and two from the south. It would be a partnership, the under 23s, perhaps with some senior-age players. It would then be an elite Tasmanian operation to aspire to work towards to get the chance to be drafted.

Mr HANSON - Are you talking about an age-driven thing there?

Mr FINCH - No, only under 23s. You still have your junior competitions.

Mr HANSON - We have the NAB team, the under-19s, as the Tasmania team.

Mr FINCH - Yes, but probably holding that. In Tim's submission, if my memory serves correctly, holding onto under-18 Mariners, I don't know if they are still called the same thing, but the Mariners-style operation is very important to development the younger ones. The under-23 level have four teams representing the regions of the state.

Mr HANSON - One of the most beautiful things about what is happening in the last 12 months is that the Government has set up the Tasmanian Football Board. That is something that absolutely would fit under their cap. I know they are working from trying to go from the lower level all the way to the AFL team. If there are other steps that can improve it along the way, then they should look at it.

CHAIR - They were talking about participation rates if we do not have an AFL in Tasmania. What is an AFL team likely to do for Tasmania moving forward? I think that it scheduled for 2021, isn't it?

Mr HANSON - It is scheduled for 2021. There might be some arguing going on to make it 2022. Perhaps it would not hurt if we had a time line of 2025 for the AFL team. Let's call it 2021. If we get an AFL team and no VFL team, there would be 45 players, including rookies. The AFL team will have 22; there will be injuries and so there are going to be 10 or 15 players who have nowhere to play. The statewide league is not of sufficient standard for an AFL player. If went back to three regional teams, that would even be worse. They have to be playing in a competition of the standard of the VFL. Without a VFL team I do not believe we can have an AFL team.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - That is critical to us being a part of that.

Mr HANSON - Otherwise, we are going to be shipping people over to the mainland somewhere who haven't got a game with Tasmania will just not work.

CHAIR - I suspect that has been the reason behind setting it up in the first place and one can hope that was the case. We have set the VFL up, our participation entering into that competition with a view to an AFL side.

Mr HANSON - It would be nice to think that was the reason.

CHAIR - I am thinking positively.

Mr HANSON - I do not think the AFL had that in mind. It was more of we are going to give you something, a VFL team, thank you.

Ms SIEJKA - We would still need that pathway through to the VFL to be really strong. It sounds like there is still some development and pathway strengthening that needs to happen in order to make AFL sustainable.

Mr HANSON - The Tasmanian Football Board is all about it and how beautifully you represent it from the north-west, north, south, junior, senior, regional, it is just perfect. I know the government did not set this up; you guys did.

CHAIR - Are there any further questions of Russell on any area?

Ms SIEJKA - It is hard to find questions, there is so much information in there, so I am pleased I asked one you had not researched for.

CHAIR - Russell, I will leave it open to you now, is there anything you would like to pass on to the committee, any area you would like to touch a bit more on, or any additional information?

Mr HANSON - The document I am talking about, when I put that out, I would be more than happy to come back in front of you to answer questions if you wish to do it that way.

CHAIR - The committee could well do that. When you send that in, the committee will decide on receiving this, then we can make a point of discussion whether or not we need to bring you back in to talk to you about certain areas within the report. Thank you, Russell, we appreciate it very much.

Mr FINCH - I will get the nod from the secretary here, the additional information that might come in, would we be able to include this into the submission process and put on the website so people can see what Russell has developed?

CHAIR - That is great. Russell, thank you very much for your involvement because it has gone on and some committee members may not be aware Russell's participation started some 12 to 18 months ago.

Mr HANSON - It was after the Burnie and Devonport dispute, so it was on 1 January 2018 I thought, enough is enough.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - It started a long time ago and you can see and understand what Russell's commitment is and now having been asked by Brett Godfrey, as well as the chair of the committee, the special task force, is also an indication of where Russell Hanson fits into this whole thing.

Russell, thank you very much. I appreciate it and the way you have answered the questions. We look forward to receiving the extra documentation. We could provide the answer to the question to you in writing. Do we need to do that, the question taken on notice taken by Russell? I think you have the detail on it, Jo was seeking further information.

Ms SIEJKA - Absolutely, yes.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, Russell.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.

PUBLIC

Mr JIM WILKINSON, CHAIRMAN, TASMANIAN FOOTBALL BOARD, **Mr KIM EVANS** SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF STATE GROWTH, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Fairly informal Christian names is sufficient in addressing any member is the way we operate and I need to explain and you are both well and truly aware of the situation this is a public enquiry a public session and it is going live. Here you have parliamentary privilege, outside it is debatable whether you do or not you are probably not covered outside and it is being recorded for Hansard and will be online shortly. If we reach a stage of you wanting to say something in confidence to the committee, then we would address and look at that and make a determination should you get to that stage in these proceedings.

We have received a submission from the Premier. We have not received one from the board. I will open it up to Kim and Jim to make any opening statements you would like to make to us and then we will take some questions following on from that process.

Mr EVANS - At the outset thanks very much for the opportunity to present today. It is a great honour to be here to represent the Government providing evidence before your committee. I will make a couple of opening comments, then I will invite Jim as the Chairman of the board to elaborate on the work his board are doing and of course you have our submission.

The submission is reasonably short but describes the approach the Government is taking to developing AFL in the state. We have an integrated plan to support and enable the sport to thrive in the state at all levels. To elaborate on that point is to put in place a Tasmanian football board which Jim chairs and has a key role to unify the sport and strengthen local grass roots football.

It focused on how we increase participation and grow the sport within the state and links to another piece of work we have initiated whereby we are trying to build the case for our own AFL team. The approach we have taken is to establish a high-powered project team headed by Brett Godfrey. The job is to put together a comprehensive business case and plan to demonstrate the feasibility of establishing an AFL and AFLW team in the state.

