

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

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



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 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 9.19 am**Mr GEOFFREY KEITH CAMPBELL WOLFENDEN****Chairperson, Regional Development Council, Metro South, examined:**

The CHAIR: Thank you for appearing today to provide evidence relating 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 Mrs Lisa O'Malley, member for Bicton, and to my right is Mr Simon Millman, member for Mount Lawley. We have apologies from the deputy chair and member for Bateman, Mr Dean Nalder, and also the member for North West Central, Mr Vince Catania.

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 of today's proceedings. I would also like to advise that today's hearing will be broadcast live over the Parliament House website. Would you please introduce yourself for the record?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Good morning. My name is Geoff Wolfenden. I am the current serving chair for the regional district council, south metro, and I am representing my other co-chairs. I would just like to note an apology from my co-chair Hayley McNamara, who could not make it this morning; she has advised accordingly. Thank you for allowing me to come and have a chat.

The CHAIR: Do you have any questions about your attendance today?

Mr WOLFENDEN: No, I do not.

[9.20 am]

The CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement before we have some questions for you?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Yes, Mr Chairman. I have some opening remarks and commentary that if you will bear with me, I would like to read through, and then I am happy to engage in questions as they come. Again, thanks for giving us the opportunity to come here and explain our perspective as part of the footy family. I will refer to regional development councils as RDCs as I move through the report. RDCs represent junior football stakeholders across the Perth metropolitan area, which encompasses approximately 47 000 community club and Auskick participants, the respective families, along with the junior football clubs that they participate within. So we are a fairly large organisation in the footy family.

There are RDCs that operate within the Perth metropolitan area. We have north metro, encompassing Claremont, Subiaco and West Perth. We have metro central, encompassing East Perth, Perth and Swan Districts. We have metro south, encompassing East Fremantle—one of the better teams in the competition, sometimes!—Peel and South Fremantle districts. The RDCs were formerly known as district football development councils. For a bit of context, I have been around for about 11 years, so I have been on the journey. These were established as part of the district model introduced back in 2003. We are an independent body. We have our own constitution and our own affiliation deed with the West Australian Football Commission, not unlike any of the other footy affiliates in our landscape.

The RDCs are comprised of volunteer stakeholders that are looking to advance junior football within the particular region. It is also important to note that WAFL CEOs are represented on each of the

RDCs and are engaged as a key part of our meeting cycles. So, the WAFL does attend our meetings; it is aware of what we are doing. I would also like to reiterate that back in 2003, when the concept of DFDCs, now RDCs, came about, this was a recommendation—it came out of a report known as the Parker report—that independently determined the interests of junior football should be overseen by an independent body in conjunction with the West Australian Football Commission. This was again validated in the 2017 Boston Consulting report.

In 2019, junior football in Perth metropolitan area had 116 clubs and 1 350 teams—so fairly healthy. On top of this, there are 40 000-odd Auskick participants participating across school and community, with almost 16 500 of these participating at junior clubs. Pleasingly, from the recovery of COVID-19, which impacted everybody, from our perspective as a competition, we recovered to 99 per cent participation in 2020, which was remarkable and just shows the wont of community to get involved and be a part of the junior football experience. This is a testament, I have to say, to club volunteers and to the WAFC game development staff who drive most of these outcomes every day of their life. Arguably junior–youth is one of the largest represented groups in terms of participant base across Western Australia, with approximately 54 per cent of all participants within WA playing under the auspices of the RDCs. The RDCs have always been about working in partnerships, and we believe that we continue to do this with the best interests of football across Western Australia, and all aspects of the pathways related to junior football.

We have heard through these hearings that WAFL clubs are wanting to take ownership of junior football through WAFL innovation projects, but we submit to you that we have not been formally approached on these matters and had any discussions around what the WAFL clubs are seeking. Quite frankly, you would think that an organisation that is looking to engage with the junior community, the junior pathway, would want to open up discussions openly with our RDCs. We are a very open organisation. They may have the best ideas in the world, but we do not know because we are not hearing them. We are a bit disappointed in that. We would like to have thought, as I said, that they would come and talk to us and want to develop that in collaboration.

RDCs have been always happy to work with WAFL clubs. Just personally, over my years of being involved in community football as a district chair, as a volunteer, I have had some great outcomes and great relations with the WAFL clubs, and I hope that this continues into the future.

