

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO USE OF STATE FUNDING BY THE WEST AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL COMMISSION



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
MONDAY, 31 AUGUST 2020**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Dr Tony Buti (Chair)
Mr Dean Nalder (Deputy Chair)
Mr Vincent Catania
Mr Simon Millman
Mrs Lisa O'Malley**

Hearing commenced at 10.15 am**Mr DARRELL PANIZZA****Private citizen, examined:**

The CHAIR: Thanks very much, Mr Panizza, for coming today. Thank you for appearing today to provide evidence related to the committee's inquiry into the use of state funding by the West Australian Football Commission. My name is Tony Buti, I am the committee chair and member for Armadale. To my left is Mr Dean Nalder, the committee's deputy chair and member for Bateman, and I believe you have been very naughty to him outside to bring back memories! To his left is Mrs Lisa O'Malley, member for Bicton, and to my right is Mr Simon Millman, member for Mount Lawley. Mr Vince Catania, member for North West Central, is an apology as he could not get back from up north. It is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of this committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. While your evidence is protected by parliamentary privilege, this privilege does not apply to anything that you might say outside today's proceedings. I would also like to advise that today's hearings will be broadcast live over the Parliament House website.

Do you have any questions about your attendance here today?

Mr PANIZZA: No, other than I think it is important to my journey as far as being involved in the Western Australian footy scene. I just want to get across to you what it is like being someone from the country.

The CHAIR: We will have a series of questions, but would you like to start with an opening statement or some comments?

Mr PANIZZA: I suppose from my point of view, I started as an 18-year-old boy who left Albany, and as of today I am still on the board at the Claremont footy club, so I have had a long associated time with Western Australian football, and in regards to being involved at the Claremont Football Club. Also, like I say, my area at the Claremont Football Club at the moment is development footy, which is a major part of being able to give kids that come from the country the same opportunity as people that are in the city. My passion now is to give something back to make sure that those kids get that opportunity. I do have an opinion on how those types of things happen and I guess it is from the stuff that we have heard in the few previous months of, you know, like what has happened to some of the funding that has been delivered to the footy commission and where has it gone.

The CHAIR: In regards to development, which you said is your particular focus, particularly in the country region obviously, what is your assessment on the WA Football Commission's role or assistance in that?

Mr PANIZZA: When I left Claremont in 1999 as their coach, I went back to Albany and started coaching in the country and sent some boys to Perth to play WAFL footy. They were rejected because of a few issues in regard to skill level and also fitness. So I started an academy in Albany, which was done off my own back and through funding through sponsorship and those types of things, to actually get them up to a standard where they could come to Perth and compete with the other boys in regards to fitness level and skill level. What we always found was any country boys that come to Perth were always sent home very shortly after attending the city—no social skills of being able to live in the city and also just their fitness level and their skill level was not up to standard. So we started working on that. In the proceeding 11 years, we had 10 drafted into the AFL

that had come through that academy, and basically what we found was that we were doing all the work and everybody else was taking the accolades of “We developed those players” and they had them for 12 months. We had them through Auskick, they paid to play Auskick, they paid to play junior footy, and what we were receiving is \$1 000 to whichever league club they had played for in the country.

[10.20 am]

Mr D.C. NALDER: Whereas the league club would receive \$40 000, is that it, or something like that?

Mr PANIZZA: The Claremont Football Club would receive \$35 000 per draftee, but on saying that, we have got a very good relationship with Claremont and they were supporting us with additional funds to make sure that academy was working.

The CHAIR: The WAFL club, Claremont in this case, provided you with support, but the commission did not?

Mr PANIZZA: Once the commission had taken the development footy away from the WAFL clubs, which is all WAFL clubs, there was sort of like it felt of disconnection and we had to really bat really hard. Because of, I suppose, what we had developed over the 11 years, we were able to then still be able to go through our development officer to get funding to come through to do our program still, but it become them versus us and having to feel as though that we were disconnected from what Claremont had structured in the previous periods.