Mr Wilkinson is the chair of the board which is looking at growing football in Tasmania. Brett Godfrey is the head of the task force and I will talk a little bit about the task force before I invite Jim to talk. The task force really hit the jackpot in terms of the calibre of the people we have on the task force. Having Brett Godfrey as chair has been a real coup for us as he has a national reputation, is a great entrepreneur, has lots of energy and a very high profile, great in start-ups and an AFL team for us would be a start-up.

He is supported by a really high calibre group of people. Grant O'Brien is the ex-CEO of Woolworths with a strong football background in his own right and very commercially focused. Errol Stuart - who you will know - developer and entrepreneur from the north of the state, a passionate football supporter and very capable. Julie Kay, President of the Lauderdale Football Club and provides the link into Jim's football board. James Henderson, who is probably known to you, Executive Chairman of Dynamic Sports and Entertainment Group, knows everything there is to know about how the AFL works within the AFL commission and is very highly connected and passionate about Tasmania. He has been an absolute boon as well. We have appointed Paul Eriksson. Paul Eriksson brings amazing credentials to the task force because he was the inaugural CFO for GWS. He has been in at the grassroots, building a new football club. He comes very

PUBLIC

well-credentialled, as well. We have Nick Riewoldt on board as well, and Brendan Bolton is in place as an adviser.

We have set them on a pathway to properly investigate the case for a Tasmanian licence. We have asked them to develop the business case to support the attainment of licences in both AFL and AFLW, including: a financial model; recommendations around the sort of organisational structure that we would need to support a club in Tasmania; some of the steps that we would need to take to implement the case, once they have developed it; advice to the government about the sorts of partnerships that we would need in supporting and enabling the attainment of a licence; working with Mr Wilkinson's board; consideration and review of the health, growth and participation of football in Tasmania because you need that grassroots to be thriving and the pathways for players to support a team into the future.

Once we have all that, how would we take it forward? Our goal here is to build the case and the pathway forward without necessarily having the timing in mind. What we want to do is to start today to ensure we have done the work, so that we are ready when there is an opportunity for a licence to be issued by the AFL - and the task force is working with the AFL to try to understand that very question, we are ready. We have to be ready when the opportunity comes up. We are not seeing this as a licence tomorrow or next year, but when a licence is available through whatever means, whether it is a new licence or relocation of an existing club, we have the structures in place and we have the business case ready to go. That includes building grassroots support, corporate support and having state government behind it. There is a body of work to be done.

The task force is off and running and it is doing a mountain of work. I could not believe how much work they have done already but they are still in the process of looking at all of the options. They are still analysing what needs to be done and formulating their advice. We expect they will have that complete by the end of the year, then they will be in a position to report to the Government and we will have a conversation with them about the next step.

CHAIR - I thought they were reporting back later this year. What is the time frame?

Mr EVANS - We have not been specific about the time frame. We have said no later than the end of the year but, with the pace at which they are going, to be fair, we want to give them enough time to do this job well because we see this as our best shot. I am open to take questions about the work we are doing in this regard and more broadly. We have allocated \$150 000 in this year's budget to support this work. We are resourcing it well, making sure that we do it professionally and that is an important point. We don't want to scrimp in terms of making sure that we do the job professionally and well, so that we can present the best case we can possibly present to the AFL.

Mr ARMSTRONG - The work you are doing is on Tasmania having its own AFL team, there is no work looking at relocating a team?

Mr EVANS - We're not making a call on how a licence might become available. That will be something that emerges down the track. Even if a licence became available either through a new team or a relocation, we need to be ready to take the licence. It is not government that is going to take it, it is going to need to be some other entity in place that is ready to accept and professionally and sustainably manage a new team, even if it is a relocated team. I wouldn't want to speculate on the mechanism by which we might get a team in the future.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - It is interesting, as you say, as to who would receive that and it won't be the government. How far have you looked at that? You would look at the Gold Coast and GWS to see how they did that and what they employed there.

Mr EVANS - There are a number of mechanisms that might happen. That is a really fundamental piece of the work that Mr Godfrey and his team are doing, to work out what sort of corporate structure you might need to put in place, how you would put it in place and how you would support it. That might need to be put in place in advance of a licence becoming available, so you have built that corporate structure and the organisational capacity to take a licence once it becomes available.

Mr WILKINSON - We have to be ready if we are called. There is some talk that it won't be before 2025, but if something happens to one of the clubs for whatever reason, hopefully we would be ready to ask, what about us? We're not the only ones trying to get into the competition. My understanding is the Northern Territory is trying to get into that competition as well. We have to make sure we are ready to put our hand up if, perhaps because of economics, one of the teams isn't able to continue.

Mr FINCH - Can you tell us about the feedback you are getting? You have travelled around the state to talk with operators and administrators in the game now. How are they feeling on the ground with the development of your board?

Mr WILKINSON - Over the last two years there has been a bit of a turnaround from where we were. Football seemed to be fairly stale a couple of years ago, but the numbers are starting to turn around and have continued to turn around this year, which everybody can be really pleased with. We should take our hats off to AFL Tasmania for the work they've been doing with it.

What I've looked at in recent times, and I've been going to some primary school games played on a Friday. My aim was to unite and grow football in Tasmania and create an interest in the juniors that seems to have been waning since CRESAP was involved about 1990-91. Schools got out of coaching teams because they said they didn't want to work any overtime, as I understand it. They didn't want to work overtime, therefore they were not coaching like they used to prior to 1991.

I have been talking to a number of schools in the last few weeks because I realised these competitions were going on. A lot of people were playing school football, primary school and underage football but, because they were not registered as players with a club, they weren't taken into account for participation as far as playing football was concerned. The only kids that are registered with the AFL Tasmania are those that sign with them and register with a club. Therefore, a lot of the players that were playing each week in school football, some up to 80 per cent of the team, weren't taken into account.

