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THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON AFL IN TASMANIA MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON MONDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2019

TRISHA SQUIRES, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Dean) - Welcome, Trish. We have the press as well - welcome.

Trish, there are two or three things I have to say to you. This is a public hearing, a public session. I think we are online too -

Ms SQUIRES - That isn't in this, though. There is nothing in here that says this will be online.

CHAIR - It is, and that's why I'm telling you now. It is streamed online. The public can listen in and watch.

Ms SQUIRES - Does that mean I have to agree to that, or can we change that?

CHAIR - We can change that - and I will get to that in a minute. We sent out a screed to you. Have you read through that?

Ms SQUIRES - Yes. It says that media and members of the public may attend, and that it may be recorded, but nothing to do with a stream.

CHAIR - It is being streamed as well; maybe we need to amend that to include that as a possibility as well.

Ms SQUIRES - Yes, I think this might be old.

CHAIR - Trish, having said that, as I spoke to you outside, let me say that if at any stage you feel you would like to give some information in confidence, or if a question is asked where you feel you would like to give the answer to that in confidence - in camera - please say so. Say, 'I would like to answer that but I would prefer it be in confidence in camera'. The committee will meet on that and make a determination on what they do from there.

Ms SQUIRES - Sure.

CHAIR - In this environment, you have parliamentary privilege, which means you can virtually say as you want, provided it is the fact, and that you are protected at law, in relation to any statements or comments you might make.

Once you leave here, that can become a different situation. You may not be protected at all once you leave this environment; you may not.

Ms SQUIRES - Sure, does that mean we are not streaming then?

CHAIR - We are streaming.

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Ms SQUIRES - Even though I was not told we were streaming?

CHAIR - It was remiss of me not to go to Natasha Exel, our secretary, the first member here. The second one is Ali, our assistant secretary, and we have our Hansard staff at the back.

Ms SQUIRES - Maybe it is noted that for next time that would be changed.

CHAIR - Trish, thank you for raising that issue. Now, you have given us a submission. We have a copy of the submission. The members have that and the members have read that submission. In the first instance, I will just leave it open to you if there is any statement you would like to make to us, any additions to this, any other information you feel we should have in relation to terms of reference.

I will give you the opportunity to do that, and then we will ask you some questions. I will leave it with you at this stage.

Ms SQUIRES - First, thank you for having me here today. I am here on behalf of AFL Tasmania. My name is Trisha Squires. I am the CEO of AFL Tasmania, and have been since February last year.

AFL Tasmania's focus is to strengthen and grow grassroots football across the state. We want to build better baseline participation to ensure long-term sustainability of the game in Tasmania.

We believe a strong underpinning football community is important in any aspiration for an AFL team.

Our focus on participation is through driving greater numbers, through school programs, Auskick, and then ensuring sustainable and vibrant competitions to aid in retention in club football.

We have made some progress in building participation at a base level, but there remain challenges in shifting demographics. The older age groups also continue to encounter challenges, and our hard work in introducing more players at the base level will take some time to ensure greater numbers of teams at all levels in the future.

There is only one age group where we have seen a decline in participation, and that is in senior males.

Another key strategic priority for AFL Tasmania in strengthening grassroots football is enabling vibrant competitions. This year AFL Tasmania signed affiliation agreements with all leagues and associations across the state to formalise working partnerships that provide two-way accountability between AFL Tasmania and the leagues.

We have worked on this for a number of years, prior to my tenure at AFL Tasmania, to have a partnership with all community leagues. These affiliation agreements enable leagues and AFL Tasmania to align objectives and work for the good of the game across the state and grow the game.

We also now have three of what we call 'competition hubs' that are managed in each area. We have one at Ulverstone Football Club, one at UTAS Stadium and one at North Hobart Oval, where we house people who are administering community football across the state.

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Prior to this, leagues were paying out the costs of running the leagues for those staff to run their competitions, or it was predominantly volunteers. So, this is something to try to help with the sustainability of the leagues and also to take away some burden from volunteers.

AFL Tasmania also plays a key role in supporting the growth of female football in our state through game development, talent programs and facility support. We help more girls and women choose AFL as their sport of choice and provide a welcoming environment to enjoy our sport.

AFL Tasmania plays a key role in developing elite talent. Over the last 18 months, we have seen an evolution of the Tasmanian talent pathway. Prior to this, we did not have a full-time boys' team, a Devils team, in the under-18s competition in the NAB League. This season we went in. We had been in a prior iteration of the competition but we have gone in full-time. Next year we will have the girls playing as the Tasmanian Devils in the NAB League.

We are also working on an application for a VFL men's side. I have submitted that application to the AFL and am awaiting a formal response, which I hope to have within three weeks.

That's the end of my statement.

CHAIR - Thanks very much, Ms Squires; we appreciate that. We will open it up for questions. I'll ask you a general question at this stage. I accept AFL Tasmania's position in creating the game here and getting people involved in the game here: what is AFL Tasmania doing in relation to Tasmania fielding an AFL team in the national competition?

Ms SQUIRES - What I do in my role is support the state Government's task force. I've provided information to the task force and have met with that task force on a number of occasions to try to assist with any stats they may need with regard to a potential business plan that they would then put to the state Government. The state Government will then decide what to do with that business plan. I have assisted them through statistics; with the VFL licence submission I shared that and presented that to the task force to ensure that we work together because the reality is we all need to work together if we want to grow football in our state.

CHAIR - We certainly do, you are right. From your perspective and from AFL Tasmania's perspective, have you had discussions with AFL House, with Gillon McLachlan, in relation to Tasmania fielding its own Tasmanian side?

Ms SQUIRES - The only conversations I've had were last year during the steering committee - as we all know, there was a Tasmanian football crisis last year when the north-west club fell out of the TSL and we created a steering committee. During that steering committee we talked about what I and the members of the steering committee had been hearing from Tasmanians: that there was a desire to have an AFL men's team. We discussed at the steering committee that this is something Tasmanians wanted.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms SIEJKA - A number of the people who have presented to us so far have talked about what needs to happen with Tasmanian football before it would be ready, potentially, to be competitive or in a position to field an AFL team. One in particular was talking about how we needed quite a competitive senior league across the state and things like that.

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What do you think is required to develop our football community in order to be ready for an AFL team?

Ms SQUIRES - It depends on what we mean by 'ready for an AFL team', but with regard to talent, what I believe is -

Ms SIEJKA - The talent, and then the other area I would be interested in is structurally because you have to have clubs in a position to feed through as well.

Ms SQUIRES - Yes. What I believe with regard to a talent pathway is what we've set up with the NAB League - having Tasmania playing in the best under-18 boys' and girls' competition in our country. To have a full-time team in that is one.

The next step I see would be a VFL side for men and women because that is the best second tier competition in our country for Tasmania to be represented in. In being represented, what would be important for the VFL side is that it wasn't just mainlanders playing for the Tassie Devils, but that it would be a very strong Tasmanian side where we would try to keep as many Tasmanians in our state playing VFL football or attempting to get the Tasmanians who have left our state to play in better competitions and to come back and play for the Tasmanian Devils because it's really important for us to have a real Tasmanian team and to build our talent base here in Tasmania. We need to have strong competitions underneath because we can't have clubs folding and leagues folding. I think we need to have a healthy football state and grow together to show, if there is an aspiration for AFL men's and women's teams, that we can do all that and then also have that at the end of the line.

Ms SIEJKA - And for it to be sustainable as well. There have been some discussion about the talent side, but then also what needs to be done with the clubs in the community to ensure it is sustainable and is going to work and all those sorts of things.

Ms SQUIRES - I understand that the task force is working on a business case. I am not across what it has put so far put in that business case, but I know that it's looking at how it would be financially sustainable.

Ms SIEJKA - Do you see anything in the community that we would need to work on? I was thinking about community engagement and sustainable engagement to make sure people own the team. Is there anything in all your communications with so many clubs, and players I would imagine, that you think needs to happen to make it work?

Ms SQUIRES - The facilities question is a big question. It is something we face when it comes to community football; also, in regard to the NAB League boys and girls, where can they train? We do not have a base as such for the Devils. Also, with the AFLW joint licence we have now with the North Melbourne/Tasmanian Kangaroos, last preseason they were training at New Town High because we don't have the right facilities to get them on. Certainly, with the women's league it starts earlier, so then cricket is on at a lot of the venues. Currently, I think the facilities are something we really need to look at across the state. We are not just talking about at league level, it is all the way down. We are running out of football ovals.