We have also heard questions raised by the committee about the participation numbers and how accurate the numbers may be. It is important to understand that there are two key measures that the RDCs work closely with the WAFC on. There is one that they are calling “total participation”, which is the AFL census; and, yes, if you step onto a footy field, like soccer and many other sports, you have participated, so you may be counted a number of times in that figure. Is that accurate? Yes, it is in terms of the participation. But the real one is club-based participation and this is the one that is the focus of our RDCs and the commission, where every player that participates in the junior pathway is registered and can only be registered once. For the last five to six years, from my experience and with working with the West Australian Football Commission and the development staff, that is what we focused on—that is more important. We want to know how many people are out there in club land and we want to know that we are delivering the best experience to them, and we want an indicator—being growth—that we are being effective in that.

The game in WA, we think, is in fairly good shape from a junior–youth perspective, and we continue to have participation outcomes that are consistently in the top one or two nationally across Australia. Basically, the model, as it is, is okay, so we would be very reluctant, and our caution would be to say, if we were going to change any model, that we need to have a lot of consultation about it to make sure we do not break what is working. Notwithstanding, we are happy to listen to anybody

who has something else that they wish to propose and discuss it openly. I do have here some tables which talk about the participation numbers that I have referred to and that type of thing. I am happy for those to be passed around, and happy to answer questions where I can or take them on notice about those as we move through this.

It is frustrating when people make throwaway comments on participation that are not based on the facts. It diminishes the great work that has been done by countless volunteers, junior clubs and the people that go to run them, and by West Australian Football Commission district staff that work fairly hard to make sure they meet KPIs and outcomes around making junior football the best experience possible.

We also note that in submissions by some of the WAFL clubs, such as Swan Districts Football Club, they incorrectly call out that male participation is in decline—not true. They focus on women and, yes, women have come at us like a tsunami, as they have right the way across our country, and it is brilliant and we want to see that increased. As new entrants into football over the last few years, of course they are going to show magnificent growth. If we look at the figures that I have just handed round, we see that males are actually increasing across the board, and that is strong and positive for where we are going in the future. It is disappointing that WAFL clubs choose to misrepresent this and do not choose, in some instances, to look at the data that is available and is shared with them, particularly when WAFL CEOs are a part of our RDCs, and this is one of the agenda items that we talk about quite consistently.

[9.30 am]

Just as frustrating it was for me to see a junior football club president present to you earlier on in these hearings and to state and use words like he did not understand what was happening in RDCs or district. We, and I in my district, and in every other district, attend information nights regularly each year. We attend for the purposes of sharing with them outcomes, our strategic plan, our visions, and we encourage two-way conversation. We want them to feed back to us what they are looking for so that we can improve, because no-one is beyond saying that they cannot improve or they are doing the best—there is always room for improvement.

Volunteers—we have to look after them. They are the lifeblood of our game and we need to make sure that they are supported, and recognise and reward volunteers to ensure that we continue to retain them in the game. There are a lot of other pressures in life, other than getting Johnny to football each week and running a football club, so it is important that we do support them.

The RDCs have been working for quite some time now alongside the West Australian Football Commission as we seek to study how junior football is put on the park each week. What we are trying to do in these studies is say: How can we make it easier? How can we lessen the burden on volunteers? How can we better utilise our resources of district staff? How can we work with the West Australian Football Commission to deliver football to be the best experience possible and a pathway for our junior male and female people going forward, and not make it onerous? An example of that is in the old model—DFDCs that I referred to before. The competition director was a volunteer. Now, that became onerous with more demands and more work on him, and most of them have a life—like we all do. So the commission said let us look at a model with the RDC that has evolved to where it is today, where our West Australian Football Commission starts to take a more active role in managing the process of competition direction and competition management, in conjunction with volunteers and with the RDCs. So the RDCs always remain that voice of reason.

The committee would have noticed in our submission as part of this inquiry that one of the key challenges that still faces the WA football industry is governance. It beggars belief that we, as one

of the largest, arguably, footprints across the football landscape, only have one per cent of a vote. Can we influence anything? No.

The CHAIR: When you say one per cent of the vote, one per cent of the vote for what?

Mr WOLFENDEN: To do with anything that comes up with the West Australian Football Commission. Just to give clarity on that, the governance model as it stands, the votes are apportioned—I am sure you understand that. We represent one per cent of them.