Mr FINCH - Do you have any definitive numbers?

Mr WILKINSON - No.

Ms SIEJKA - You might need to talk to Russell Hanson about that. He is doing some work on participation numbers.

PUBLIC

Mr WILKINSON - I had a word to him yesterday, as he probably told you.

Ms SIEJKA - I managed to ask one question in an area he had not researched extensively.

Mr WILKINSON - I spoke with Andrew Richardson, on the north-west coast, and Scott Rigby last week. They are looking into it to see whether it is the same situation on the north-west coast and the north as it is in the south. I spoke with Trisha Squires about it a couple of weeks ago. On 19 August, she sent me a letter in relation to school competitions. It is from Andrew Dykes who is involved in that area. He said -

Jim is spot on. Attached is the latest database of school football competitions the FDMs have put together and we suspect there are still more competitions running which we are not across. The strategy through our increasing number of school ambassadors is to work closely with them to fully understand how much football is being played in schools. Because many of the school football competitions run smoothly without our involvement, schools probably don't believe there is any need to inform us of the existing competitions in place.

I have shared the strategy with many stakeholders across the state who readily acknowledge the fact that we aren't fully across the number of school football competitions in place, but are working on addressing this.

I am happy to discuss further.

For a number of years, it's been stated that the numbers that AFL Tasmania is putting forward are rubbery numbers and are less than what they are talking about. I disagree with that. If you look at the six- to eight-week competitions being run in schools, 80 per cent of the players are not being registered. Therefore, their numbers aren't considered. I believe participation is higher than what AFL Tasmania is coming back with.

Ms SIEJKA - It would be interesting to know too, whether that is the same interstate, because it would skew all of those participation figures.

Mr WILKINSON - Yes, it would. Now with the work being done, especially with the hubs that were started as a result of the Government initiative in the last budget, it is going to improve, together with school ambassadors.

AFL Tasmania has been endeavouring to have a school ambassador in every school. Previously, when I was working with AFL Tasmania, and wanted to know what was happening in one of the schools, I would ring up the school, the school would put me on to, maybe, the headmaster or headmistress who would put me on to whoever is in charge of sport. You would get a bit of a run around before you spoke to the appropriate person.

Let us say you wanted to go to Rosevears High, you could ring up a person, Kerry Finch, and Kerry would know what was going on in that school. That will be a great help. We are trying to increase the school ambassadors to ensure that every school has a school ambassador, so it's a one port of call.

CHAIR - Down to primary or high school only?

PUBLIC

Mr WILKINSON - Both.

Mr FINCH - Who is the school ambassador? Where do they come from?

Mr WILKINSON - They come from the school, a parent, a teacher or a worker at the school - I'm not too sure. But it would be a person you could speak to who would know who was playing football, how many games their school was playing in and how many games each of their underage teams were playing in. They are a one-stop-shop, so to speak, as opposed to speaking with two or three people before you speak to the person who knows what you are talking about.

Mr FINCH - That person, Jim, would be given the 'tick' by the principal of the school? Is that how you are working it? Or is it just 'by hook or by crook' that you have this somebody who has a strong interest in football who makes the connection back to the board?

Mr WILKINSON - No, the board's role -

Mr FINCH - AFL Tasmania?

Mr WILKINSON - It would be AFL Tasmania. Andrew Dykes is in charge of what is happening with the junior football. If he wanted to speak with somebody to find out what he is in the process of doing now, he would be ringing one person who is identified as the school ambassador for football.

Mr FINCH - Can we get some idea of how many schools are in competitions for primary and the senior schools? Some schools have an ethos of encouraging AFL involvement; and that is probably developing even more now that girls are interested in playing. Of course, that has dropped away, as you say, with CRESAP and the aftermath of that. School football really hit the dust when principals were making their budgeting allocations or allocating time where their energies would be spent. Football was a victim of that.

Mr WILKINSON - Sure. The numbers I got back on 19 August from Andrew Dykes - from under 9s to under 12s, southern - 62 teams; non-metropolitan, northern 39, north-west 32. We have 133 under 9s to under 12s teams.

Mr FINCH - In primary school, representing their schools?

Mr WILKINSON - Under 9s to under 12s.

Mr FINCH - Representing their schools in competitions?

Mr WILKINSON - That's as I understand it.

CHAIR - Or is that Mini-League?

Mr WILKINSON - This is just primary schools. Average players per team, 25 in each of the regions. Total primary players in the south, 1550; in the north, 975; and in the north-west, 800. We have a total of 3325.

Ms SIEJKA - They are some of the people not captured in the AFL data - that overlap?

PUBLIC

Mr WILKINSON - Could well be. That is what we are endeavouring to find out.

Female football has taken off, as you know. One of my grandchildren - under 13s - plays hockey with the school and plays with a club as well. She said, 'I really enjoy football more than hockey. I'd rather continue to play club footie than club hockey'. It is the same with a lot of her friends, and it is the same with the girls.

There are 150 school teams in the south, 100 teams in the north, and 70 in the north-west. There are 3325 players from under 9s to under 12s. Girls between under 9s and under 12s, 320 players; under 14s, 42. Secondary school teams: under 15s and 16s, 42; under 18s, 9.

The number of teams is significant. They are significant numbers to be looked at as far as players playing regularly with a school team who may not be picked up by not being registered with a club.

Mr FINCH - Mr Wilkinson, when do they play? During school hours?

Mr WILKINSON - Primary schools play on a Friday afternoon - grades 5 and 6. I am not too sure when the other teams play. I think they play at other times, whenever they can. Fahan played last night, for example.

Mr FINCH - Did you win?