Ms SIEJKA - And membership of players is growing as well, it seems.

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Ms SQUIRES - It is, and not all of them are female-friendly, as we know. We need to ensure that every person involved in football is in a safe environment. That wouldn't necessarily be the case as we sit here today.

Ms SIEJKA - As a follow-up to the question on growing membership, you mentioned it was only the older male age group that was declining. Does that have anything to do with perhaps the next stage not being available in Tasmania at the moment?

Ms SQUIRES - Yes. There are a number of factors. One is that if you have aspirations to play at the highest level, currently those men are tending to leave Tasmania to go and play on the mainland. Another thing is that demographics have actually changed in Tasmania, certainly on the north-west coast. I don't need to tell you that because I'm sure you know all those details about the number of people who are leaving at a certain age from the north-west coast, which includes men between 18 and 40. It is a combination of those. I think life has changed. Maybe 10 or 20 years ago, playing social football on the weekend took up six hours of your time. It may be different. You have young families, you have jobs on the weekend, things like that. Society has changed as well.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Ms Squires, you have probably seen articles in the media about a Macquarie Point facility?

Ms SQUIRES - Yes.

Mr ARMSTRONG - What are your thoughts on that?

Ms SQUIRES - I read it, and the first thought I had was in regard to parking, which I assume a lot of people thought of if there were a stadium there. I heard that it would be a stadium, not only for AFL, but for other sports, which I think is a good concept. If the state Government is hearing from all sports saying there is a drain on facilities, does that work? It is more about how would people get there and park there, and what impact does that have on transport? That was my first thought on that.

Mr ARMSTRONG - There is a huge parking area on The Domain. A lot of people, if they travel to Tasmania, I would assume, if we had an AFL side, would just pop on a plane and come into Hobart where they are within walking distance to the hotels, motels, entertainment and meals. That's where I've looked at it and thought that it would probably fit into that.

Ms SQUIRES - Yes, absolutely. I'm not too sure what the cost would be involved in that. It would be quite large.

Mr ARMSTRONG - We talk about our own AFL side constantly, but as we saw in Brisbane with the relocation of Fitzroy, and in Sydney with the relocation of the Sydney Swans, have you ever put any thought into relocating a side to Tasmania instead of our own AFL side?

Ms SQUIRES - I haven't personally put thought into the relocation of an AFL team to Tasmania.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Do you know whether anything has been raised with the AFL through that?

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Ms SQUIRES - All I know is what I've read in the paper, that there has been speculation about a relocation, but that's the only time I have heard about it.

Mr ARMSTRONG - You are talking about a VFL side, which would be really good. How do you think it would impact on our local competitions?

Ms SQUIRES - That is something we had to consider in the VFL licence submission because you would not want to bring a VFL side into the football landscape here that would be detrimental to our local competitions. The TSL would be impacted by a VFL side because you would be taking the top players out of the TSL into the VFL and that is something we need to work through with the TSL clubs. It could also be an opportunity to provide more opportunity for players to play TSL. You could look at it in two ways. To actually run a VFL club would cost anywhere between \$900 000 to about \$1.6 million at the top end per year. That is a very modest amount of money for what people may have thought in regard to a VFL side. We have looked into how much it cost standalone clubs versus AFL clubs. There is a cost of travel to take ourselves to the mainland and potentially bring sides here also, so it is the travel costs we have to face into and at the moment there is \$385 000 salary cap for a VFL side.

Ms ARMITAGE - For the total side?

Ms SQUIRES - Yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - That \$385 000 - does that include coaches?

Ms SQUIRES - You can have a coach on top of that.

Ms SIEJKA - That is not an individual player but the entire team?

Ms SQUIRES - Yes, that is the salary cap.

CHAIR - Does that include umpires and so on?

Ms SQUIRES - No, that is the playing salary cap.

Mr FINCH - Is that \$385 000 salary cap a limiting factor in what you are able to achieve with a VFL side or should it be greater? What is your assessment of that?

Ms SQUIRES - No. If that is the salary cap across the competition, then it is ensuring it is equal across the competition. I think we could fill a competitive side. We have a list management strategy to attempt to get a lot of Tasmanians who have gone to the mainland to play at a higher level back into Tasmania. We know doing that is not as easy as simply asking them to come back. It is about creating a high-performance environment, about potential jobs and university outside of playing VFL football. That is really important for us to consider and to try to get Tasmanians back here. The facilities again play a big part in that if we have the right coach and great facilities, that may be what brings people - well, at this point, men - back to Tasmania to play football in our VFL side.

Mr FINCH - You mentioned we would need to have an established under-18 operation. We would need to have an established VFL team. How long do you think it would take before that situation might be in place?

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Ms SQUIRES - At the moment this was the first season the under-18 boys went in full time. The VFL - we are still waiting to hear whether the licence will be granted and looking at either a 2021 or 2022 entry.

Mr FINCH - Dates thrown about in respect to an AFL team, they have talked about 2023 and 2025.

Ms SQUIRES - Sorry, who is they?

Mr FINCH - Media and speculation and suggestions like 2025.

Ms SQUIRES - Russell Hanson.

Mr FINCH - Media speculation also. Do you suspect we could be in place if, let us say, 2025, which gives us a little bit more time? Do you think what you are suggesting needs to be in place could be achieved by 2025?

Ms SQUIRES - I have fed all the information to the task force so it can make the right decision around that because it has all the other factors in regards to finance and how a team would be set up. I cannot personally answer that, but I have given all the information about our talent pathways to that group so it can make an educated suggestion to the state Government on that because they will have more about the club and how the club would run and the finances and governance sides.

Mr FINCH - What are your thoughts about us achieving a VFL team?

Ms SQUIRES - I think we can achieve a VFL side.

Mr FINCH - Are you getting a warm fuzzy feeling about the application?

Ms SQUIRES - Yes.

Mr FINCH - About us getting a licence?

Ms SQUIRES - Yes, I feel we have put in a very strong application.

Mr FINCH - Okay. In the scheme of things, would you see the TSL operation per se would be under threat? You say there are limitations if you are trying to take the better players into VFL team. There have been suggestions that we go back to NWFU, NTFA, SFL local competitions. Can you see that as a scenario or has it been suggested to you the TSL might morph back into that situation?

Ms SQUIRES - No. We work really closely with the TSL. AFL Tasmania is the competition management of the TSL and what we can see is that we would try to strengthen their competition. What we would need is that VFL players who do not get picked every round would need to play TSL football. If we do not have a TSL structure there, then where would they fall back into? We currently know through the under-18 programs, that it is the same concept - the boys go back in a play TSL football and then come back into our structure. We have a really strong relationship with the TSL clubs for that reason.

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Mr ARMSTRONG - Is the salary cap on \$385 000 for the total squad?

Ms SQUIRES - Yes.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Not just the playing group of the day. What is the total number of players they are allowed to have in the squad? Is there a limit, or is it 30 or 35 players?

Ms SQUIRES - I will have to send you some more information if you like. I would have to send it from the VFL, because I would not be exactly sure on the numbers. I do not want to say the wrong number, but I can send that onto you.

CHAIR - If you could.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Are players with the under-18 side remunerated through that competition at all?

Ms SQUIRES - No, they do not pay any levies to be involved. The other teams would probably pay a levy for apparel or things like that, but we make sure there are no barriers to young boys or girls in our academies, where they do not pay a levy.

Mr ARMSTRONG - We have boys from the north-west coast, northern Tasmania and southern Tasmania in our Tassie Devils, not in the VFL in the underage. How do they facilitate that?

Ms SQUIRES - I am glad you asked that question. With regard to being in Tasmania for the NAB League Competition, a number of the other teams probably would not have the same issues we have in that we have three regions. Therefore, the boys may not train together at all during the week until we get to match day. We are not going to move boys from where they have grown up or from their families, many are underage, a lot still at school; they are still going to be doing their homework, a lot of other things and probably other sports. We have the coaches within each region so they stay within their regions. What it means is we have to duplicate resources. Let's say the Oakley Charges - another team in the NAB league - would all be at the same base and have the coaches there, whereas we actually have to run a mini-hub with three hubs across our state and bring them together. That is something we need to do because there cannot be a barrier for any boys or girls to play at the talent end in the academy.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Do you see any way it can be better facilitated?

Ms SQUIRES - My belief is we have to do it that way because potentially it could become Hobart-centric, but I think if it is underage, they have to be able to stay where they have grown up. That is my belief.

Mr ARMSTRONG - How would a VFL side operate?