The CHAIR: Under the current structure that is put in place by the West Australian footy commission, do you feel that the Albany region, which obviously is Claremont, is harder to maintain that linkage?

Mr PANIZZA: It is a lot harder to maintain that linkage because you do not get the access that we did with Claremont, and also Claremont coming to Albany and servicing the area. We probably have not seen anyone from the footy commission for as long as last year’s grand final, which would have been September, which is nearly 12 months. In regard to that, I know that we use COVID-19 as “We can’t get out of the city”, or whatever, but the disconnection is there. The Western Australian football clubs are disconnected as well. In the development footy area, we are trying to develop footballers to have football in the next 10 years of their life, and in regard to that, football clubs, I suppose, are passionate and want their football clubs to survive and have players come through. The whole process when they start development footy at 14, is to have them as supporters in later years as well. If they are all getting told how to run the program outside of what that football club’s beliefs are, there are two masters and one deliverer, and it becomes a little bit difficult.

Mr D.C. NALDER: So your view is that it should have stayed in the hands of the WAFL?

Mr PANIZZA: It should have stayed in the hands of the WAFL clubs, and then if anyone was not really developing or doing the right thing or using the funding correctly, there should have been someone then able to go to those clubs and assist them. If you have a look at the East Fremantle Football Club and the Claremont Football Club and the number of players that they both had drafted prior to the football commission taking away the development football from the footy clubs, they were getting more than their ample share. Also, as noted by the AFL, the two football clubs and their country zones are both hotspots as far as per population goes. I think the Great Northern Football League rates fourth in Australia and I think the great southern rates fifth in Australia as being able to provide footballers. Again, that is due to the inclusiveness of what those two football clubs have done for their zones.

Mrs L.M. O’MALLEY: I just want to ask a question about the academy. The academy system and what you have developed sounds like a great place for support and development of the player, like the whole player, so it is not just about finding those elite athletes, but also supporting them on a

pathway to adulthood, and all those important steps. As far as the academy system is concerned, if it is something that has worked and worked well, how can that be better supported?

Mr PANIZZA: We, on numerous occasions, have had discussions in regard to those types of things, one in a commissioner not more than 18 months ago in trying to secure, hopefully, our stability and being able to get some funding to continue on when we found out that the footy commission was taking away development footy from the football club. It was all about not just football; it was about education and drugs. We have four life skills sessions during an eight-week period where it is about drugs, driving, alcohol and just being good general citizens. You are right, it was more about delivering something to those kids, but also trying to make sure that they developed so that they could play footy and enjoy the football and the camaraderie and the friendships that you do get out of all that.

The CHAIR: Albany—I am just looking up population size—excluding Mandurah, it would probably be in the top five country towns or cities that we have in Western Australia, around that anyway. Is there any West Australian Football Commission employee stationed in Albany?

Mr PANIZZA: Yes, there is. He is the development officer down there. In regard to what their roles are, they are changing and they change them regularly. One of them is that they start with Auskick and they are there to try to help that. There are about six or seven different people that run those things, and it is centralised in Perth, and we would not have seen any of them out in the country in the last 12 months.

The CHAIR: In regard to West Australian Football Commission commissioners, when was the last time you saw one in Albany?

Mr PANIZZA: Well, I could not tell you. I do not think I have ever seen one in Albany. Whenever we need to speak to people, we have got to come to Perth, and such is my little journey this morning, which started at 10 to five. Commissioners, I have not seen them in Albany, no. I have not seen anyone from the football commission. I reckon the last time we would have seen anybody in great mass was when the Boston report came out, when they came and told us that there was no money and we had to do these things and whatever else, and tried to sell to the country football fraternity that all football was going to become centralised and they were going to run it.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Is this Boston Consulting Group?

Mr PANIZZA: Yes.

Mr D.C. NALDER: It sounds like a standard operating procedure for a consultancy when they come across a decentralised program to actually say to centralise it; and, if it is centralised, decentralise it! That is how they make their fees. This sounds ludicrous. How much engagement was there with the WAFL clubs, as a director, or with the community programs you had to actually work with you to get the best outcome?