Mr WILKINSON - I don't know. It depends on when they can play when they get older. Primary schools play during school hours. The beauty of that is that if there is a single-parent family and parents who are doing other things over the weekend, they can still allow their children to play football during the week, and play it regularly with the school, and not go out of their way to any significant degree on the weekend. But their kids are still playing football.

Ms SIEJKA - One of the areas of the terms of reference was to look at future participation rates of AFL if we don't have a team - the impact of not having a team. It sounds like that might be a little difficult to gauge as it sounds like there are more people playing than we expected.

Mr WILKINSON - Part of the increase, I think, has been because of the increase of interest, the talk about it, and the start of a pathway occurring, and underage competition. Tasmania is now in the NAB Cup full time. This is the first year it has been in it full time for many years. People can see a bit of a pathway.

Trisha Squires is in Melbourne today speaking with the AFL about a VFL licence. That is the next step on the pathway. We need that because a number of players leave Tasmania because they want to be to be picked up on the radar. We will probably only have one player being drafted this year from the underage. There were a number last year, as you know. Back in 1986, when Alastair Lynch came down and spoke, he said there were 16. I didn't know there were that many but I am just quoting what he was saying. What we can see is that, with the pathway opening up, people's and school kids' interests is going to increase. That is why it has to be fed from top to bottom. I believe we need the AFL to say to us, yes, you will be in at such and such a time. We were told we would be in 1995. Alan Schwab told me that in 1991. That didn't happen. Unfortunately, he died. Unless we are told we are going to be in, it is going to be harder it would be if somebody said Tasmania will have a team in 2025. If they said that, I think the interest would be even greater than it is now.

PUBLIC

Mr FINCH - On the subject of school footy, there was a debate many years ago about children playing school footy and turning up for their club on the weekend. There was some concern about too much sport. Are you getting any feedback as to what might be appropriate for primary school children, particularly?

Mr WILKINSON - That was one thing we raised at the last board meeting. It was a concern of mine that if you play a number of matches in the one weekend or the one week, it could harm you at some later stage in life. There has been a lot of study done on it. We are going through a number of reports in relation to it. The commonality in it all is that it depends on the individual. Different people are built different ways. Interestingly enough, the underage schoolgirls who went away for Tasmania this year came back and weren't allowed to play the following week, even though they weren't playing any further games. They said they couldn't play this week. If you do, you won't play for the state any more. It is something we have been taking into account. Over the last two board meetings, we have mentioned it and it has come back and we have these reports, which has been terrific and we can look at those.

I have also been speaking with a psychiatrist, not for my own personal use, a psychologist to look at assisting the under-18s who might not be drafted this year, to assist them get over the disappointment that they would have as a result of not being drafted. The under-18s teams are treated extremely well all over Australia. A lot of people, once they finish and if they are not drafted ask, what is left? They go to the club and the club is not looked after nearly as well as the representative team, so a lot fall away. We have to do everything we can to keep these people in the game as well because it is in the older age groups that they are starting to fall away a bit, especially around the age of 16.

CHAIR - Yesterday we heard from Tim MacMichael, who has been involved in AFL Tasmania, AFL in Victoria and is a school teacher and has been very much involved in football in a number of areas. He said that we need to get the structure of football right in this state if we are going to move into the AFL. If we look at what AFL Tasmania is doing in that regard, from your board's perspective, are you also looking at what might be the right structure for football here? In other words, the competitions, whether there should be a state league or a regional league? Are you looking at that in conjunction with AFL Tasmania?

Mr WILKINSON - We are certainly mentioning it. Our role is an advisory role. Our core functions are to work with members of the Tasmanian footy community to ensure there is growth in junior participation, increase player retention at all levels and to support the state in attaining AFL and AFLW licences and teams. The board hasn't got the power to enforce anything. It is there to advise, and hopefully to advise appropriately, but it is in conjunction with AFL Tasmania and anybody else, Sport and Recreation, and Helen Langenberg is a great support, here today, as is Adam Sproule of Events Tasmania.

What we are here to do is to ensure that the base is built and the community is going prosper as a result of what is happening. Community football has been the problem. It is starting to fall away a bit, as you know. There have to be ways of doing that so that everybody has the ability to put their two bobs' worth in, all around the state, in an endeavour to have better outcomes.

CHAIR - When we were looking at participation rates and school participation rates, the school model will be a very good one because it will pick up those kids who can't afford to get into Auskick, their parents can't get them into Auskick and some of those other programs. You

PUBLIC

will probably be aware that I currently sponsor a program north of the state to pick up those kids who can't get into football because their parents won't pay the money. Are any of the primary schools reneging in any way? Are they conscious of the need to pick up this program and move forward with it? You talked about ambassadors and each school. We had a number of schools that did not want to participate in AFL football in any way and they were going into other sports. Is that an area that the board is looking at?

Mr WILKINSON - Already, there was a program, but Helen could fill you in with what is happening.

Ms HELEN LANGENBERG, MANAGER, SPORT AND RECREATION, DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES TASMANIA WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

Ms LANGENBERG - I was aware of your sponsorship of the program in Launceston and that has been reported back to us through clubs and schools. The initiative you are referring to is Ticket to Play, which is the Tasmanian Government initiative providing vouchers of up to \$100 in value for the use of children who are listed on pensioner cards or health care cards or are in out-of-home care. AFL Tasmania, through junior football and also through Auskick, has been a significant adopter of the initiative. A significant proportion of the 5000 vouchers we have already issued this year have been for AFL and Auskick. It removes cost as the barrier, which was your concern. In effect, that covers the total registration cost of Auskick, and also for most of the junior clubs.

CHAIR - I was concerned that these kids were missing out and they were running around the streets. It has been really well supported.

Mr FINCH - Has there been any connection between you and Jeremy Rockcliff, who now holds the two portfolios of Minister of Education and Training and Minister for Sport and Recreation?