Ms SQUIRES - With a VFL we would have to talk through the mechanics of all that, but it would be more likely based in either Hobart or Launceston. Some players may not live in that area, though. If someone has a professional job outside where the base is, there may be an exception - they may train only once a week with the side - but that would be an exception.

CHAIR - Have you read the compelling case put in by Russell Hanson?

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Ms SQUIRES - Russell has sent me a few different versions and I have met with him before, but I do not know whether I have seen this version.

CHAIR - This is that version - 'Tasmanian Devils: The betterment of the game. The compelling case'.

Ms SQUIRES - I sent some stats to Russell last week because he said he was doing some follow-up work for this group. He wanted to see the participation, but I may not have read that exact document.

CHAIR - I think that was on top of this document.

Ms SIEJKA - A question was raised out of this one.

CHAIR - The first one. It is an interesting document and it looks at the financial side of things, of Tasmania providing a national team in the national competition.

Ms SIEJKA - That has also been provided to the task force.

Ms SQUIRES - My understanding is that the task force has signed a nondisclosure agreement, and has been provided with information from the AFL in regard to club finances.

CHAIR - Right. You touched on the TSL side, the state side. I agree with you, we need to have the competitions right. To get the best level of players, we have to have the best football.

To do that, I think we need a state side of some sort. I am not quite sure how it should work, whether we should go back to the districts and form somehow in that way.

What are we doing to get that statewide league into the north-west coast?

Ms SQUIRES - It is a really difficult one with the north-west coast and the TSL, because we have learned from the past that if you start a franchise or a team that doesn't already exist on the north-west coast, it is not necessarily going to work.

We are not going to try to do something that has not worked in the past, because I think then we haven't learnt from our mistakes. We now have two teams that were in the TSL, that are now back in the North West Football League, and there isn't a current appetite to get back into the TSL.

We have needed to resource the north-west coast because, as you may be aware, the TSL clubs have agreements - they get a grant from AFL Tasmania, and as a part of that, they have to deliver community hours to engage community clubs and participants in football in their zone. We have put in a full-time game development resource in the north-west coast, and a full-time talent manager. There is no TSL club present, as you know, currently on the north-west coast.

CHAIR - It used to be the strongest competition in the state for a long, long time.

Ms SQUIRES - The clubs?

CHAIR - Yes. Basketball. Any sport really - that is where it was.

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Ms SQUIRES - Is basketball still strong on the north-west?

CHAIR - Yes, still fairly strong.

Mr FINCH - On that point, Ulverstone - where are they sitting in respect of an appetite to perhaps consider joining the TSL?

Ms SQUIRES - I haven't personally spoken to Ulverstone Football Club about joining the TSL.

Mr FINCH - They were very much a stronghold in years gone by. In fact, there was a promotion of Ulverstone into the state league, but it wasn't taken up by AFL Tasmania. They went with Burnie and Devonport, but Ulverstone is very, very strong.

Ms SQUIRES - They wanted to join the TSL?

Mr FINCH - Yes. But it didn't come to fruition.

Ms SQUIRES - That must have been a number of years ago. Is that right?

Mr FINCH - Yes, 10, 12 or 13 years ago.

Ms SQUIRES - I wasn't aware of that.

Mr FINCH - I think it was an opportunity lost.

CHAIR - So AFL Tasmania is currently focused on and doing is ensuring they get the competition right in this state, with the purpose of ensuring everything is right, the structure is right, for us to field a national team? Is that a fair question?

Ms SQUIRES - What we focus on is building participation. As you know, each state has a governing body. AFL Tasmania's role is about our talent pathways, and it is about our game development, which is Auskick in schools and also about community leagues and clubs.

That is what we focus on. It is the same in all the states, depending on whether there is an AFL team in the structure or not. It is the same remit in each state.

CHAIR - If Tasmania gets its AFL team, national team - and we're hoping that happens - will AFL Tasmania not be involved in the national team? Will it still be concentrating on the state structure, getting the state structure right?

Ms SQUIRES - Correct.

CHAIR - Some people are not aware of that.

Ms SQUIRES - We have a formal partnership with Hawthorn and North Melbourne because they're the two clubs in our state and we run some game development and community football activities with them.

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CHAIR - Okay.

Ms SIEJKA - One of our terms of reference is around the impact on future participation rates of AFL if we don't have a national, or state, team.

Do you have any thoughts on that? Some people have spoken about the benefits of having a team to aspire to and that sort of thing. Do you think not having a team is one way or another?

Ms SQUIRES - I've heard that when we had a VFL side here in Tasmania, the participation went up but we don't have the same statistics as we have today to prove that. It's hard to know. My team is charged with keeping increasing participation no matter what's in the state or what structures are in the state.

We want as many as boys and girls playing football as we can and we want them to enjoy it. We want it to be safe. We want them to return, but we don't just want people playing football: we want umpires, we want administrators, we want volunteers and we want people to be around football and it to be a positive experience. That is what we have to focus on.

Ms SIEJKA - The aspiration factor for some players, I guess, would be compelling when there is something to look up to as well, especially for younger kids, getting them engaged and seeing that pathway. It is likely it would have a positive impact?

Ms SQUIRES - It is hard to know because we just don't have the statistics behind it.

Ms SIEJKA - Yes.

Mr FINCH - On that point, I am just trying to recall what Jim Wilkinson said in respect of this development his board is taking on, the ideas that they're proffering.

Ms SQUIRES - I'm on the board with Mr Wilkinson.

Mr FINCH - No. He has given evidence here already.

Ms SQUIRES - Yes, on the Tasmanian Football Board.

CHAIR - You're on the board as well?

Ms SQUIRES - Yes.

CHAIR - That's what Ms Squires is telling you.

Mr FINCH - With respect to schools, I think we suffered a decline after the CRESAP report. Football was not a focus for schools throughout Tasmania so subsequently there wasn't that early appetite by schools; their focus went elsewhere.

Is there a suggestion or a thought that perhaps there might be a stronger bond with the Education department to get school access to football coaching and participation in the early days? I think the answer is 'yes', but I'll just get it from you.

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Ms SQUIRES - Absolutely. Schools are a great avenue for us because people are already engaged at schools. So that's a place that we want to get into to ensure we can get the captive audience within the school. A couple of things have happened, obviously - Mr Rockliff having the portfolios of Education, Sport and Recreation is great for us because we want to have a really strong relationship with education because we think that's where sport works really closely.

One thing to come out of the Tasmanian Football Board is that currently there is a recruitment drive for three regional sports coordinators. It has just been recruited for last week; it was advertised last week. They would help all sports, not just football, to be able to engage with the schools more effectively than they have in the past. From what I hear, 10 or 20 years ago football and other sports were very active within the schools, and that's changed. That's something we want to ensure continues to happen from now on, to see more schools participating in football - all sports, but football particularly.

Mr FINCH - What goes with that is the calibre or the quality of those adults, or coaches, who work with the schools - whether they're teachers or whether they're brought in. I wonder what initiatives might be taken by AFL Tasmania, not only just that school program but generally where you 'coach the coaches'?

I have recalled already in this inquiry that 1994 was the Year of the Coach for Australia. That was a federal government program that went right throughout Australia doing that in all sports. It is an important issue when you want to bring on and develop younger people, the kids at school.

Ms SQUIRES - It is. Agreed, and coaching now has changed this year for AFL, where you have to re-accredit every four years and you have to continue to learn. Otherwise historically, you could just all become coaches if you like, you are doing it for 20 years. You could still be doing it the way you did it 20 years ago compared to the way young people learn now, particularly that girls are participating in football as well. I think that has been a really important step. This year we have run 20 coach education sessions across the state. Last year and probably the year before we ran not as many, closer to one or two.

That is something we want to focus on as an organisation. We have done surveys that have shown that people opt out of football because of coaching. It's something that's really important. If you have a negative coaching experience, not just in football but I'm sure in other sports, you are less likely to enjoy it and you are less likely to continue to play. That's something we need to focus on. Also, we know that being a coach takes a lot of someone's time. It is about how do we best upskill them to make sure they have the right skills, while also knowing they are all time-poor. It's just finding a balance to ensure that the right people are coaching, particularly our kids' football.

Mr FINCH - In your position with AFL Tasmania, how concerned are you about the influence other sports are having on younger people at that school age - like basketball, soccer and other sports? A lot of those have those circumstances in place already and are just waiting to attract any young people interested in sport, and their parents, to come along and skew to sports other than Aussie Rules.