We have been talking about this and talking about this. I think perhaps there is an appetite—I hope there is an appetite—moving forward that we look at that, and that the community, not just us but community, our colleagues at Perth Football League and the likes, that there is an opportunity for people to sit back and look at that. We see that, still, as a massive issue that needs to be dealt with so that the people on the ground that are the lifeblood to WAFL, for argument's sake, are having a say in it and feel like they have ownership in it a little bit more. That is what we would be looking for.

In terms of RDCs' relationship with the West Australian Football Commission, there has been some rhetoric around the fact that we are just an arm of the West Australian Football Commission. Yes, we are; we are an affiliated body. My role as the chair is to challenge them and keep them honest. We are the voice of football. They may come up with some ideas that have merit, but the first people they have got to get through are the RDCs and the volunteers, and people like me as the chair. My role as the chair is to advocate, too, upwards into the West Australian Football Commission and with the Western Australian football leagues and with any other stakeholders across the landscape that can help us on our journey. We are independent. We do have some robust debates, and will continue to, because that is what the business of football is about. It is pretty robust; it is pretty emotional. But we do have a consensus where we do agree that we do not want to go public with our forays and fights; we want to keep them in house.

We have a very transparent relationship, such that the CEOs, the commissioners, the senior staff at the West Australian Football Commission are very approachable. They attend functions that we have. I had them as guests at South Fremantle the other week for an engagement day with the junior football, so very open. They come to many of our functions—end of year, midyear. They come and sit on our RDCs to provide direction and updates. So, really open and transparent so far as we can see.

We work well with other affiliates in community and I will call out Mr Sam Birmingham, who presented to you earlier from the Perth footy league. He and I work quite closely over many things. One of them in particular is what we call the pathway. We see one of the big things that we need to do, and I would like to think at some stage it is a legacy of mine, and ours, that we have achieved, that we redefine our pathway. We think it has got a bit lost—AFL are up here, everybody wears AFL jumpers, the kids down here are what the WAFL want. We want the WAFL to have relevance. We want them to be the best competition at state level that they can be. They need the juniors. We need that pathway to be identified. We need to come together and collaborate on how we are going to work that. There is some good work being done and there is some good cooperation being done at the current time, so we need to work with all the community and WAFL and the West Australian Football Commission to identify those pathways to try and take the emphasis off AFL and engage everybody, not just have a look down to say, "That's the best, and if I'm not the best, I'm not going to make it." We want you involved in footy right the way through that journey. That is something that we work with in community and I believe community is working pretty well with it. It is a perspective we have, if you want.

The other big ticket item that we have outside of governance, outside of developing those pathways, is around facilities. I know there are some independent reports being done on facilities. I have seen those reports. Can I comment on them in depth? Probably not, but I do know there is some good work on it, particularly around upgrading around female friendly. We talk about that participation coming at us like a tsunami; we need to be ready for that, and we need to think that state governments and sporting associations, WAFC et cetera are working together around funding that may or may not be available for that.

I would just like to finish by saying that, having said a little while ago that we are a bit disappointed with WAFL clubs and some of the things that have been said, we are a bit disappointed about numbers being called out on participation, which arguably I have seen no metrics nor proof to prove other than what I presented to you here to be any different. We had a fantastic engagement day with the East Fremantle WAFL club and the South Fremantle WAFL club. I think, Lisa—excuse me; member—you were at the East Fremantle one. We brought the kids in, and it was a combined effort—WAFL club, district and junior clubs—and we had a parade day, if you want. It was fabulous to see 1 000-plus parents, kids, families all running around that oval like days gone by. That is what we need to work to. It is not about ownerships or shifting a deckchair to say, “Well, that thing is undermined. Look at us and how good we are now.” It is better that we work collaboratively, because we are all in the same space anyway.

Again, thank you for my opportunity and thank you for listening to my opening remarks. I am happy to answer questions where I can.

The CHAIR: I would just like everyone to know that I have known Geoff for quite a few years. He is an outstanding local constituent of mine.

Geoff, in that written submission that you made, on page 4 you mention —

The AFL, and other states, often look to Western Australia and the RDC District Model, as an example of best practice in the delivery of community outcomes and in respect to driving participation outcomes.

What do you base that claim on?