Mr WILKINSON - I spoke with Mr Rockcliff two weeks ago in relation to his role and what is going on in our area as far as the Football Tasmania Board is concerned. He is well aware of it and he has been extremely supportive.

Mr FINCH - Will that support be reflected back to the school system, the principals? Will there be encouragement for careful consideration of the need, when we talk about getting to an AFL team, to see the reflection of the growth back into the primary schools?

Ms LANGENBERG - One of the other initiatives the Tasmanian Government announced in the 2019-20 Budget was the establishment of regional sports coordinator positions within the Department of Education. Community Sport and Recreation has been working closely with our colleagues in the Department of Education toward the scope of those roles. It is not solely confined to AFL or football, it is across a range of sports. It is about improving the links between the community, community sporting organisations, and the school environments as well. It is my understanding that those positions will be employed from the start of term 4 in 2019, after being inducted and building links, ready to take up their full-time roles with gusto at the start of next year.

PUBLIC

Mr FINCH - Have that skew towards Aussie Rules considering the importance of the development of it for us to get an AFL team. If we have a coordinator who has been a former hockey player or a former basketball player and anathema of Aussie Rules - and I do not want to jump on that old bandwagon - is there going to be some balance offered here and even a bit of a skew towards Aussie Rules because of the importance of it in the development of an AFL team?

Ms LANGENBERG - The coordinators will not actually be working on a particular sport or have a particular leaning towards any one sport. They are really a link and a resource between the sport itself and then the school communities. It is probably fair to say as one of the better resourced sports in Tasmania, AFL has a head start on most of the other sports both in terms of iconic status and its history, but also in terms of the resources which are not only Tasmania Government resources for the sport but also the support from AFL as the parent body back to the sport in the state. There are more resources - both financial and also personnel - in that sport throughout the state than any other sport. They are best positioned to take advantage of those opportunities.

Mr WILKINSON - I do think governments can really prefer one sport to another, it is very difficult.

Mr FINCH - I tend to disagree.

Mr WILKINSON - You would like to say yes but, and I would like to say yes in the position I am, but it has to be fair.

Mr FINCH - I am across all sports, please do not misread me.

Mr WILKINSON - I know that. If you have a person who is an absolute superstar at soccer, basketball or hockey - and we have done extremely well in hockey - then they have every right to be as well looked after as what Aussie Rules has. My personal view is you are going to be a better player if you want to choose Australian Rules in the end, if you play other sports as well. Look at the AFL now and the people playing extremely well over who had a strong basketball base, Pendlebury, Sam Mitchell, Bontempelli, you can go on. The better sportsperson in the end is the person who plays a number of sports and then decides what they believe is appropriate.

Mr ARMSTRONG - I am not sure where we are on the terms of reference but recently, Jim, on Saturday or Sunday in the *Mercury* about the new stadium on the Macquarie Point site. What are your thoughts on this?

Mr WILKINSON - The conversation started some time ago, both cricket and Australian Rules are looking for another venue for whatever reason and for whatever purpose it might be. Cricket is in the process of doing it now; Aussie Rules also is looking at certain areas where they can get extra venues. It might be a pie in the sky and two years too late but my view would be if you could have a purpose-built stadium which is a multi-purpose stadium to encompass a number of different sports, conferences, concerts, et cetera, Macquarie Point would be an ideal spot for it.

I have spoken with the people involved at Macquarie Point. There would have to be some extra work done and it would cost a significant amount. I am told Docklands as it was when it was built cost around about \$460 million. My understanding is Optus in Perth cost approximately \$600 million, a significant amount of money. The only way anybody would consider building

PUBLIC

that type of stadium now in Tasmania would be if the AFL said yes, you will be involved from 2025 or 2026. The government could not afford to pay that amount of money. It would have to be a federal government fund that the money comes from. It would be ideal if it could occur and I know Brett Godfrey said only recently that a new stadium would be ideal.

Mr ARMSTRONG - The location would be ideal because you are walking distance to accommodation, restaurants, city centre and parking on the Domain.

Mr EVANS - I might add one of the things the project team is having a look at is undertaking an infrastructure assessment. Not only stadiums, but broader infrastructure, understanding what you need in order to support an AFL team in the state both in the short term and into the future. They are looking really broadly at this. Obviously, Blundstone Arena and University Stadium are key pieces, but the option of a new standalone stadium is one they are giving some thought to. It is early days and I would think it would form part of their report back to Government later on in the year.

Mr WILKINSON - We need something special in Tasmania if we are to attract people here. The hardest thing is to retain players as you can see from what happens on the Gold Coast and other places around Australia. They are drafted, have a couple of years of playing at the club, they want to go home unless something special occurs. That is why if Tasmania is involved there really has something special to offer the players. Not only playing the game, but also after football. They have to set a number of things in train to ensure they are looked after. I have spoken with the university; briefly I have spoken with TAFE to see what they have available for them whilst they are playing. You see so many people who finish playing football, their average time is about 4 to 6 years, average age is about 26, the average number of games now is about 19, a few years ago it was about 4 per player. It does not last as long as kids would like to think it lasts. We have to ensure not only do we provide them with a good football upbringing, but also provide them with a good person and future upbringing.

Mr ARMSTRONG - To follow up regarding patrons, we are known for our inclement weather. If you have a Tasmanian side playing a Victorian-based side here and they know we have a good stadium, you can walk to it, your accommodation and restaurants and bus to MONA, it makes it more attractive for people then to come over here to patronise the opposition club. It has to be better for Tasmanian football in the long run.

Ms SIEJKA - There is a *Utopia* episode about building a stadium in Tasmania - it may have some warnings in it.

Mr FINCH - The juggling of course is the two stadiums in Tasmania now, one north, one south, have both been invested in heavily and are both housing AFL teams. Surely, you can always improve the standard, comfort, facilities and that sort of thing but it would be a balancing act too in respect of looking at a new venue. Wouldn't you invest maybe a third of the money to improve the two we have already which is the work of looking after the customers?