Ms SQUIRES - I actually believe that if a young person is active and playing other sports, they could be more likely to play football as well. I support of all sports in the state and what they are doing with young people and seniors. I believe that if someone is active, they may play three or four sports anyway. We ensure that at our talent end, people do not pay levies. I have seen in

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other sports that if you are paying a levy, if you are a family who does not have the income, your child isn't in that talent pathway.

That's something we like to offer if there is a talented AFL player. But I certainly encourage everyone to play all sorts of sports because I think it's a positive.

Mr FINCH - On the subject of no levies, what about those youngsters, of under-12 age particularly, who make representative teams and have to go to Darwin and Perth and all that, do they have a big fee to find?

Ms SQUIRES - That is Sporting Schools Australia; that isn't an AFL-run program. That is Sporting Schools Australia and they don't have a branch here in Tasmania - but yes.

Mr ARMSTRONG - It isn't AFL?

Ms SQUIRES - It isn't, no.

Mr FINCH - There are young people coming to me, as their local representative, seeking financial support. Who are they? Are they in AFL teams?

Ms SQUIRES - Sorry?

Mr FINCH - Are they in AFL teams?

Ms SQUIRES - Next year, we in Tasmania are not going to field teams in Sporting Schools Australia - SSA. What we have seen is that families who want to send and cannot afford to send are going and asking for fundraising when actually it's not part of an AFL program. It has all sports involved, so it isn't a part of our talent pathway. Does that make sense?

Mr FINCH - So there is a confusion out there that people think the AFL is begrudging these young people the opportunity, particularly if they are hard-pressed financially as far as the family is concerned -

Ms SQUIRES - It's a barrier. You are flying from Launceston to Darwin - that's a barrier. We are in agreement there.

Mr FINCH - Ms Squires, what will happen? Are you saying you will pull out of SSA?

Ms SQUIRES - Yes.

Mr FINCH - Will those young people who get those representative opportunities, if they still continue to get them, be supported by AFL Tasmania?

Ms SQUIRES - We believe that at that age they don't necessarily need to be playing interstate, but we would play more intrastate competitions at that younger level of the pathway. We will run AFL-run talent programs, which won't be the SSA programs.

Mr FINCH - What would be the youngest representative opportunity for a footballer, male or female?

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Ms SQUIRES - It would be probably around under-15s. There would still be a program for under-12s - that would be more intrastate, not interstate.

Mr FINCH - That is in the pipeline at the moment, not established?

Ms SQUIRES - Yes. It is coming for next year.

CHAIR - At this stage, is it identified where a VFL team will play in Tasmania?

Ms SQUIRES - We have looked at whether it would be Hobart- or Launceston-based. At the moment, it is more likely to be Hobart, but it is a facilities issue. It is about where the training base could be.

CHAIR - I ask this because of the questions are coming out of AFL: if we get our national side as to where games will be played, is it envisaged games will be played north and south, across the state, even the north-west?

Ms SQUIRES - Across the state. In the under-18 competition the boys played a game in Penguin; we played in Launceston and in Hobart. We see that would be a similar model as the VFL.

CHAIR - Right. A question that often comes up is retaining players in those groups. If we are looking at a VFL side, I would take it we will need, through necessity perhaps, to have some mainland players making up the VFL side. What is AFL Tasmania doing with regard to ensuring we are able to keep those people here, that they will want to stay in Tasmania and be part of the VFL side? It is said with the national side that you would not be able to keep them here.

Ms SQUIRES - With regard to the VFL side, we would like the team to be predominantly Tasmanian anyway, so it is probably a very different question for a national team than a VFL side

CHAIR - You are saying at this stage you are proposing with the VFL side that we won't have the need to bring in players from the mainland to be competitive?

Ms SQUIRES - Not many, no. We would really like to see predominantly Tasmanians playing in the VFL side.

CHAIR - Another one of our terms of reference is in relation to what a national side is likely to do for the state. From AFL Tasmania's perspective, if we have an AFL national team, where do you see football going? Is it going to boost Australian Rules in this state? Is it going to bring more players into the game? Are we likely to see that? What have you done in that regard? Have you looked at that at this stage?

Ms SQUIRES - No, again that is something the task force would look at. Is that what you mean with regard to economics?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms SQUIRES - I could not sit here and tell you I know the details or figures on this.

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CHAIR - I am asking from a different perspective. If we look at the sums, for instance - the AFL is operating there, the same as AFL Tasmania, AFL Queensland - they would have known what bringing the teams into the Gold Coast have done for local football in the area.

Ms SQUIRES - I can find out whether there are statistics on how this has impacted. Are you happy for me to follow this through because I would not be able to answer that without the statistics?

CHAIR - I am, if we can take that on notice. I am interested to know how having a national team has boosted football.

Ms SQUIRES - I am happy to provide that.

CHAIR - Part of our terms of reference is what it has done and what it will do. I appreciate that.

Mr FINCH - Ms Squires, you mentioned shifting demographics; of these demographics you have given us, they all look reasonably positive. What are the major concerns out from these statistics you have given us?

Ms SQUIRES - The concerns we have are the drop we tend to have around the 13- to 14-year-olds and then into senior football. At the moment in males, not in females. As you know, we have had an explosion of females playing football at all levels. A bit of that has to do with demographics, but it is about retaining players, something we need to work on.

Ms SIEJKA - It is coming across a lot of sports too.

Ms SQUIRES - Yes. It is social issues also. At 14 you get a part-time job, but then your friends are or are not playing and all those things come into play, but we want to make sure they have the best, which comes down to coaches, umpires and administrators, so that when the question is 'Do you want to do this or this', you will still play football. That's what we really want to work on: the structures around the player.

Mr FINCH - While I talked before about coaches and the importance of the quality of their abilities, their learning, and how they can deal with young people, what about administrators? Those of us involved in footy have noticed a lot of disenchanted administrators have bitten the dust and have gone out of the game. I am just wondering: what initiatives are you taking to encourage administrators to develop and to stay with the sport?

Ms SQUIRES - I think starting the hubs partly helps that, because currently now there are some administrators who have been volunteering for 40 years to run competitions without getting any support, any pay, any professional development, any of those things. Bringing those hub staff in should help with this. We agree - volunteers all across the state have kept football clubs alive for years and years and years. We want to recognise those people. We want to upskill them as well, because another side of it is that we have volunteers who have been doing it the same way for 40 years and we also need to make sure clubs are run effectively.

It's about engaging those volunteers, as all the sports know. I heard from Volunteering Tasmania that the number of volunteers coming up the pipeline isn't as high as it probably was 10 or 20 years ago. It is about how we make sure it is effective so we are not as reliant on those volunteers week in, week out.

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Ms SIEJKA - Or engaging people differently because the way of volunteering is changing.

Ms SQUIRES - Yes.

Mr ARMSTRONG - On volunteer trainers: does AFL run any courses? Every club you talk to, they always have trouble getting trainers for their three sides et cetera.

Ms SQUIRES - Do you mean the trainers as in sports trainers?

Mr ARMSTRONG - Yes.

Ms SQUIRES - Yes. Some sports trainers' courses are run.

CHAIR - Are they run just in the one area or around the state?

Ms SQUIRES - Throughout the state.

Mr FINCH - So with all that work that has to be done at that grassroots level, the basic level, is the budget allocation AFL Tasmania gets sufficient to cover all these projects that need to be undertaken to move us into this under-18 and VFL team situation?

Ms SQUIRES - We work on a budget. As you know, in any organisation you have a set budget that you work towards. I think we could always put some more money into community football. It is not necessarily always about putting people there; it is about what community football needs and how we best work with them in regard to that. That is something we will continue to work through with the community football leagues and clubs.

CHAIR - On the point of VFL, does AFL Tasmania see that if we can get this licence for the VFL side, the running of that competition will be a litmus test of whether we can successfully run a national AFL team? Do you see it that way - that we have to get that right and show we can do that right?

Ms SQUIRES - I think what we have to get right about that is actually everyone coming together and uniting. That's what I think the VFL does. The VFL and AFL would be quite different in regard to player composition, how you would run the club - all those things are quite separate, but at the same time I think the VFL can show that as a state we can all work together and support the VFL side.

CHAIR - Will our VFL side - hoping we will get it within the two-year period you've suggested - be a feeder club to one of the current national teams? You have all the others.

Ms SQUIRES - No, not all of them.

CHAIR - Some of them. Only some of them are feeder clubs to the other competitions.

Ms SQUIRES - They're standalone.