Mr WOLFENDEN: We base it on comparisons that are done—on information that comes out of the AFL that compares all the data around growth across the stakeholder members. In a very broad sense, if we were to line up state figures from South Australia, Victoria and Queensland, which are available and have been presented to us, the figures show that what we are doing is very positive. The comments that are made have been said to me by various AFL people that I have come across and the presentations that have been put together on those certainly validate that we are doing something right.

[9.40 am]

The CHAIR: As you said before, you have been involved in junior sport for quite a few years—prior to 2003 and since, obviously.

Mr WOLFENDEN: Yes.

The CHAIR: Before 2003, you would have been involved with just the East Fremantle football zone, right—the junior development in that zone?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Are you talking about DFDCs, Tony?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr WOLFENDEN: I came on board 11 years ago now. When I came on board, there were nine DFDCs.

The CHAIR: Related to each WAFL club?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Yes. One that was held at the WAFL club, yes.

The CHAIR: So the East Fremantle development was always considered one of the better ones?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Are you talking about talent pathway now?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr WOLFENDEN: Okay.

The CHAIR: Would you have agreed with that at the time?

Mr WOLFENDEN: At the time, yes. If I can pre-empt where you are going, the talent pathway model now, that was a decision that was brought up, agreed to and made about the commission running it now, yes.

The CHAIR: Since 2003, in your submission you talk about there being quite a substantial increase in participation, and prior to 2003 there was basically zero growth under the WAFL model. In your submission, you state that —

The priority and focus of a WAFL Club is to win premierships, not developing participation across all levels of football. WAFL Clubs do not have the staff expertise in growing participation ...

What do you base your view on that their priority and focus is on a premiership and not developing participation across all levels of football?

Mr WOLFENDEN: I will cite my specific examples. One of them is that recently I was reminded of the need for WAFL clubs to reintegrate with community by constituents out of my junior district, as in East Fremantle, at East Fremantle. I think the perception is, rightly or wrongly, that WAFL was a pre-eminent body of football and should still be, and we want it still to be, but their business was playing football, winning a premiership. That was their business model, and their boards were around that business model. The perception out there is that they cherry-pick the better players from junior community and bring them in. Yes, that is their job in development squads, and always will be. Am I saying that we do not do that? I am saying that we need to continue doing that. The perception is that that is what they are seen as doing: “We want the best; we’re not really interested”—for want of words—“in fostering a relationship.” In saying that, I can also cite a lot of examples where, over my journey, I have seen WAFL clubs positively engage with community. I just stated one in the sense that we had the engagement days at South Fremantle and East Fremantle. I do not want to sound like I am bagging the WAFL; I want to say that we are different businesses. Different businesses, RDC; different businesses, Perth league. But what the future is for me is we all need to work together collaboratively to be a community. That is where we want to go. Am I going to say it is better one way or the other? I am going to always answer and say that if we work together and we are all in there, using our expertise across whether it is developing players to their full potential, whether it is developing a pathway for players who may have been disillusioned about football in the pathway, whether it is managing how players come out of a development squad and back into their community, whether it is about draft age, whether it is about the age of a colt in amateurs, and the likes of that. I refer to some of the figures here: we have 299 players playing up in amateurs, for argument’s sake. Maybe there is a case to say to the amateurs—I am working with them on that, and we are talking about that—do we bring the age back down and release them back to junior football and allow them to play up permanently to have that experience at Perth league? It is a difficult question, Tony, to answer in one session. I just keep drawing back with everything