Mr EVANS - To be honest, you have to have all those options on the table. A new stadium would be fantastic, but equally you could imagine if we did have our own AFL team it would want to share games between the north and the south, so you are still going to need facilities in both parts of the state. You have to work through the cost benefits of a whole range of options and investments you would need to make.

PUBLIC

Mr ARMSTRONG - Did Jim say they were looking at relocating cricket?

Mr WILKINSON - I have heard they are speaking about and looking at other venues. I do not think it is to play test cricket. It is another appropriate venue for all the other teams to play in, the female games, the underage games, matters like that.

CHAIR - They are also looking for one in the north of the state in the Launceston area.

Mr WILKINSON - One of the important things though is we have to remember our role is to unite the whole of the state. That is what we have to be very aware of. To do that games have to be played at both ends of the state. There is no question about that. Some people say they should be played north, some people say they should be played south. My strong view is they have to be played at both areas in equal shares to unite the whole of the state.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Some people say we should not be investing in football. You hear it in conversations wherever it might be, at a football match or something, saying the Tasmanian government should not be putting their money into AFL football here in Tasmania for them to take it back to Victoria. Would it disappear if you are putting it into a Tasmanian side, would you would get more support from Tasmanians for a Tasmanian side than Hawthorn or North Melbourne?

Mr WILKINSON - I think you would. You have 17 000 members of either Hawthorn or North Melbourne in Tasmania at the moment. There are 91 000 Tasmanian members of other clubs, which is a significant number. If we wanted to get our numbers up to 50 000, we would be about 12th on the list. You are looking at the lowest being the Gold Coast at about 12 500 members. What would hopefully be as the case is the 91 000 members, the lot of them, would become members of a Tasmanian team as well. A survey was done in Launceston a year or two ago and about 30 per cent said they would become members of a Tasmanian team but I think it would be higher than that.

Mr EVANS - A PricewaterhouseCoopers report put a value on Hawthorn's presence resulting in a direct annual expenditure of \$20.4 million in the state. That is a direct return on a \$3 million-a-year investment, so that is pretty significant.

CHAIR - It certainly is.

Mr EVANS - In terms of Hawthorn and North Melbourne, the goal is to have our own team and our own licence, but it is worth noting that we really do value those relationships with both Hawthorn and North Melbourne. North Melbourne is, more recently, in the state but Hawthorn is in its 19th year. We have a whole generation of kids that have grown up watching Hawthorn play in the north of the state and who are fanatics for the Hawthorn Football Club. That is a relationship that we highly value and would want to ensure, as part of our planning, that we work through the smooth transition with those clubs because we don't want to undo the good work we have done in building those relationships.

Mr ARMSTRONG - It is interesting to hear what has gone on with Jeff Kennett and Caroline Wilson in the last couple of days.

Mr EVANS - They are great friends of Tasmania.

PUBLIC

Mr FINCH - Both have profited tremendously from coming to Tasmania, so it is not as if that relationship ended and they couldn't go back to their Melbourne base feeling that has been a good partnership with Tasmania.

Mr WILKINSON - Look where they were before they came and where they are now.

Mr FINCH - Absolutely, on the knucklebones.

Mr ARMSTRONG - The previous presenter, Mr Hanson, said that when the North Melbourne and Hawthorn clubs run out of their current contract in 2021, they shouldn't be renewed. They should then be looking at our side in 2025 and, if it does happen, that the AFL should send teams over here to play games, not Hawthorn or North Melbourne but other teams, for three years to give us that transition period into our own side. Do you have any comment to make on that?

CHAIR - That money is to be banked. The money paid out now is to be put into an account to start the process for an AFL team.

Mr EVANS - That is certainly an option but I suggest that we really need to allow Brett Godfrey and his team to do their work and come back with a case. As part as their advice back to government, in the role that those key partnerships should play in supporting and entertaining a licence, they may well have a role. It is too early to jump to a position about what happens in 2021. We will get the report from Mr Godfrey and his team, we will work through that advice and have discussions with the clubs and the AFL about the best way forward. That may include an extension to those relationships, or it might involve a different strategy. I have heard that comment before but I wouldn't like to speculate on what is the best strategy. We have to get some better advice and information. I stress that we would work constructively with Hawthorn and North Melbourne.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Yes, you can't simply cut ties with them like that.

Mr WILKINSON - We can't dictate to the AFL, either. We want to come to their house to dinner, they're not inviting us to their place for dinner. What we have to do is make sure it is worthwhile us coming to their place for dinner. If we can do that, which I think we can show, we have a really good chance.

Mr FINCH - In a discussion yesterday with Tim MacMichael, and we touched on it with Russell Hanson, I am sowing a seed with you as chairman of the board and to garner your thoughts as to how football might be structured. You have the junior levels. There is a suggestion from Tim MacMichael in his submission that we revert to the NWFL or NWFU, the north-west as we know it, the north and the south and that becomes the next tier after your juniors. Then there would be representative teams, under-23 teams, that are aligned to universities, and that would be one based in the north-west of Tasmania, one based in the north of Tasmania, and two based in the south of Tasmania. They would be under-23 teams with perhaps some overage players, five or six, a scenario that occurs in our current competition -

Mr WILKINSON - In the NAB Cup, you can play overage with a certain number of 19-year olds in the under-18 competition.

PUBLIC

Mr FINCH - We had the situation in the statewide league as well. He was citing an instance in England and that is what they are doing. There are four universities playing AFL in a four-team roster. If you take on that situation, perhaps the best of our players who are developing can aspire to be in that under-23 team. In that partnership the university would be an overarching supporter of it, not necessarily students needing to be part of that team but could join that team in their regions.