Mr PANIZZA: From my point of view sitting on the board at the Claremont Football Club, I was asked to go to a football commission meeting, which Mr Gavin Taylor chaired. Basically, then we were told what was and how it was all going to come together and work. As far as the CEOs go, I do not believe the clubs were all that involved, not from a board point of view. We were advised of different things at different times. I know from the country point of view, not that I am the be-all and end-all of football people in the country by any stretch of the imagination, I was never asked my opinion or what I actually thought, and that is in numerous years of being involved in that particular area—even just to sit down and maybe give them some reasons why. I have done the whole journey. I started as an 18-year-old boy in the country, and mum and dad were the ones, and they still are

the ones, that support their children financially and those types of things through to having an opportunity to play at a WAFL club and then maybe get drafted into the AFL.

[10.30 am]

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: I have a quick question about the development pathway. I mean, you are developing them all the way up, from Auskick until they get to a certain point. When we had the commission in, we talked about their role in development and having taken over the colts program. Given that you are supporting them in their development pathway until that point, how much support are you currently given at the grassroots level from the commission?

Mr PANIZZA: Basically, they write the program and then they send it to the development officer in Albany, and then we have to deliver the program as volunteers.

The CHAIR: As volunteers. So there is no funding?

Mr D.C. NALDER: There is no funding anymore?

Mr PANIZZA: There is no funding to have somebody actually paid in a role of making sure that Auskick is done correctly, no. I am actually the footy coordinator on the junior council in Albany and we are not getting any funding to actually run junior footy. All those funds come from the parent when they enrol their child. Sport take their bit off and we keep our bit. Auskick is controlled by the AFL; it is not actually controlled by the West Australian Football Commission.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: My daughters play in year 7 and 8. My kids have come through junior footy. There is Auskick; again, all that disconnection. Auskick is AFL; the junior footy is all about the volunteers and the parents—my husband is the manager and does all of that. There is money from fees that goes to the football commission, but what I am hearing you say is that that does not come back in a direct way, if at all.

Mr PANIZZA: No.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: The other question I have is around capacity building. For example, to run a good junior program, you need coaches and all the rest of it. How much investment does the football commission put into that capacity building in that space?

Mr PANIZZA: The only investment is when I ring up the development officer and say, "We want to have a meeting." We work very closely together. We are very lucky that we have Matt Bishop in Albany, who works very, very closely with us. We sit down and we try to deliver the football commission's coaching protocols from what we see online, because it has all been centralised and they just do it online and send it out, and you read it and you do it and you press a few buttons.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: But no clinics, no workshops?

Mr PANIZZA: They expect Matt Bishop, who is employed by, I suppose, the country footy league pays some of his wage, which is also through the West Australian Football Commission. He performs a level 1 coaching course, which he will present to the region, but then he comes and asks people like myself, who are qualified coaches, to deliver the program and speak at these things as well. We do not get paid for that; it is just another one where it is our time that we give up because we are passionate about the sport.

The CHAIR: What is the actual academy called?

Mr PANIZZA: It is the Great Southern Storm.

The CHAIR: That is financed how?

Mr PANIZZA: At the present time, through Claremont. We put in a submission to them and we were able to secure \$15 000. We fundraised another \$25 000.

The CHAIR: So WAFL and fundraising, and nothing from the commission itself?

Mr PANIZZA: The football commission would be paying through giving it to the development coordinator at the Claremont footy club. We have still been able to secure that, but I would think that that would be in jeopardy now with what has happened in the football world.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: Are there other academies like this around?

