

WEST AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL COMMISSION — STATE FUNDING

967. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Minister for Sport and Recreation:

I would first like to acknowledge the president of East Fremantle Football Club and guests in the Speaker's gallery.

I refer to the Public Accounts Committee's recent report into the use of state funding by the West Australian Football Commission. Can the minister update the house on his response to the report and its findings?

Mr S.A. Millman: Great question!

The SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Mount Lawley.

Mr M.P. Murray: Will you give me the call?

The SPEAKER: Yes; I will give you the call for the last time. My mate Mick.

Mr M.P. MURRAY replied:

I promise not to cry. Thank you very much for that question. It is a very important question on where we go with football into the future. Although the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries has not had the time to prepare a formal response to the report and its findings since it was released just recently, it would be remiss of me not to provide some comment because I will not be here in the future, and also Parliament will rise.

The committee itself identified the complexity, breadth and importance of football and the significant changes that have occurred since the creation of the West Australian Football Commission in 1989. I make the comment that in 1990, there was another press release that sounded very similar to the problem that we have had in recent times. Sometimes we see the full circle go around, and we are back there again. As we know, Aussie Rules has a strong brand recognition and loyalty, which benefited football in WA through revenue from the Eagles and the Dockers, but this has come at the cost of the identity and recognition of the West Australian Football League as the pre-eminent competition in Western Australia. A lot of clubs have struggled with not being the number one entity in the state, and many people recognise that. But it has a challenge. The challenge for the West Australian Football League is how it remains sustainable, how it creates a following, and, as outlined in the committee's report, whether this could be through things such as a return to the Colts—there is movement in the station on that area already—or be totally responsible for junior football so that it has an identity on the way through.

The report also shows that the government's process with the WAFC is about as complicated as it gets. Even today, I shake my head that it was able to be put into place. It is something that the WAFC has expressed a desire to change. However, as it is an incorporated body, the only way it can change is if those with the existing power—the AFL clubs, the WAFL clubs and the commissioners—agree to relinquish the power and redistribute it to others. As we know, that will be a very difficult task for anyone in that area. It would be very strange to say, "We're going to give away our power." If we have a look at the voting rights in there, something has to change. It is the same for the Eagles and Dockers. They were not created as clubs, as some VFL clubs were; they were formed as businesses. The Eagles and Dockers are wholly owned by the WAFC. The general public are not in fact members but season ticket holders because they are businesses. Again, as the report shows, this can change, but there needs to be a willingness to implement change to give up that power.

When young players make it through the AFL draft but do not make the team and are essentially discarded, as we have seen over the last couple of weeks in the draft system, the committee points out: who is responsible? We have heard some tragic stories of kids who have been drafted, do not quite get there and then fail when they go back into their communities as well. That is something that really has to be looked at hard.

The added challenge is: how does an organisation balance the diversity of the sport with the challenges of the mental wellbeing of elite players who do not make it to provide participation opportunities for young kids in not only communities, but also remote communities? It is not simply a matter of funding. As the report shows, WAFC receives more funds than any other sport, whether through grants or agreeing to provide content at Optus Stadium. We all know that many smaller sports would love to get the \$11 million a year that comes from the stadium agreement. I have been there when we have given cheques of \$5 000 to some of those smaller sports and they get down on their knees with gratitude, yet here we have the big boys of town whingeing about how much they get. Those smaller clubs do a lot more with far less in their time, something that the football commission and the elite clubs must recognise. It becomes a matter of choice through informed decision-making.

The report shows that the WAFC is doing many good things for the community. The arguments in the report more relate to whether the choices that the WA Football Commission is making are ones that the community feels it should be making. It has lost touch with its community. It must work hard to get back and gain that respect from many of those areas.

On female grassroots participation, the report makes a number of observations, which I will take on board, particularly the development of appropriate facilities to accommodate the rapidly growing female participation

numbers. But I should point out that this increase in female participation has not been reflected at the executive and board level of football in WA and I believe it is incumbent on the WA Football Commission to lead by example.

Passion in sport is one of its greatest strengths and at times its greatest weakness when passion overrides or clouds more logical judgement and process. Again, this is highlighted throughout the report. Sport is not simple. The report confirms that, but there are crystal-clear areas for improvement in transparency and representation decision-making.

The issues and challenges outlined in this report also apply to many other larger sports in Australia, and the pursuit to commercialise is a topic that has led to many robust conversations nationally as to the future management of sport. I look forward to continuing to monitor how the report progresses and the way the West Australian Football League and the West Australian Football Commission use this opportunity to reach common ground and reset Australian Rules football in Western Australia.

As many would be aware, most major sports have had a major rethink and restructure due to COVID. This, along with the parliamentary report, is a great opportunity for the WAFC to consider and implement changes that will ensure a robust future for football in WA.

Point of Order

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I appreciate —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! I will hear the point of order.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I appreciate that this is the minister's last response to a question, but it is a very long answer. I ask that you ask him to tighten his response to the relevancy of the question that was asked.

The SPEAKER: He was asked about the football commission.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: It is a very long answer, Mr Speaker.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: That is good, even with a threat. I have to think of the Clerk's ears when I use this all the time. I think the member has had a pretty good whack there. Minister, are you ready to finish?

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Mr Speaker, with due respect, may I finish my report —

The SPEAKER: Last one, yes.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: — by saying thank you to everyone in the chamber. I wish you all a Merry Christmas.

The SPEAKER: And bah humbug to you, member for Dawesville. I give the call to the member for Hillarys.

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: I am glad that was not directed at me, Mr Speaker.