Ms SIEJKA - One of the issues that he didn't really touch on was that we only have the one university and it would require setting up another level when the VFL is the accepted pathway. That was my concern with that idea.

Mr WILKINSON - All options are on the table. We have a number of senior teams but, with the player situation as it is in junior teams, you don't have enough of those junior teams to fit the senior teams. Look at what has happened in Circular Head, on the north-east coast in the Scottsdale area, Huonville and Queenstown. When people are leaving the areas in search of work or whatever it may be, it's mainly in search of work, those teams are still here but you don't have the players to fill them all up. That is one area that Ms Langenberg mentioned a short time ago.

Ms LANGENBERG - Yes, I certainly was. AFL Tasmania is looking at the structure of their underpinning leagues with the view to consolidating some of them because the demographics in Tasmania have changed. In some of the rural areas, the rural population base isn't there in the same way that it was previously, so it is very difficult for some of those areas to sustain senior teams. As well as encouraging juniors to play it is about, in a collaborative way, negotiating with each of those leagues and teams toward restructuring what senior football looks like as well. There have been discussions in the north-west of the state, for example, with the Darwin Football Association. We have seen the drop of teams from Circular Head, from the west coast and even some of the country leagues in the north-west and, as Mr Wilkinson touched on, in the north-east. It is about providing a fit-for-purpose competition structure that allows people to play where and how they want to play, in what are relatively even competitions.

Mr FINCH - That structure, when we were presented with it yesterday, seemed to have merit. With the aspiration of those players with the skill level and the desire to succeed, do you think that they would be looking, or the board might recommend, that you would go to that VFL team as that step for players to be seen and drafted at this stage?

Mr WILKINSON - If I were a young player, I would be hoping there would be a VFL competition in place. Most people want a second chance if they miss out. How many players playing in the AFL now who are very good players? Ben Brown kicked 10 goals on Saturday with North Melbourne. He came through the VFL system. Brody Mihocek from Collingwood came through the VFL system. A lot of players leave here because they want to be seen and want to be on the radar at all times. Years ago, AFL scouts used to look at our competitions because our competition was up to scratch. There were a number of Tasmanian scouts that the AFL talent people would speak with fairly regularly. That is not the case now. They say our standard of football in the Tasmanian state league is not up to scratch, therefore we are not on the radar. That is why we need a pathway. That is why we need the under 18s. That's why we need the VFL. I think that's why we need an AFL team.

CHAIR - At this stage have you done a close analysis of what a state AFL side would do for the economy of Tasmania? Have you closely considered that? I guess you could look at what

PUBLIC

other AFL teams have done for certain areas. Geelong is a good example, because it is outside the main area. Have you looked at that at all, Mr Evans?

Mr EVANS - No, we haven't looked at it closely at this stage. It doesn't immediately form part of the terms of reference for the project team. We are looking at the business case itself. But we could, and will, at some point do some modelling around the economic benefits of an AFL team.

We have a very good understanding in the case of Hawthorn of what economic benefits are brought to the state. Obviously, if we have our own AFL team it will bring a lot more visitation to the state. We have a good handle on what happens with Hawthorn in terms of visitation and probably with North Melbourne - I don't know off the top of my head.

I don't think we can underestimate the broader social and community benefits that would flow from having our own team, including uniting the state with a common interest. I am sure if we had an AFL team, whether you are in the north-west, north or the south, you are going to be right behind the Tasmanian team.

CHAIR - That is what David O'Byrne said to us today: that it would reunite the state and bring the state together - words to that effect.

Mr EVANS - There are going to be obvious economic benefits and we would need to understand those but I don't think you can discount the social and community benefits that would flow because they are as important.

CHAIR - That is one of our terms of reference. We were trying to follow that through to the best of our ability.

Mr WILKINSON - How many people travel from Tasmania to interstate to watch AFL football? I was speaking with two families today. I was looking after two of my grandchildren - and two people at a playgroup I went to said that they are going to Melbourne to watch AFL over the weekend.

CHAIR - Quite a few do it.

Mr WILKINSON - So there is a significant number. I don't know whether they would be staying here and whether they would spend money here. I strongly believe that we have a good food culture and arts culture in Tasmania but our sporting culture is not as good as it should be. It was, but not now. It does okay in cricket; it does terrifically well in hockey. Ms Langenberg, are there any other areas where we do a lot better than we should?

Ms LANGENBERG - In some sports, certainly. Perhaps not in the visitation sense, but in cycling and rowing we have performed at an elite level. Mountain biking and perhaps even female skateboarding.

Mr WILKINSON - The female area is untouched at the moment. It is really starting to blossom. That is something we all should be proud of, the way it has been going. We could do a lot more and we are starting to do that, with facilities as well.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - When was the last time that the state spoke with Gillon McLachlan at AFL House in Victoria to see exactly what the situation is?

Mr EVANS - I wish I could answer that question definitively. I do know that the Premier is in reasonably close contact and has certainly spoken to Gill about our project team and the work that we are trying to do. Those doors have been opened and remain open and there is communication.

I also know that the project team itself, through both the Chair and also James Henderson, have been in contact with Gill McLachlan. We need to understand their thinking and what it would take from their perspective to obtain a licence. They hold the keys. We need them to accept our proposal so we need to understand what their expectations would be. I know that is part of the discussions that have been held by the project team and I know the Premier has had some discussions.

CHAIR - I notice the Acting Premier, Jeremy Rockliff, says that. In the document provided it simply says that,

The task force will produce a business case to support the attainment of a Tasmanian licence in the AFL and AFLW. This includes the financial model and recommended organisational structure of a Tasmanian club that would meet AFL licence requirements.

Do we know what the licence requirements are? Is what you have to meet set out?