Mr PANIZZA: No, this is unique. The Great Northern Football League, which is East Fremantle's zone, have started a Shark Pack. They have tried to follow in the footsteps of what we have done. They have been reasonably successful in doing it. I am sure that they would be even better if they were able to get some more funding. The greatest problem is the distance; that is, the travel and the cost to travel. You cannot just turn up here. We have had academies that have slept on the floor of football clubs because we cannot accommodate or actually fund sleeping in a hotel or a hub or a resort or anything like that. We have to do what we can do. I changed that in my own way, and that was I went to see some businesspeople in Albany and was able to raise the additional funds. Now we stay at a government youth camp. At least they have got a bed and it is a little bit more organised.

The CHAIR: So what is the reach of your academy geographically?

Mr PANIZZA: It is the Claremont zone. Basically, we do not actually alienate anyone from any other WAFL club if the kids go to school in Albany. We actually have a kid playing league footy for South Fremantle at the present time. He had come through our junior development. We go out to Ravensthorpe, Jerramungup, Ongerup, Gnowangerup. It is the Claremont zone.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Not from Wagin, though.

Mr PANIZZA: No, not Wagin.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I am a Wagin boy.

Mr PANIZZA: Yes. If you did go to school in Albany, at boarding school, or was doing an apprenticeship, we still accommodate them with no bias.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: How many boys in that program currently?

Mr PANIZZA: We have anywhere up to about 30 to 35. The football commission has developed a 14s program, and we call them the "Mini" Storm. They are the boys that are initiated into the program. We have got 30 of those at the moment who are training, who will have a game of footy against the Claremont 14s in a development group. There is no money for that, so parents will have to bring them to Perth. Again, it is one of those things where the "Mini" Storm have got their own jumpers and those types of things, which we have purchased and done all those things through our own work.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Darrell, there seems to have been quite a sizeable shift from the footy commission from one which is primarily, historically, governance and maybe an overarching strategy for footy, to being a lot more operational. It seems like they are getting operationally involved in the game by trying to get into the whole development path and control it. Do you have some views on that shift? Were there actually, from your awareness, again through your involvement with Claremont, any policy changes from the footy commission that actually changed the structure and organisation of the footy commission?

Mr PANIZZA: We all know that with governance, it is very important to make sure that everybody is following some sort of protocols and making sure that there is best delivery and that it is done in the correct fashion. A lot of football clubs and sporting organisations—I chair a government-funded body in Albany in regard to sport—we are all totally aware of our obligations and what needs to transpire to make sure that everything is done correctly. It got involved in, I suppose, the paperwork

side of it, but is that really their role? It is not really. Where they have gone to now is that they are trying to have control over the development of the players rather than just administer the program or the business side of it all. They have tried to get involved in best practice of how you should train, what drills you should do and all those types of things. When you look at the TAC Cup, an AFL TAC Cup competition gets over \$500 000 a year to run their organisation over there. They are looking at veering back to where do these kids go to after, because a lot of the kids that are in the TAC Cup in Victoria are finding nowhere after 18: “Where do I go to? I’ve got no association with any community footy because I was taken out when I was 14, and I don’t know anybody or where I should go back to.” Again, the relevance of the football club. We all know that football clubs are great community places for kids that are lost in society as well—it can be something that brings them back into the community and understand how to fit back into society and those types of things. They are sort of getting involved in that side of it, which is not healthy. Football clubs, generally, have been going for 100 years and they are the ones that understand what their community needs are, and different areas need different things.

[10.40 am]

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Was there ever a discussion amongst stakeholders in footy, amongst the clubs or the commission, about the commission’s change in direction that Mr Nalder was talking about? Was there ever a debate about “We’re going to shift responsibility for operational matters on to the footy commission and take it off the clubs”, or was that something that the commission did of its own accord?

Mr PANIZZA: I never heard it at board level. It was basically told this is what was going to happen.

The CHAIR: Darrell, in your view, with your long history of football playing and administration, what should be the role of the West Australian Football Commission?

Mr PANIZZA: They should sit there and make sure that the football clubs are administering the best practice to have a competition which is a second-tier competition. I would suggest never give up to the AFL and sell out. I think that that is something that happened in regard to 18 months ago when the AFL offered \$1 million to the footy commission to take the colts away from the clubs. I am of the opinion that that was a done deal, and there was no consultation about that ever happening with any of the football clubs.