Mr FINCH - Some years ago, we missed what was a golden opportunity in the psyche of the young people and the playing of their football when we didn't continue our coverage on ABC

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television. I am wondering whether this has been mentioned to you before, Ms Squires, in respect of that opportunity which would attract young people to stay in the statewide league? A big attraction was they and their parents not only could go to the games, but then they could also enjoy the replay or if they could not get to the game, they could watch it on TV. The ABC provided an excellent coverage of the football. That was not renewed in negotiations between AFL Tasmania and the ABC, but I wonder whether it has come across your radar that there might be an opportunity that will attract our young people to footy?

Ms SQUIRES - We livestream some matches of the TSL, which people are more likely watch than a potential ABC game because you can watch it on your phone - you can watch for 10 minutes and then maybe watch again in another 20 minutes; you do not have to watch the whole game. This is something we have done because we do see not everyone nowadays is going to get to the match and be there for two-and-half-hours, but people are still really interested and want to see what is happening. They can check in on their phone, check on the aps, see their scores and watch a bit of the livestream.

Mr ARMSTRONG - There is a little group called Duff TV. Duff TV actually broadcast our local game down at Cygnet. I have had people come to me and say they sit at home and watch it on their iPad or phone. It is a very good coverage and filming.

Are you of a mind to keep a watching brief on this to see whether there is an expansion of the opportunity for the public to watch it on their phone?

Ms SQUIRES - Yes. We provide commentary for those games, we invest to make sure people who cannot be there can have access to the games, and we will continue to do that.

Mr FINCH - That is an attraction for young people and the better the service, the more they are going to thin, 'I might get big money playing out in the regions, but I might get a better chance of being seen and among my peers if I am playing TSL'.

Ms SQUIRES - Yes, if that is what they wanted, absolutely.

CHAIR - Ms Squires, to go back to my previous questions about VFL and not being aligned to a national team. Does AFL Tasmania see this as a likely obstacle? If a player is able to play at the VFL level, would they prefer to play with a team aligned with a current AFL club because of the prospects of getting into that side? Do you see this as an issue or not?

Ms SQUIRES -No. I see playing at the VFL level as the second-tier competition to AFL. Currently, that is the best standard competition underneath the AFL and I think Tasmanians want to play for a Tasmanian team.

CHAIR - Yes. I agree with you, and it is important they do. We're getting close to time. Are there any more questions?

Mr FINCH - In the bigger picture of where you are now and your knowledge now of a year-and-half watching footy in Tasmania, are you able to divulge to us what your feeling would be if we were able to achieve an AFL team in Tasmania? How do you think this would impact on the work you are trying to do with AFL Tasmania?

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Ms SQUIRES - Again, it is hard for me to speculate exactly because it has not happened before and I do not have the statistics. What I do know is that wherever I go around Tasmania, everyone has a very different view. I meet stakeholders all day, every day; some support AFL, VFL, TSL, community league, but everyone has a really different opinion. What I know is my team at AFL Tasmania needs to focus on growing our game, because we all love footy in Tasmania. One thing I know is this is a real footy state - this is a heartland footy state, and we cannot take that for granted. We need to make sure we continue to invest in the grassroots-level footy.

Mr FINCH - You have a lot of work to do, because over the last couple of decades there has been a lot of jaded attitudes about footy coming in to Tasmania. People have left the scene and whether they can be brought back, I do not know, but you are probably looking to build a new future with new enthusiasts.

Ms SQUIRES - Yes, we are.

CHAIR - Trish, I misread the time factor. We have gone beyond time and that will come onto me later on. I am sorry about that, but you have stayed on and that's great. We appreciate that very much. I appreciate the way in which you have given evidence today. You have done it very well so I appreciate that.

We will write to you in relation to those two matters taken on notice. Nat will do that and if you can provide those answers to Nat, that would be great. We will give you reasonable time to do that and we won't be pushing you too much on that. We appreciate it very much, thank you, Trish.

Ms SQUIRES - No worries. Thanks for having me.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.

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LUKE MARTIN CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, TOURISM INDUSTRY COUNCIL TASMANIA WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Luke, welcome. I am sorry we are running late and I apologise for that. Hopefully you will be okay to spend a bit more time with us than that was originally planned. Just to let you know, as came up with our previous witness, Trish Squires, this session is being streamed live. You need to be aware of that. It is not in the correspondence we provided to you originally either. This is a public hearing. It is being recorded. It will be in *Hansard* and will be available to anybody in that form.

You have given evidence to these committees before so I am not going to spend an inordinate amount of time on this. As I said, these hearings are being recorded. I need to tell you that parliamentary privilege applies while you are here, and I think you are well and truly aware of that, and once you leave it may not apply. If we get to a stage where there was something you wanted to pass on to the committee in confidence, you only have to ask that the committee receive it in confidence. We would make that decision as a committee if we get there.

Luke, you have provided a submission to us, and we thank you very much for that submission. We appreciate that very much. At this stage I will give you an opportunity to provide any additional information you would like to pass on or a statement you'd like to make adding to your submission or your overview. We will give you that opportunity and then go onto questions from there.

Mr MARTIN - Thank you for the opportunity and invitation. I think I made the point in the submission that in my experience - and the organisation's experience - we always find the Legislative Council select committee process really valuable. You are able to cut across some of the political debates we have in the state with the makeup of the committee. I always find in the process you go through whenever I've had addressed a select committee around the tourism agenda that you actually go to a lot of trouble and try to get to the nub of the issues. We really appreciate it.

I say that in the context that we took this hearing and the submission we presented as an opportunity to make a statement about AFL. Our organisation - and I am sure you will all be loosely familiar with it - but through our structure we genuinely try to bring together as broad a cross-section of tourism in the visitor economy in Tasmania as we can. Our board has up to 24 members. It has 22 at the moment, which people find extraordinary, but it does genuinely work as a council of industry and that includes all - some large operators, small operators, from the centre of Hobart through to our deputy chairman based out of Stanley.

CHAIR - That is a big board, isn't it?

Mr MARTIN - It is a very big board. It can get up to 24. It is about 22. It's been like it for 25 years; people have a variety of opinions about our organisation but generally it seems to work.

Mr FINCH - They are all on the same page anyway, aren't they?

Mr MARTIN - That is the thing. It is a filter. We only tackle issues when we can try to get a genuine statewide perspective, because if we get into the specifics of issues that do not have a genuine across-the-state tourism outcome, they just do not fly. It has provided a bit of a natural filter. In the context of AFL that is why, until now, we have generally stayed out of the debate,

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which is ironic. I guess people would be surprised, given tourism is often cited particularly in relation to the Hawks deal, as a major driver for why we have AFL in Tassie.

We have not gone into it for two reasons. First, as I think you have seen in previous evidence, there are so many different opinions about this issue and different layers of people invested in it emotionally, commercially, regionally. Also, there is so much invested in this financially and particularly by the parties of our industry that, from our perspective, we felt making an unconstructed debate without a clear timeline or pipeline of where that debate was going to lead to would be unconstructive and just damage the models we have, particularly for the Hawthorn and the Launceston deal. It is just fundamentally important to that local industry.

What has changed and the reason we submitted and took this opportunity to take a position was we felt the momentum was clearly building towards an outcome. I look at that in probably three ways. Obviously, the Godfrey process the Government has initiated. Anyone who has had any experience with Brett - and we have all seen what he has done in the last few weeks; he does not get into issues without an outcome. He is an extraordinary force of nature in his own right. The fact that he and the people he has brought together, who are not political, not government - this is genuinely being driven by external forces essentially of the Tasmanian Government to push this agenda on. This is a big change from previous bids that have been done.

The AFL community is building momentum. There is a sense of inevitability about this question. It is now being put on the front. Third - and probably more critically for us - Tasmania is evolving as a state and as a destination. The expectations around investment that go into demand drivers for Tasmania need to be really carefully scrutinised when you look at the scale of issues we have around us - in industry, opportunities in film, creative industries and major events, and in other sports that are knocking on the door and serious bids from other teams. When you look at the pressure on us for public funds for skills and for visitor infrastructure, the sheer scale of investment that goes into AFL, directly and indirectly, to have content in the state warrants really careful scrutiny. I guess that is what I am hoping that this process will do. It was also important that we develop a position.

That is the context. As you see from our perspective and submission, we are fundamentally supportive of an AFL team in Tasmania. We think it is a natural inevitability of the model we have, the current successful model we have, of the two teams playing at both ends of the state. We look at other states. This is not an isolated Tasmanian issue; indeed, I think when you look at the Hawks deal in particular, Tasmania was a kind of pioneer around the fly-in AFL tourism model, as it was dubbed in the late 1990s.