that I see, read, hear and do around this landscape, that if we do not get on and work together, we are just going to end up doing the same old, same old.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: On that, Geoff: you would have been watching the evidence of the proceedings so far?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Yes.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Did you get a chance to have a listen to what some of the WAFL club presidents said when they were before us?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Yes, I did.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: I have to admit I was impressed by the emphasis that the clubs that you have already mentioned, Easts and Souths, but also Swan Districts, and in my own neck of the woods, East Perth, have really put a renewed emphasis onto community engagement. Although you might maintain the position that their number one focus is on winning a premiership, would you concede that they are renewing their focus on community engagement as well?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Yes, I will concede that, because I would be nothing less than belligerent if I did not. Yes; in fact, I was engaged with East Fremantle in the very early stages when they set up how they were going to reactivate into community, and sat with them. Swan Districts do a marvellous job. If you look at V Swans, and you go up to East Perth and look at Coolbinia footy club and those—Starkick—all those types of things. I have myriad examples of what we do in community and do well. They just flow out and they are self-evident. So, yes, I agree.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Thanks.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: If I could just follow up on that, too, Geoff. My example is East Fremantle as well; that shift in the understanding of the value of partnership. Could I get you to expand a little bit more on these opportunities around pathways? I like how you described that it is not necessarily one being more greatly valued or important than another, it is just they have got different jobs to do. I actually agree in a sense. I do not think it is a bad thing that the WAFL competition in WAFL clubs is aimed at winning premierships; it is the peak of that competition, so it makes sense that that is what they would be seeking. That is not to undermine the importance of that partnership and the partnership opportunities. You talked earlier about those pathways from the junior competition, if you like, and this also goes more to a theme that our colleague Dean, who is not here at the moment, has been expanding on, and that is that we do not want to lose players to the game. Where do they go, if they do not make it into the AFL? The AFL, WAFL and PFL, can you just expand a little more on how you see that fitting in, and where is the commission's role in all of this?

Mr WOLFENDEN: In terms of the ultimate model, if you want, we need to clear up and define where those pathways are. I do not think it is the ownership or the responsibility of any one of the parties; it is the responsibility of all of them in the sense of connecting each of those parties together. I was talking with Todd Shimmon, CEO of East Fremantle, only recently about some engagement programs. We are talking about bringing them to the RDC and jointly running engagement programs in the community. I cannot define exactly what they are because I have not seen them, but council have come out and said, "We've got money to deliver a program." It may be for getting Johnnies who can't get to sport—a bit like the Starkick thing—out and about: "How can we do that?" They are the types of engagements that I think will foster that connection and recognition that we all are one. It is breaking down barriers of perception; and there is a lot of perception out there. There is a perception that "the WAFL club don't want to know me because I'm not the best footballer in the junior world, so I will play my junior time out, I will disappear and I may come back into amateurs." What we want to do is work hard to try to retain that drop-off. We are getting some results, as you

can see by the numbers. The partnerships that we are talking about are working with Perth footy league, are working with WAFL clubs, are working with RDCs. We see the role of the West Australian Football Commission absolutely as being clearly involved because they offer us a resource that a lot of us volunteer people do not have; that is, district staff to help manage and make these things happen. They offer us district staff who can go out and engage at schools. They offer us district staff who can go out and engage in mums–kids kicking day and put the message about not only wellness and wellbeing, but starting to develop that link of community around different types of works that we may pull together as different groups operating as different business units, picking up on Lisa’s point, that could come together for the betterment of giving—not making; no perception—that definite opinion that, “We are all at one, we all work in the same space, let’s do it.”

[9.50 am]

Mr WOLFENDEN: We are doing it in kind at Swan Districts. We are doing it in kind at East Fremantle. We are doing it in kind at South Fremantle. Would it not be fabulous if we did not worry about who is who in the zoo and shifting a deckchair over to here to say, “Well, that’s under me now. Look what I can do.” Let’s just say, “Let’s come together and use the collective knowledge.” Who is to say that an idea that is put up by the innovative model of Swan Districts is not the right one? We do not know because we have not seen it. We just want engagement, and that is the only way I can answer that.

Mrs L.M. O’MALLEY: Just on that point, you have said that the commission will provide staff in order to assist and facilitate that. Is that happening enough? Could it be more? Could it be done better?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Yes, it has been, outside of these weird times, and we know what has happened there. The level of staff—we are always asking for more people to assist in the districts. Are we asking for more money? I am not going to sit here and say I am not. We all want more money.

Mrs L.M. O’MALLEY: If it is apportioned through staff involvement and staff out on those grounds, how do you ask for more? How do you achieve that?

Mr WOLFENDEN: How do we ask for more? We would have to put a —

Mrs L.M. O’MALLEY: And would the commission be prepared, do you think, to do that?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Specifically, on that, we have a means under which we could advocate for resources and we could advocate openly and transparently. For argument’s sake, I sit on the footy affairs committees on occasions up there and talk about that and talk about how possibly it would be nice to have more. I think most people talk about wanting to have more, and it would be nice to have more money. From our perspective, we would have to put a business case together on it, and there are some protocols around that and retained funds that we can utilise in our various districts for better outcomes.

Specifically, on how that impacts on a Western Australian football club—I am not sure. I would advocate up and say it would be brilliant if we had two more district officers and why. That would be a business case that would have to be put up and justified, I guess, like most things in most businesses.