Mr D.C. NALDER: And the BCG report was just window-dressing a decision that was—so it was a predetermined outcome.

Mr PANIZZA: If I was able to say this that, evidently, one of the major players in Western Australian football has gone to the AFL and asked for some money to help the West Australian footy commission in regard to the colts, we were actually told that the AFL held a gun at our head and said, “As long as you take over the colts development football, we’ll give you the money”, which to my understanding is not correct.

The CHAIR: I did not know. So, the AFL gave about \$1 million for this change to happen.

Mr D.C. NALDER: They did say that to us.

The CHAIR: Did they? All right.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: You could not speak to the AFL’s motivation for taking the colts out of the responsibility of the clubs and giving it to the footy commission, could you?

Mr PANIZZA: I believe the AFL never asked for that to happen. I think that was done by the powers at the West Australian Football Commission, which would obviously be the CEO.

The CHAIR: In regard to the two WA AFL-based clubs—the Dockers and Eagles—do you see their involvement down your way?

Mr PANIZZA: We do. We are very lucky that the AFL went out and started putting in the next gen and we do see the Eagles down there. The one thing that the Eagles have done for us is that they have been all-inclusive. They have done their thing where they have to do the next gen program for those kids. But when they have been in Albany, they have actually come to our academy and been all-inclusive and taken training runs.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: Just a final question around transparency, which I think you probably answered a bit as you have gone along—transparency on what the football commission is actually doing and how they are delivering. Are you satisfied that there is enough transparency around reporting and that kind of thing?

Mr PANIZZA: I am not the president of the Claremont footy club, so I do not go to the president's meetings, but he does come back and sometimes you are quite shocked that the decisions are made and, basically, there is no discussion. Some transparency would be clouded in regard to what has happened with development footy and also the way that the clubs have been advised on different things.

The one thing I think that needs to happen from all of the WAFL clubs is that there needs to be a genuine concerted uniting of them to make sure that all clubs are doing the right thing by all people. I know that a lot of clubs do not have the same passion or the same awareness of what the country people do need, because you will hear different versions from different football clubs on how much they invest into their districts and into their country zones. District footy now is basically in the western suburbs dead. Claremont has one under-17s team in its whole base. I suppose from our point of view, we do have three PSA schools—Christ Church, Scotch and Hale—which cover off on an enormous amount of young men playing our sport. But when you come to community footy, if you look at Aquinas and the kids that are from the country, which go to Hale, Scotch and Christ Church, they are all playing for the school and then on the Sunday they are playing for their community somewhere else to get another game of football. Again, the WAFL clubs need to make sure that they are all delivering to their communities and keeping those people involved in football.

There is so much governance, paperwork and everything else, a lot does get lost in volunteers. A lot of volunteers do not know how to turn on a laptop or do a coaching course on the computer to do their level 1 so that they can coach and those types of things. There has to be a lot of different ways that things have to be delivered so that everybody is equal and gets the same opportunity and have those volunteers not feeling uncomfortable about any of those things that are necessary and need to be done.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: I have experienced personally, there is a lot of emphasis on compliance around game day, the game day environment and these sorts of things around that support of the volunteer. On the day, there are like three different apps that have to be managed around interchange and the lists and all of those sorts of things, so who bears the responsibility, not for the compliance, but on the capacity building? In your opinion, who do you think should be doing that?

Mr PANIZZA: I know that the West Australian footy commission and their different departments are the ones that override all—I suppose if there are any issues, that is where we go back to. But 99 per cent of it is the competition and the board, whoever run that competition, it is all down to them, unless there is something really unruly which has to be referred back to the footy commission, such as misbehaviour or some sort of behaviour that is well and truly out of line with what anyone would accept.

The CHAIR: You mentioned that the WAFL clubs all have to be united to ensure that they are delivering to their zones or their country areas. Does the footy commission have a role to play to ensure that happens?