When you look around the rest of the country, we are not the only state that sees AFL tourism as an opportunity to grow, and I think we are getting in a little bit of a bubble about this. Why would AFL be a good thing economically for the state? Clearly, on any measure, our own experience, but also the way the AFL is growing around the rest of the country, the public funds that are going into stadiums in Perth and Adelaide and the Gold Coast warrant and attract the travelling public or AFL tourism to follow games. The business cases that were put up around the Gold Coast and GWS clearly made AFL tourism a key driver about the public funds that went into it.

Almost every state government is investing tens of millions of dollars, directly and indirectly, into AFL teams around the rest of the country. Again, we fall into this isolated context of suggesting that Tasmania would be the only state that has a government that invests in AFL football whereas

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it seems like every month you open the paper and there is the Victorian government committing millions of dollars to upgrade the training facilities of Collingwood or Essendon or Hawthorn, or God knows who. There is sheer public investment that has gone into the stadium upgrades in Western Australia and Queensland; other state governments get it, they invest. Tasmania is not alone in that process.

We support a team. Critically, importantly, we have landed on a very firm position that an AFL team when - and I use that language now, not if, I think it is a 'when' question - is established that it plays at both ends of the state, and probably equally. There is an inevitability around that. It has to happen. The alternatives are not reasonable. You cannot take games away from the north, nor should you. Also, seeing it as an opportunity, Tasmania's decentralised population is something we need to embrace around an AFL team and the balance of actually having four, five or six games in Hobart. Four, five or six games each year in Launceston, both in terms of making them major events for those destinations and also getting that intrastate travel which we know particularly for Launceston is critically important. You would not want it any other way.

This whole notion in your terms of reference about uniting the state and accepting a decentralisation is one of the strengths of the potential bid or of an eventual team and is something we should be up-front about and acknowledge. I see no reason a team playing six games, the blockbusters probably at an unexpanded UTAS Stadium, Launceston, which is the natural heart of AFL footy now, would not attract crowds from all over the state, plus fly-ins from Melbourne. Then obviously supported by games out of Hobart that would be a great outcome for us as a state.

By any measure, \$34 million a year, or \$28 million, is what the Hawks are projected to generate by their own calculations with five games a year. That puts them among the most lucrative major events the state hosts and the return on those games is immediate and direct. I cannot see an argument why expanding that content and having a footprint, where our own team would attract a more diverse group of opposing with much bigger memberships than some of the teams we see come to Tasmania, would not be a major economic winner for us.

We have not done the modelling of what directly an AFL team would do. I am hopeful the Godfrey process will do this, or the Government will eventually do that. We note the most comparable model we can find is the Gold Coast, ironically. It is no surprise whenever you turn on the Queensland games, or the western Sydney games, that the only parts of the grandstands that have any sort of crowd are the visiting team's supporter-base from Melbourne. I think that has been the basis of their business model.

In terms of comparisons for us, the underpinning of the business model for the Gold Coast Suns - which the AFL accepted as fact - was an additional 121 000 room nights a year would be generated by the Gold Coast Suns and 45 per cent of people going to their games would be from outside the region. That is a greater return than what we currently get out of the games into Tassie. Would our own team generate those sorts of numbers? If it did, that would be a substantial economic windfall particularly for northern Tasmania. I think again that we are falling down a spectrum by saying there are not models just as relevant for us as a destination.

The other key points include a supporter team. We want to see it spread across the two regions. The sense of inevitability building up to this rather than a what if, and if it is a what if, we need to accept the best possible return and carefully scrutinise the return on investment we are getting out of the public funds and also community investment in business investment we are putting into local

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content in the state. We evaluate that against some of the opportunity cost of other sports and major events we have.

CHAIR - Thanks very much for the overview and your discussion there. We appreciate very much your submissions and the way in which you have covered it. It might be best if we could cover that in questioning, and if we could go through the terms of reference. If you are able to, Jo, could you cover the financial side in point (1), the likely benefits to the broader Tasmanian economy and community from having a Tasmanian team in the AFL?

Could we start with a question about the economy?

Ms SIEJKA - My question was to do with the third. I think sometimes they overlap anyway. It is partly an economic answer that will probably need to be discussed.

In terms of the ongoing support required to sustain it, you talked about this almost being inevitable now, but when we have tried different things the past, it has not always been sustainable, or we have not done this, but is a really important part. In your submission you talked about the need to galvanise community support in terms of membership and public support. It is also the community and all the other drivers like tourism and business and that sort of thing. I think an important aspect of this is the sustainability and viability of it. I am curious about your thoughts on the best ways to ensure its ongoing sustainability from your perspective. That's why I think it is a bit economic because it is tourism and dollars, in order to make sure it's not full excitement at the start and then drops off. We need to make sure it is sustainable.

Mr MARTIN - My first point is we often get thrown that message about would it or would it not, and we've been hearing that debate for 30 years. In my lifetime I remember the Tassie Devils falling over in 1994. Tasmania will be an extremely different place in 2030, which is the kind of time frame we are talking about, than it was then. The sustainability question needs to be explored - what do we mean by that economically - the financial viability of a team. Again, from our perspective there are probably two answers to that. I can't imagine a more credible business voice than Brett Godfrey to be managing this process, and I guess we will have to look to him around showing the business case. That's what he has been ultimately tasked to do. I've referred to the fact that people like Saul Eslake and PricewaterhouseCoopers, when they previously looked at this question, have answered it. There was a business model for a team in 1997 and when you look at the numbers now you think, in the scheme of things, that's a pretty low investment compared to the return on investment that would have been generated in the past 20 years.

From our perspective, , so that we can answer the question around ongoing public funding, the returns we have experienced with the Hawks and the experience in other states, I think we shouldn't be afraid of expecting there will be a role for government, purely in major events funding, and you can see the economic returns. All the evidence has been generated to show we will get that return back to the state.

In terms of corporate support, is the Tasmanian market big enough to support an AFL team? Certainly, there is a lot of funding going into AFL major sports at the moment that could potentially be generated.

The other thing, and I guess this is where our industry comes in, when I look at the Gold Coast Suns and who their major sponsors are, Hostplus, a hospitality superannuation firm, which has

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about 30 000 to 40 000 members based in Tasmania, why wouldn't they, as a national player, consider an investment in Tasmania?

Ms SIEJKA - Do you consider there would be significant opportunities for the tourism sector on an ongoing basis?

Mr MARTIN - Yes, you would hope so. It would certainly galvanise local support. With that current corporate support, the test would be whether we would get national investment in our sector to come back into the state to support a team. Look at the evidence: we see, again, that these are not Gold Coast-based businesses supporting the Gold Coast Suns, they are national players. Similarly, most of the Victorian teams have that support. If an economy the size of Geelong's can support an AFL team highly successfully, clearly, by looking at their balance sheet, these questions need to be fully explored. I'm hoping the Godfrey process will do it, but again, there are perceptions of poor old Tassie - can we afford that? The world has moved on and Tassie certainly has moved on. You see an enormous amount of investment fly into our sector, a major lot of national players rolling in to get involved in this state, with significant marketing budgets. Why wouldn't they see Tasmania as appealing as a destination to plant money through an AFL team or indeed an NBL team or something else in the same way as they've seen value in supporting the Gold Coast Suns and the GWS Giants and the North Melbourne Kangaroos in Melbourne?

CHAIR - Before we go to Kerry Finch and Rob Armstrong, have you seen the last document that was provided by Russell Hanson, 'The Betterment of the Game - the Compelling Case - Tasmania Devils'?

Mr MARTIN - Is this the gentleman from the north-west?

CHAIR - No, he's from Lindisfarne.

Ms SIEJKA - There are several versions of submissions. You might have seen this one.

CHAIR - That covers some of the issues you have raised today - the financials and so on. It's a document. If you get a chance you might want to pick it up and have a quick look at it. It covers the financials and what it might do for the economy. It aligns with a lot of what you have said.

Mr FINCH - One of the big drivers economically in our bid to get into the AFL is the television rights. That is where, as you mentioned before, those other national sponsors come in. They do their marketing and look for the opportunities to market their product through the television rights. That is where Tasmania can be advantaged. I think a lot of Tasmanians overlook that opportunity and think, 'Well, how can we afford to put a team in the national competition?'