Mr EVANS - We started with some intelligence, particularly through James Henderson, on what he thought the keys to success looked like. Those keys to success have been further tested directly with the AFL. I have not been privy to those discussions and I know the chair of our project team, Brett, and James Henderson have had further discussions. I think they have probably firmed up what that looks like. It includes things like the level of membership that we would need; the sort of infrastructure that we would need; the amount of funding that we would need both corporate and through memberships and other sources; and the sorts of care we would need to take with player welfare, as Jim has mentioned, is really important. You have to have all of that stuff together.

We are starting to build up a picture of what success might look like and it is not for me to tell you what that looks like because I actually do not know. That is the work that that project team is doing. Then work out what would a business case from a Tasmanian perspective look like in order to ensure that we can deliver what the AFL would need for when a licence becomes available.

CHAIR - That seems to be an area that people keep talking about when you listen to the radio. What do we need to do to put ourselves in a good position to get this licence?

Mr EVANS - Rather than me telling you what I know and don't know, I know our submission did say that we could facilitate discussions directly with the project team. Because it's a work in progress, if they were to give you a briefing it would need to be confidential. But I am sure that would be worthwhile in getting to the heart of those sorts of questions.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - I need to discuss with the committee whether we should do that. You are right, it would have to be in confidence. I accept that.

Mr FINCH - As chairman of the board, Jim, and in your discussions that you have had around the state, has it covered the situation of administrators and coaches who are needed? It is one thing to develop the players and the kids being involved and then providing the pathway through whatever those competitions might look like, but we have seen administrators - I can recall over the past couple of decades the drain of disheartened administrators who have been used and abused, not by their clubs but by the system and have walked away. I am sure there must be a struggle to get the volunteers to take on the job of seeing those clubs survive and work towards a future.

Mr WILKINSON - Now what has occurred as each one of the competitions around the state have signed an affiliation agreement with AFL Tasmania as a result of that and what is happening now in the three hubs. Those clubs can tap in to the expertise in those hubs if they need assistance. We have said it is not only about playing the game, it is also about volunteering, umpiring, administration and coaches. If you look at the good teams in any sport around the world they always have, as they say, an excellent front office, good administrators.

Every club with good administrators has good performances on the field, that is something spoken about on a number of occasions. Every club that does well has good coaches. We especially need them in the underage area to enthuse the young players to make it fun for them and why you play in the first place because you enjoy it. You want to keep it being fun. Some of the coaches in yesteryear are living their life through the children and trying to make out they are AFL coaches and it does not work. That is something being looked at.

AFL Tas has sent around a survey to each of the clubs around the state asking those same questions that you are talking about. Have you always filled your committee? Do you have special people on your committee looking at certain roles? Are those people expert in the roles they are performing? Also looking at coaching, at whether the clubs are on survival rates each year as opposed to knowing they are going to continue the following year. A lot of clubs are just year by year. By getting all the information which is being gathered now, we will be in a better position to answer your question at some later stage. Certainly, the work is being done because it is highly important.

Mr FINCH - I would cite again the opportunity created for Australians when we had the year of the coach, graded school levels were offered coaching right through the community. You could get your 0 level if you were a newbie, or if you were at level 1 you could then try to advance to level 2 and so on. I noticed within our community in the north of Tasmania plenty took up the opportunity and it was then a high-level coaching of coaches were then filtered back to the way young people were dealt with.

That understanding of stopping a parent from living their life because they had the skills rather than trying to learn how to be a coach by osmosis and trying to do what they were emulating how they were coached. Here they were given proper coaching and training to know what was the most appropriate way to deal with young people particularly.

Mr WILKINSON - I agree.

PUBLIC

Mr FINCH - Kim, the task force member you mentioned, fantastic, to have those skills contributing to this development in Tasmania. Paul Eriksson is really interesting because he must be able to bring such a strong understanding of the process we have trying to bring on a new team into the AFL. Could you tell me more, does he have a special role on the task force or is he purely a member?

Mr EVENS - He is just a member of the task force. He has arrived in the state to take on a role as CEO of Racing Tasmania, so he is in the system. We found him and we put together his background and immediately identified him as a key person we would like to have on the project team. He is just one of the project team members, but brings special expertise around what it takes to build a club from the bottom up and from the starting point, coming in as the inaugural CEO of RGWS, so he is a major find for us. He is making an excellent contribution, as are all of the project team members. Brett has all the project team assigned roles, doing certain things, working on certain pieces of work. They are all doing their bit, it is not just a steering committee, they are actually rolling their sleeves up and doing some work.

Mr WILKINSON - If I might close on that, Kerry, because Kim is spot on. When the game was in Launceston, about three or four weeks ago, Brett met all the people from the Northern Tasmanian Football Association, Scott Rigby, Andrew Richardson from North West Football Union, and also NWFL; Julie Kay, who is on the board, and Matty Ogilvie from the Southern Football League. They are endeavouring to gather all the information and the best evidence they can to come forward with the final report. They are not doing it in isolation with everybody who is involved in the sport of football around Tasmania, you are speaking with them, and coming back here in the end with the conclusion, which is terrific.

Mr EVANS - And also talking to people in other sporting codes. Brett often says he does not want to leave any stone unturned in terms of information they gather and analysis they undertake in terms of coming to their final recommendations.

CHAIR - Does anybody want to say anything in conclusion?

Mr WILKINSON - I would like to thank you for the work you are doing. The more information you can gain in relation to matters like this, the better. This is the first time a club or state has had to really fight for a position and say look, we want to be involved. Normally, it is the AFL going out and doing the work that Tasmania is doing now. I take my hat off to the Government and all involved, saying we want to be involved, we will do the work and is what they are doing.

CHAIR - Thank you all very much, Kim, Jim, Helen and Adam. Thank you very much for the time and for the information you have provided to us, it will certainly assist this committee. We appreciate it.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.