Mr PANIZZA: Their role is to administer and not get involved in the day-to-day practices of how to make a footballer. They should be administering the protocols and the governance and staying away from the practical side of things of making players and making them into good citizens and AFL superstars.

The CHAIR: The country league that Albany is part of, what is that called?

Mr PANIZZA: The Great Southern Football League.

The CHAIR: How strong is that?

Mr PANIZZA: We only have a six-team competition. We have four teams in Albany. One has just been developed over the last seven or eight years, which is the Albany Sharks, because of population demand. Then we have a team in Denmark–Walpole and one in Mt Barker. We have six teams and each club has four age groups—seniors, reserves, colts and under-16s. Then the junior footy down there runs from under-14s down to Auskick.

The CHAIR: Are you involved with any particular club?

[10.50 am]

Mr PANIZZA: Yes, I am.

The CHAIR: Which one?

Mr PANIZZA: The Royals Football Club.

The CHAIR: What role does the commission have in the country league?

Mr PANIZZA: The footy commission will have done. Its role is limited, other than, I think, Tom Bottrell is aligned to the football commission, where he may be being told what he is meant to do. But there is the country footy league executive that is meant to run country footy. Tom was put in between them and the football commission to be a conduit. I am not sure how all that is going and what it has resulted in. But I can tell you that I have not seen anyone from the footy commission at a game of footy this year.

Mr D.C. NALDER: And there is Central Great Southern and Upper Great Southern.

Mr PANIZZA: Central Great Southern has gone.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Has it?

Mr PANIZZA: The Upper Greats, we —

Mr D.C. NALDER: Katanning has gone into that; that is right. The have gone into Uppers.

Mr PANIZZA: They have gone into Upper Great Southern. Then you have Lower South West, South West, Great Northern, Kalgoorlie and the Esperance footy leagues and Eastern Districts. There are still a number—we are still hanging on in the country. Look, we all change in the way that each league operates because of the sparseness and the difference in the OFA, which is totally community footy because they all go to the footy and have done from nippers all the way through—hockey, footy and netball. It is their Saturday way of celebrating and having a day off and being community minded.

The CHAIR: Under the West Australian Football Commission constitution, the AFL clubs and the WAFL clubs and the commissioners are members with different levels of membership. The affiliates, which includes the country leagues, are not members of the West Australian Football Commission

and they get a vote. The affiliates as a total, which includes amateurs, women's league et cetera, have a 10 per cent vote for the appointment of commissioners, whereas the two AFL clubs and the commissioners have a 60 per cent vote, and then the WAFL clubs, between the nine of them, have 30 per cent. If you look at the number of people playing, most are in the affiliates overall, and they only get a 10 per cent vote. Do you think that system needs to be changed?

Mr PANIZZA: In regard to that, it is like Big Brother is telling everybody else what to do and we know all. Possibly, that is an area that needs to be changed—to have a voice. Whether or not the commissioners—where they come from and how they get appointed—is it by the mere fact that they are popular or do they have an understanding of how football actually generates from grassroots through to the AFL?

The CHAIR: So the affiliates are not actual members of the commission but the commissioners are? Do you think the commissioners should actually be members of the commission?

Mr PANIZZA: I would think that they should be, yes, because then it is an attachment. Why should they vote on something they know nothing about? Why is there not a commissioner who is a commissioner of country people? Why is there not a commissioner of community people? Why is there only a commissioner of, "I got voted in because someone reckons I might do a good job"?

The CHAIR: In various hearings we have had so far, there has been discussion about the possibility of the structure needing to change. If the commission is unable to change itself in regard to the appointment of commissioners, is there a role for government to become involved in ensuring that happens?

Mr PANIZZA: I would not think so. Again, I think we need to leave it to—I think WAFL football clubs should have more of a say. They have governed over this game for a longer period than anybody. History will show that, yes, we have had some bumpy roads and all the rest of it, but there is a formula and there is a great history of what has happened. But I still think there needs to be change going forward. I suppose they presided over the game for all those years and they should have more of a say. Should government be involved? I do not think so, because government should be governing.