The CHAIR: Geoff, so the funding that the West Australian Football Commission basically gives is to the staff funding, right, to help?

Mr WOLFENDEN: It is part of it.

The CHAIR: It is not funding they give to the actual club. They do not give it to the clubs themselves?

Mr WOLFENDEN: No.

The CHAIR: There is no redistribution between lower socioeconomic areas and areas that may be considered to have greater economic status, like the western suburbs or whatever? There is no real difference in how the West Australian Football Commission approaches it?

Mr WOLFENDEN: No. Not at all. There is. There is a big difference, sorry. There is a huge difference.

The CHAIR: How?

Mr WOLFENDEN: We like to think that we operate ethically as a business. What I mean by that is that we will look at where there are challenges—and there are things like night fields and different programs that the commission has had that have been set up in different areas to support that demographic. I, myself, went to the one off Champion Drive—Jefferson Reserve—where we engaged, and we had people come in from communities. We are very mindful of that, and we look at best practice. We do not say, “We have got \$100, and we have got 10 clubs, and you are going to get 10 bucks each.” It is best practice for what is needed by the community.

Some clubs are very self-sufficient, as we know. The focus on things that we might put into other clubs are not required as much as might be needed. That can be helping them with governance—sorting out their committees—or it can be helping with things like if a kid cannot make the footy, why can he not make it? How could we possibly help? Could we integrate with the council and look at a bus to pick them up and bring them down? There is all that sort of opportunity, and you can pick up on some of the different people that we have worked in concert with around the place that do that. It is not just carte blanche.

The CHAIR: I know that you may put extra effort into certain areas, but the extra assistance comes from council and government through that program, you know. The only reason I bring that up is because, for some reason, in the West Australian Football Commission’s subsequent submission to us, out of all the areas, they picked Seville Grove. I do not know why they would pick Seville Grove, saying that —

There is significant risk to the development of the game associated with the devolution of program delivery specifically to WAFL Clubs, as there is the potential to create a nine speed participation model whereby if you live in Scarborough, then you may be afforded opportunities that you may miss out on if you live in Seville Grove, due to a particular focus or drive of that WAFL Club. The WAFC must ensure that all segments of the game are supported and developed consistently, so as to ensure football continues to grow.

I was just wondering what are they trying to get from that and why —

Mr WOLFENDEN: I cannot speak to the specifics of what they are asking, Tony. From our perspective, we do not care; we simply look at what is the best practice. Does it meet the pillars of what we are looking for under our governance and constitution? Can we go up to footy affairs and get it ticked off as part of the wider pillars and requirements to meet for funding? We have retained funds that we can utilise, and they are very sparing, so we want to use them best all the time. Would we like more? Yes.

The CHAIR: The RDCs are based—As you said, there is a metro north, metro central and metro south, and each have three of the WAFL districts, right? You have East Fremantle, Peel and South Fremantle districts. They are not at all based on the political electorates, are they? No.

That is another thing. I am just surprised that in their submission—I presume they might be listening—that they talk about the under-17 competitions, and in the South Fremantle district, which incorporates the electorate of Armadale—I am not sure why they have mentioned that either—there are currently 11 male under-17 teams. As you would know, Geoff, there are actually

two clubs in the electorate of Armadale, and neither of them have an under-17 teams. Kelmscott and Armadale do not have under-17 teams.

Mr WOLFENDEN: I am not going to argue with you. Yes, I think we are getting into probably where boundaries cross—a bit like where Kardinya crosses back into East Fremantle, and Willetton crosses back into East Fremantle.

If you say, “Johnny from Willetton, where are you going to go?”, he is going to go to South Fremantle, even though he is playing in the East Fremantle competition. That is a whole different argument, and I cannot speak to what the thinking is behind it.

The CHAIR: But you can confirm that there are no under-17 teams in the electorate of Armadale, not that that is really relevant, but the West Australian Football Commission thought it was relevant. Thanks.

Mr WOLFENDEN: That would be a challenge that we are working to try to get happen.

Mrs L.M. O’MALLEY: Sorry. Just a quick question on the funds. You said that the RDCs have retained funds. I just want to clarify that you do have autonomy over delivery of some of that resource. You were saying you could actually allocate additional resource to, say, Armadale as compared with East Fremantle, for example.