Mr MARTIN - I guess, building off that, we have been fortunate with the Hawks. We have literally had the Manchester City, Dallas Cowboys of the AFL basically, for the last 15 years, highly successful. Our brand has been front and centre. You can question and criticise the value of that investment, but that exposure when they can win the major premierships for Tasmania has been great ROI for us as a destination. Anecdotally, TT-Line will tell you that whenever they see signage they get an uptake and surge of activity.

Our own Tasmanian experience suggests there is no reason again that major players, particularly in sectors that have an invested heart in Tasmania, cannot see value in partnering in Tasmania. We have seen that in the past, whether it was a PR stunt or genuine, with the Mars

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commitment 10 years ago. These national players are out there. I do not know if the sustainability question will necessarily be about getting the investment to come into the model round, supporting the start-up of the team. It will ultimately be about its success and ongoing ability to attract and retain players and be successful and keeping those teams [inaudible].

Mr FINCH - Luke, you deal in tourism circles and with business people. They are pretty hardnosed in respect of their view of something like this that may create opportunities for them in the future. Do you get any sense of negativity about the debate, about whether we should be putting our energies and moving down this track? Or with the Brett Godfrey influence - have they said, 'Well, hang on, there might be something in this'?

Mr MARTIN - The prism of this footy conversation in our sector for a long time has been around Launceston. As I say, Tasmania pioneered, through Jim Bacon's decision, to invest in the UTAS stadium, or York Park, whatever we call it, and to partner the Hawks, and its success. That has been extraordinarily successful over a long time. We lose sight of that. We have had a great partner on field. Again, we pay a lot, but their investment back in the state, in terms of their success on field, has been great.

The footy conversation for us for a long time as an industry has been very much geared around the critical importance of those four games, particularly in winter. The operators will tell you that if there is a Saturday afternoon game in Launceston, they have a very busy weekend. If there is a Sunday night game, everyone shoots back down to Hobart after the game and they do not get that return. They tell you, to an operator, of the business impact when the rostering is good and when the games are on and how critically important they are to keeping them busy over the winter months.

I think what is changing over the last few years has been this evolving thinking around how we grow the model. Is the current the best, the most opportune model we have going forward? Can we sustainably grow it? Those who are not football nuts are seeing the events' potential and saying, 'Well, for the umpteen million dollars as a community, government and corporate that we are investing into the AFL structure in Tasmania now, could we enhance that and grow it? What is the future of it?' Clearly, I think by any comparable measure, the best way to evolve that is to have a team of our own. Again, the potential, the reality, of having a Tasmania versus Collingwood match on Saturday afternoon in Launceston, in a 35 000-seat stadium would be the biggest major event the state has ever had.

Mr FINCH - It would be.

Mr MARTIN - That is the reality, not a one-off every year.

Mr FINCH - And given that time when, as you highlighted, that winter is, I suppose, a struggle - that might be an appropriate word - for tourism operators, particularly those who would make their infrastructure part of the program. They have to accommodate them, and be able to feed them and get them in and get them out of the place. Winter is that crunch time for a lot of those businesses. This must look to be pretty helpful for the future.

Mr MARTIN - Yes, absolutely. The model evolving includes having - I am a St Kilda member, I get bombarded with invitations to go Virgin, which has the rights to do the AFL travel, months out from them hosting a game in China, Townsville, Gold Coast, Adelaide, wherever the Saints are playing. I get invitations, package deals to go and travel. We do that really well at the Hawks, particularly through their membership. What we do not do at all well is the visiting teams.

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In the context of some of these teams - in the case of Richmond and Collingwood, they have 100 000 members - they have the potential to fly down to partner and make 11 very major sporting events in the state a year over those four or five months when the region is quiet. It's the natural evolution of that model. You are right about this - how do we stimulate these events in regions in winter months to keep these operators active and to keep them running all year and keep their winter months just above water because then they make their money in the summer? AFL has proven here, particularly in Launceston, and around the rest of the country, that it's an extremely effective way of stimulating activity.

Ms SIEJKA - Talking about the location where a team might fit - obviously it's a lot of speculation, and that there is currently no team and we're discussing those sorts of things - a number of people have raised that while you'd want to ensure all the state was engaged and things have been happening in Launceston, other aspects might need to be considered where Hobart might be a better option. For example, one of the people spoke about whether there are things in the community - in terms of employment or other working opportunities - or that kind of thing where Hobart might provide those things but Launceston might not. I was just wondering what your thoughts would be if it were in Hobart, because you have had quite a bit to say about the benefits to the northern region.

Mr MARTIN - In terms of tourism I can't make a link, just having a strong opinion.

Ms SIEJKA - It can be a personal thing and that's fine. It was more that if it were in Hobart, there would clearly be other benefits to the business community here, but I'm picking up from what you are saying is that it's northern tourism where it is needed and it's filling a gap perhaps.

Mr MARTIN - I'm probably emphasising the point from our perspective, and I am not trying to undersell the value of the three games a year we're getting in Hobart again, but the conversation around this has always been a bit of a risk, particularly a negativity in the north about losing something. I guess from our perspective, all the anecdotal evidence, particularly from the northern business communities, shows very much that there cannot be worse-off outcome so where the team is based, where the players are living, I get the arguments about -

Ms SIEJKA - You can see similar benefits in the south.

Mr MARTIN - Well, certainly having your own team. I think, say, in an ideal scenario you have the team playing six games in Hobart and five games in Launceston, what's that going to look like, or vice versa? Flip it from one year to the next. I think the reality is probably that you would develop one of the stadiums as the showcase stadium.

Ms SIEJKA - Facilities does seem to be a recurring issue.

Mr MARTIN - The Tasmanian duplication we are notorious for doing and have done and then, from this debate, we will continue to do again. From our perspective, the notion of having the central home hub for the blockbuster, so to speak, and whether that's the training as well, but having that in the north, would make strategic sense.

Again, having players moving from a big city like Melbourne or if you are recruited from Melbourne earning enormous salaries that most of us can dream about as 20-year-olds, how is that going to play out living in regional Tasmania? Maybe not, it's Hobart with the more likely potential scale. I can understand the arguments about having the team based in Hobart, but I think the trade-off for that is that at a minimum you would expect - and I think it's logical and sensible that

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the centre of the state, and UTAS stadium is a wonderful venue, on the doorstep to the city. Again, Bellerive has its place, but I think logically that would be the home for the blockbusters. If you had the two-team, two-model solution for the state, the northern one would be the central point for the north-west. It's the same argument that we've got now; it would make sense to really develop that as the larger stadium and hopefully that would be the drawcard for people to travel from across the state and over. That might be the trade-off for having the team administration and training based in the capital city.

Mr ARMSTRONG - I have had a lot of people say to me about the amount of money the state puts into football and this is more to do with tourism than the AFL side. If that money were actually put into subsidising people coming to Tasmania for airfares and TT Line, would this have a better return than having North Melbourne and Hawthorn teams playing in the state? You could subsidise people coming to Tasmania over the winter months and as a part of the conditions they would have to stay for a longer period. Has that ever been raised with you?

Mr MARTIN - You have to remember also the intent of AFL, particularly in the north, was never established around economic grounds. If I look at all the intel back then, it was about -

Mr ARMSTRONG - They are saying they only come in Friday night and go home Sunday, or come in Saturday and go home Monday. If they have subsidised fares, they could stay a minimum of a week and spread the money throughout the whole of Tasmania.

Mr MARTIN - I understand the argument; I just question it. This industry has for two or three generations been trying to evolve from being a cottage industry. Now we generally believe and should take pride that we are probably the leading tourism industry in the country in terms of our planning and strategy, and most say that now. We have been struggling - how do you crack the nut of winter seasonality? The only thing that has proven more effective than anything else has been events, cultural events - obviously the Dark MOFO factor - business events and conferences particularly in the south of the state, and obviously sporting events. The question about where you would redirect that money - absolutely, have that debate on the return of investment of AFL football compared to other options, but when it comes to the investment that goes into AFL, you know by any measure, particularly in the north, that it shows the return on investment has been there. If you took it away, could you spend that money elsewhere and have the same results? Free tickets maybe, but there is also the prevailing argument, that if you do not have an event, you could try to convince Melbournians to come down to Tasmania in the middle of July. If there is not a major event to stimulate them, you could just about pay them to come down because they all escape for summer as we do and has been the generation problem. The success of AFL is just for those stimulants.

Ms SIEJKA - Dark MOFO.

