

Ella Haddad MP
Chair
Government Administration Committee B

Dear Ms Haddad

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee to provide a statement on the records and to answer questions.

The below information and attachments respond to questions taken on notice from my appearance before the Committee on 4 April 2025.

Response to Questions on Notice – 4 April 2025

Highlighted section One

“In any of those cases where industry participants came to you, did any of them result in the reopening of investigations or anything of that nature?”

Yes, I was able to identify multiple instances where additional activities were undertaken by the stewards following concerns being raised by other participants. One such example was in relation to an inquiry into the driving tactics adopted by N Ford on PRIDDY SUBLIME in Race 9 at Launceston Pacing Club’s meeting on Sunday 26 February 2023.

Highlighted section Two

“Can you take us through that initial response where, publicly anyway, the Minister was saying she would ask ORI to investigate? What, at that point in time, was going on from your perspective in the Office of Racing Integrity? What were you being asked to do?”

I have reviewed my records.

There was one communication from the Minister’s advisor to me on Sunday 26 March 2023 at 12.21pm of a media release from the Shadow Minister for Racing Dean Winter MP.

I was not able to locate any other emails or communications between the Minister’s Office and myself, in the period between the release of the ABC report and the Minister announcing the independent review of harness racing on 27 March 2023.

I do not recall being asked to undertake any particular action by the Minister or the Department. However, on Sunday 26 March 2023 at 12.31pm, I emailed Mr Neil Finnigan and Mr Ross Neal in relation to the ABC report and sought advice and action in relation to several matters that were relevant from the report.

That email is provided as an annexure.

Highlighted section Three

Mr WINTER - Presumably, they found no wrongdoing and that's why it would have never been on an inquiry report?

Mr HELMICH - I'd probably have to take that on notice, Mr Winter. I don't know exactly. My understanding was -

Mr WINTER - I appreciate you taking it on notice.

Response:

In the hearing I provided a response that is accurately recorded in the transcript. The response was:

"I understand the question. Thanks, Mr Winter. My understanding and my recollection - I'll be necessarily vague because I don't want to lock myself into something - is that with the Priddy Sublime inquiry, there was an initial reference in the steward's report. Then, at a subsequent time, it was detailed at the bottom of another steward's report, which was usual process, I'm not sure if that's still the process. If there was something that was dealt with through - because Mr Ford, I expect, would have been brought into the steward's inquiry during a race meeting - if there were findings from that, it would have been dealt with in the steward's report of that race meeting."

In the hearing, Mr Winter provided me a copy of a stewards' report related to the Launceston Pacing Club harness racing meeting on 26 February 2023.

For the committee's convenience, I provided a link to that report from the Harness Racing Australia website:

[Stewards Reports Detail - Australian Harness Racing](#)

I have reviewed this issue and I can advise that my response in the hearing was accurate. The Priddy Sublime inquiry was dealt with in the stewards' report for the Tasmanian Trotting Club harness racing meeting on 7 May 2023. The following is a link to the Harness Racing Australia website [Stewards Reports Detail - Australian Harness Racing](#)

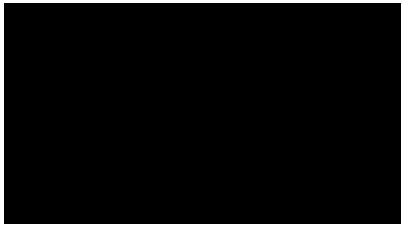
For the ease of the committee, the stewards report notes:

Supplementary: Stewards concluded their inquiries into the driving tactics adopted by N Ford on PRIDY SUBLIME in Race 9 at Launceston Pacing Club's meeting on Sunday February 26th, 2023, of concern to Stewards was his decision to move wider near the 500 metres when at the time he was trailing the leader. On questioning regarding the tactics, driver Ford stated that he had made the decision passing the 600 metres that his best option was to, if possible, move wider to trail TURQUOISE STRIDE, (T Ford), which had gone into the race with sound form, winning two of its last three starts, rather than follow QUEENOFDANCE NZ, (T Madden) which was having its second start after a spell, and had raced wide early in the event before working to lead the one-out line and then work forward again to cross to the lead. Driver Ford added that this move would require him easing KERMADEC, (C Castles) wider and needed to be done before other runners raced up outside that mare. Finally, driver Ford stated that on moving wider, PRIDY SUBLIME lost its momentum and dropped the bit, for which he could not explain, but hypothesised that his mare resented the jostle with KERMADEC when easing wider.

Stewards also took the opportunity to review betting on the race which revealed no abnormalities or concerns. Stewards, after considering all presented, although believing that driver Ford had erred in his decision to move wider at the time, it was however reasonable for him to do so under the circumstances, with acceptable reasoning. Stewards after considering all presented, took no further action other than to note the circumstances.

If needed I am willing to reattend the Committee to clarify any information or answer other questions that the members may have.

Yours sincerely



Justin Helmich



From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Today's article on the ABC
Attachments: [image002.png](#)

Gents

Thanks for your efforts as always.

No doubt you have had an opportunity to review the ABC article in relation to harness racing. A bit of a non event really.

Nonetheless there are some matters that emanate from it that we should look at:

1. **Betting Analyst** – we need to get some early advice in relation to how we might acquire the services of a qualified and experienced betting analyst on a part time basis. Can you please both have a think about how this might best be achieved. Ross and I had an initial discussion about this on Thursday, but I would like to progress it quickly.
2. [REDACTED] - I have a note from 11 May 2022 when Janet Ainscow indicated that [REDACTED] had told her that [REDACTED] was no longer driving for Yole because Yole had told [REDACTED] to let certain horses go past and to box others in. [REDACTED] had a discussion with [REDACTED] shortly after this time but [REDACTED] is now denying that [REDACTED] has been approached by stewards. Can we please make a second approach to [REDACTED] and get [REDACTED] on the record in terms of [REDACTED] views? Again, an urgent activity.
3. **Reds Good to Go** – please confirm that the sample taken was negative (I recall Ross mentioning that it was clear last week).
4. **Yole stable** – it was raised that members of Yole's stable in the stabling area are not licensed. Can we please have an audit done and the next few meetings to ensure that everyone is where they are supposed to be. This might require an additional staff member for a few weeks. Go through all of the stables – not just Yole.
5. **Nathan Ford** – Need to finalise the ford inquiry ASAP

Regards



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I often work irregular hours to balance my work and family commitments. Please do not feel any obligation to respond to an email that you may receive from me outside of normal office hours.

Unless marked as urgent, it can wait until you are best able to respond.