Mr WOLFENDEN: Absolutely, yes.

Mrs L.M. O’MALLEY: If that was the perceived additional need.

Mr WOLFENDEN: Absolutely. We would actively encourage our constituents—our clubs, our members, our lifeline—if they were needing help, to advocate to our district staff or to our RDCs through our comp directors and say to us, “We are struggling. We need new jumpers for a new side.” I am just saying that as an example, but, for sure, as long as it meets the guidelines of our constitutions and our affiliation, and it ticks off on footy affairs of the West Australian Football Commission—we are not going out there and finding that I have gone to Singapore to study how kids are going—so that it is actually delivering.

Part of that due diligence would be that they are not just going to say, “Well, here is the money. Good luck.” They are going to say, “Here is the money. What are your KPIs? How are you going to measure it? Where are we going to review it? What meetings are we going to have? How often are we going to cycle it?” It is the same as our RDCs; at the end of this year, I fully expect—not fully expect, I know—we will be sitting together and looking at what worked, what did not work, how we can improve and what we need to do to move forward. And we will be engaging our stakeholders to say exactly the same thing: what do you think on what we delivered, and how can we improve that and take that feedback on board?

Mrs L.M. O’MALLEY: With that, I mean, with the RDCs, you are describing a higher level of scrutiny and accountability. Do you think the football commission has the same level of scrutiny within the commission itself?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Look, from what I see, I believe they do. Yes.

[10.00 am]

Mrs L.M. O’MALLEY: Also with the RDCs and the level of autonomy, the RDCs being the delivering agent, if you like, of junior football, so I have a question on fixturing, which you knew that I would be coming to. In regards to female participation in particular, if I can just draw your attention to the article from *The West* today which describes a bit of a dilemma for a year 7–8 girls’ competition. Given that we are still developing the competition in the female space, this comes to a particular challenge in that—I do not want to think of them as competing sports; I like to think of them as

complementary, and I hope you would agree—at the junior level, kids should be able to participate in as many different sporting codes as they possibly can. Here we see that classic clash between the growth of girls' participation in AFL and that more traditional sport of netball. I guess I would just like to hear your opinion or your thoughts on how much autonomy the RDCs have in the fixturing space and if this consideration is given or if it is just always this reactive kind of sense?

Mr WOLFENDEN: No. In terms of that, we always try to develop it in conjunction with our stakeholders. We would have meetings early in the season. I must say this year is weird. We have had things squashed up over here to here. You are trying to please every man or beast and you have got conflicting sports, whether we like it or not, impacting because summer is coming and winter is finishing. We are even seeing that at the AFL level and the WAFL level with how they are managing things. To answer your question as best as I can, we are very considerate in fixturing. We like to oblige people, but take a step back: the constraints on us are a lack of green space. We talk about facilities and needing more ovals and the growing demand—a lack of lights. We would like to think that we have got more funding coming down to light up more grounds so we can utilise them better. We know all those things now, and they are challenges that have to be sorted out. There comes a point where we say, "I'm sorry; we've changed 20 and you five somehow have got to fit that in. We're not going to exclude you but it may inconvenience you because you may not play at the oval that you used to and you may have to travel to here." That is life. We do not just do that in a dictatorial fashion; we try to work through that with the clubs and spend a lot of time working with them. This one here on Piara Waters that you were referring to, Lisa: yes, it came up in the paper this morning. I have read it. Was I aware of it? No, not until I saw it. Again, I say that there are 93 grand finals happening in junior football and I know that the people in the background who are managing those and putting them out are lurking to see what they can do around this outcome. It would be wrong of me to comment any further on that.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: I guess in a sense that is also possibly that lack of communication, given that the teams themselves have actually presented a possible solution to that scenario. I guess what it does is it really highlights the intention around increasing female participation and the challenges that come with that and how much additional resource or support can be given. The RDCs are delivering but what about the commission? Is the commission involved in that level? We did put a question to the commission regarding fixturing and how the encouragement in female participation fits in the bigger picture.