Mr MARTIN - And cultural events. That is the way I would look at it, is AFL investment justified, as opposed to putting more money into, say, cultural events, another sporting competition or more visitor infrastructure that draws people down here. It is a legitimate argument and question, which is what you as a committee are considering.

CHAIR - Luke, you made a very important point in your submission and overview: if we get an AFL side, a state government probably should continue to financially support a national team. I think that is what you are saying, because statements have been made that the state should not have to put any money at all. I do not subscribe to that. I think you indicated the Queensland government continues to put in money annually for the Gold Coast Suns.

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Mr MARTIN - I do not know if they continue to do, but the state government and the federal government certainly did fund that stadium, and I am sure they would. If you scratch the surface you do not have to look far for AFL teams because they are essentially public companies. You look at their annual reports and balance sheets and you can see the amount of funding in grants from state government authorities. It is not a direct taxpayer handout, it is Road Safety Victoria, Quit Victoria or the Queensland Department of Community Services - the amount and scale of grants these teams receive because they are effective and governments support them. The suggestion that there would not be a role for Tasmania to continue to support the infrastructure of a team, invest in our stadiums, which is a role of government, or indeed continue to support an AFL team's operating costs for community benefits, economic benefits. I do not subscribe to that at all - there would have to be an ongoing role and, after Mr Armstrong's point, I probably the question government about what is the right amount and what else can the government do with that money, which is obviously the role for the government at the end of the day.

CHAIR - Russell Hanson and yourself have gone into the return to the states from the current contribution the state Government makes to Hawthorn and North Melbourne. There is a huge income return to the state in relation to that investment. It would really be a small investment at when you look at the return to the state.

Mr FINCH - I wanted to inform you that the original colours for the Tasmanian jumper, which I know you will be promoting, were myrtle, magenta and primrose.

Mr MARTIN - Household colours, those ones. We'll stick with maroon, green and yellow. Just to illustrate it, that is about the branding point. Again, how do you measure the impact on our brand and the economic value of having 2.2 million people tuned in to watch the Brisbane Lions versus Richmond final on the weekend? Imagine the day when we see that magenta, primrose and red. This is not a paid ad sticking a logo up on a jumper. How do you measure that and what is the government's role in investing in the brand exposure of what is the largest and most supported sporting organisation in the country - having a full-time presence, playing games in every corner of the country, just having Brand Tasmania out there? There is clearly an ongoing role for government.

How do you measure it? Branding gurus will come up with an answer to that. I think it's just the power of having the Tasmanian brand out there, with a national footprint on what is essentially the biggest stage in the country, without it being tacked onto someone else's jumper, but with a legitimate colour of our own.

Mr FINCH - You may have missed it in the cricket - being a bit of a cricket tragic, particularly at this time when we are winning - on television broadcast from the UK, but there was a chap wearing a Hawthorn jumper and he was Tasmanian. The commentator said, 'There is somebody from Tasmania.'

CHAIR - Is that right, with a Hawthorn jumper?

Mr FINCH - With a Hawthorn jumper, and there was Tasmania emblazoned across there.

Mr MARTIN - We have seen that exposure. The inevitability of this is, how else does the model evolve? Is this the norm? Are we locked into a status quo model of having two outstanding teams - in the case of the Hawks particularly, an outstanding club, and the Kangaroos, a fledgling

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club - playing at the end of the state indefinitely? Is that the future for AFL Tasmania? Or can we be brave enough and prepared to make the investments to go to the next level? My sense is that overwhelmingly in our sector, and I think increasingly in the Tasmanian community, people have decided no, it's time to evolve and go to that next level. Are we brave enough as Tasmanians to do it? I think the Government is on side, or three sides of politics are on side.

We have smart businesspeople telling us that it can stack up. The only one missing in the room at the moment is AFL. We can't get what they are not prepared to give us.

CHAIR - Does any other state have that model? In South Australia, were games played there before they had their own, before Adelaide came on the scene? I don't think they did. I think Tasmania is the only state that has really gone with that model of bringing these interstate teams in.

Mr FINCH - They had their own very strong SANFL competition. Their appetite for footy, in a lot of ways, was covered by that. But then, of course, the television started to play a stronger role. That's when the interest would have grown exponentially.

CHAIR - Mr Martin, you commented in your submission about the revenue generation from Hawthorn and North Melbourne coming here. Then you go on to say that with our own state side one could expect that revenue to increase. I think you are absolutely right there. Are you basing that on what has happened in Queensland or in some other area, or is that just the way you see it? Is that the way the board sees it?

Mr MARTIN - Yes. I think the capacity to capture and to host a broader range of teams would be important. We know the economic return is greater when we host - well, twofold actually. The return on games is interesting. We know a lot of locals really dislike games against WA, from the number of times we have seen the Dockers play in Launceston. We know Western Australians who come over and follow the game will generally spend longer in the state, and the same for South Australians, more than the Melbournians, who would generally just fly down for the day and then fly back.

Nevertheless, when we have the big teams - Richmond occasionally comes down, Geelong and St Kilda - the crowds are bigger and the economic returns are greater. With the concept of having 11-game seasons, with our own team rotating through every team, including the major national teams, once every couple of years having Collingwood come down and Essendon, and then the rotation of the interstate teams, I think we can expect that the return from the interstate travel will be significant. Then also having a team of our own, which hopefully will galvanise the Tasmanian football community. While the Hawks and Kangaroos have a good following, I think we can all assume that a Tasmanian team would have a much greater following.

The intrastate travel, the southerners moving up to the north to watch a game, the northerners to the south. I think the assumption you can make is those baseline numbers from the Hawks deal would be a reasonable baseline to say that an AFL team would generate a greater return than that.

I don't see the risks of having our own team would be likely to generate a lesser economic return than what we currently see out of the Hawks.

CHAIR - I can see a Tasmanian side generating a huge amount more, in my opinion. Russell Hanson goes into that in his document as well.

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As you have said, bringing in these other clubs, these Victorian clubs, for instance, and top-quality clubs with big followings, I think one can reasonably see exactly what would happen.

You also commented in your overview about other sports coming in. If they get in first, there is always the belief, or view, that it could thwart an AFL side coming to this state. Do you see it that way or not? We are talking about NBL at present.

Mr MARTIN - Good question. I think that is a 'How big is the pie?' conversation as well. I am not actually involved personally, less so from an organisational perspective, in the NBL proposal. I can certainly see there is a market for that.

Again, the first mover advantage. The largest untapped markets without a national sporting presence in the football and basketball codes, are us and the Sunshine Coast. We are larger than the Sunshine Coast. They are the largest markets that currently don't have either an A-League team, an AFL team, a rugby league team or an NBL team. We are the next cab off the rank for any sporting team that wants to expand to a new market.

I guess, first mover advantage - good luck to whoever it is.

The AFL has had a chance for 40 years. We are still knocking on the door. If the A-League, or the NBL wanted to get in, good luck to them. I guess that would change the dynamic again. Again, to go back to Mr Armstrong's point, with the return on the investment of public funds, we are the best bang for the buck, I think. The AFL is the most likely to generate the tourism activity, so from our agenda that is probably still the top priority. I am not sure NBL or A-League necessarily have the same runs on the board when it comes getting people to move, and that ultimately is our first interest from our perspective. And to national audiences, yes.

The NBL I think, is great low-hanging fruit for us in terms of getting a footprint in the national market. Basketball is a sleeping giant in Tasmanian sport when you look at the participation numbers. We should pursue that with vigour.

Obviously, also, the Cricket Association of Sydney is going, 'Well, hang on, we are already in the national audience, what about us?' Again, we have to make sure that the limited corporate dollar and public dollar can spread.

CHAIR - We've done well with the national cricket side, haven't we? It has been supported well and it works well.

Mr FINCH - Held out for many, many years.

Mr MARTIN - Generates Australian Test captains. It's just a machine.

CHAIR - Any other questions? Thanks. I'm okay. We are pretty well spot-on time. Luke, thank you very much for your submission. It covered the points very well.

Just so I am clear on the submission - it is a board submission?

Mr MARTIN - Yes. I have strong views on that myself. As I said, a lot of us have deep emotion and passion for this topic. A lot of Tasmanians do.

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To my credit, again, it is part of the board structure. We held off, but that has been endorsed by the full council and, again, it was a pretty significant step for us to actually go to the point of actually submitting that level of detail.

CHAIR - The committee appreciates it very much. It was a great submission as well. So well done on that. We thank you very much for the way you have answered the questions today. Thank you for that.

Mr MARTIN - Good luck on your deliberations.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.