The CHAIR: My question was not about the government being involved in the day-to-day administration of football, but if there was a general view in the footy community that the make-up of how commissioners are appointed is wrong and the industry will not change itself in regard to that, does there need to be someone who comes in to change that?

Mr PANIZZA: That is a difficult question; other than, if the government comes in and starts telling how you vote and how you pick them, I do not think that should happen, no.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Taking that angle a little bit further, is there a risk at the moment, because it would appear that the commission is becoming AFL-centric, that therefore, from a Western Australian perspective, the wrong attention is being applied to the community development of football and junior development and career paths and all sorts of things? It is the community benefit of the game that we would like to see preserved. What we are getting from people at committee hearings is that they are concerned that that is being lost somewhat, so we are trying to understand. It should not be up to us, from a committee perspective or a Parliament perspective, to influence the game—that is the game; it is not ours—but we give \$11 million a year and we are concerned about the community. We are trying to understand what role we play; therefore, what advice would you provide us?

Mr PANIZZA: What should happen is that if the government is providing a certain amount of money, there should be acquittals and people should be explaining where the money is being spent, and

not just on a spreadsheet saying, “This here, this here and this here.” They should be held more accountable on where they are spending the money and who they are spending it on. Again, if we get all people involved, you will get all different opinions. I mean, it is no good having the whole community with everybody coming from a different tree, and that is why I still think the amateur football club has a strong history of getting things right in most instances and so does the WAFL system. Who presides over them is, like you say, at the moment is commissioners but we have to get the right commissioners who understand the sport that they are administering over, and making them accountable, or the commissioners accountable, for where that government funding is going, and not just sort of saying, “Here it is. Off you go, and go to the next lunch.” There has to be accountability all the way through in regard to where you are spending that money. We are all used to doing acquittals and providing evidence of what we are spending the money on. There needs to be more of that so that the funding does get to the bottom.

Mr D.C. NALDER: So greater transparency. One of the things you would like to see us call for is greater transparency on where the money is flowing?

Mr PANIZZA: Correct.

Mrs L.M. O’MALLEY: Quickly, also just on measures. As you said, with acquittals you need to know the numbers. What are the decisions being based on? The commission is saying that their number one measure, if you like, is participation. But, in a sense, what is the definition of participation? Is that just the number of draftees—the number of boys who make it into the AFL—or is it more of a grassroots interpretation of participation? What are your thoughts on that?

Mr PANIZZA: Grassroots participation—I might have been one of the most vocal people of all time, going back three or four years ago, of why are you counting the same kid five times?

Mrs L.M. O’MALLEY: I asked that question, too.

The CHAIR: It has come up.

Mr PANIZZA: I know that my son was counted five times. Again, what do you count as participation? Is it numbers? For the sport, or any sport, does the amount of funding need to count whether you have 1 000 or 800? I think it has to be about what funding the sport actually requires to make it work and sustainable. Population says that we ain’t going to go backwards, even though the coronavirus has tried to put us on the deficit side of people playing or being born or whatever. Again, as would you imagine, going forward there is going to be more people playing and you would imagine there would be more people playing football. We have the females and we have Indigenous footy. We have all these different things that the football commission is trying to run and it all goes back to the one body at the top. There is a lot of money that has probably been wasted over a lot of years that you would like to know if it was actually funnelled into the right areas, how much more we would have got out of it.

[11.00 am]

The CHAIR: In regard to the current commissioners, do any of them reside in the country, as far as you know?

Mr PANIZZA: Not that I know of. I do not know where they live. I would not have thought so. I know at least three of them and they do not live in the country, no.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. Thank you for your evidence before the committee. We will forward a copy of the transcript of this hearing to you for the correction of transcription errors. Please make those corrections and return the transcript within 10 working days of receipt. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be introduced via

these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. Thank you very much for coming up from Albany.

Hearing concluded at 11.00 am