Mr WOLFENDEN: They would have oversight to it, for sure, and we have conversations about it very regularly. It always comes up. We have Steph Walding, who is our rep on our RDC and who constantly comes in. Do not go against her about female football, I can tell you! She is very vocal about pushing for that sort of need. I know she is working with a work group now with one of our comp directors to see what the future is starting to shape up like and then having a look at what facilities are there. That little work group off the side of the RDC—mind you, I stress that these are volunteers—they are going to come back to our RDC and say, "Guess what? We've got this coming, that happening, and no means of facilitating it unless somebody puts a skyhook up there and puts another ground up here." We know that some of the biggest challenges that we have are green space. We know that some of the biggest challenges that we have are a lot of that green space is not lit up whereby we can have people come out and utilise that ground more safely. Yes, they are challenges. Are we addressing the diversity and are we diversifying our thinking around people who are within our model? We are challenging that all the time.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: What is your gender balance like with the RDCs?

Mr WOLFENDEN: In our case, there are three—so, 30 per cent. Beautifully this year, to keep me in line, the two other chairs are female—Hayley and Simone. We are very mindful of that—absolutely. We see it, like everyone should see it, as being important, not just a tick-a-box, and the person must be fit for the position as well, in saying that. It is important.

The CHAIR: I just want to clear up something. Before you said you have a one per cent vote. Are you an affiliate? Are you considered an affiliate?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Yes. We have got our own constitution.

The CHAIR: You are an affiliate of the West Australian Football Commission?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Correct; just like anybody else.

The CHAIR: You are an affiliate like Perth Football League and the West Australian Country Football League?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Yes.

The CHAIR: There has been comment made to us about the need to change that voting system because, obviously, affiliates get 10 per cent of the overall vote.

Mr WOLFENDEN: In total, yes.

The CHAIR: In the appointment of commissioners, you get 10 per cent, the WAFL clubs get 30 per cent, existing commissioners get 20 per cent, and the two AFL clubs get 20 per cent each.

Mr WOLFENDEN: Correct.

The CHAIR: Two AFL clubs and the commissioners get a 60 per cent block, and then 30 per cent for the WAFL clubs and 10 per cent for the affiliates, and, as you say, one per cent for you. I assume you are arguing that that should change.

Mr WOLFENDEN: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you have any suggested model?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Not on record, Tony, no. I just think it needs to be looked at. My general comment is to be more reflective of the largest segments in the game. I am not for one moment saying that we strip WAFL clubs or we strip this or we do that, but changing the constitution and changing governance is not something that we can just flick a switch on and say, "Make it so." It is a process. I would like to think there is an appetite for that process and I would like to think that, moving forward, the one thing they consider is reflecting on that 10 per cent for community and seeing whether that—it may change. A distribution of how the votes go, that is not for me to comment on here.

The CHAIR: Should you therefore become members of the commission itself? At the moment you are not a member of the commission. The affiliates are not members of the commission?

Mr WOLFENDEN: No. We are only an affiliation across community.

The CHAIR: Do you think that you should?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Do I think? I would take that on notice. I have not thought about that long enough, Tony.

The CHAIR: My colleague may have some other questions. In regards to funding, on page 6 of your submission you talk about that you would like more funding invested in community football.

Mr WOLFENDEN: Yes.

The CHAIR: How equitable do you consider the current funding? Do you have any figure on what you would see to be a reasonable level of funding for community football?

Mr WOLFENDEN: What I can say is that we always need more to deliver more. It would be wrong of me to now try to qualify my personal beliefs, because if you can organise another million dollars, fantastic. The funding and state funding is West Australian Football Commission. The distribution, the conditioning et cetera around it, I am not qualified to talk on that, because I am not. What I can say is currently the funds that we have we survive on, and we are delivering at the moment. Could we do it better if we had more funds? Of course we could. Could we do it better if we had more people? Of course we could. I think that is the only answer I can give you, Tony.

The CHAIR: I was at an Auskick medal presentation on Friday night between two clubs. One club said they pay somewhere between \$8 000 and \$10 000 a year to the commission for registration fees et cetera and another \$4 000 on top for umpiring fees. So, would it be nice if maybe more money filtered down to try to reduce the cost hurdles or inhibition for some parents to —

[10.10 am]

Mr WOLFENDEN: Auskick we have got to be careful of, because it is an AFL thing, as opposed to —

The CHAIR: But it would not be that much different. The junior football club would have probably higher.

Mr WOLFENDEN: We would love the AFL in general to give more money to Western Australian football. Yes, your logic is right; I am not going to argue with you. Yes, it would be great if some sort of advocacy would be done for that. Specifically, could we advocate it? Possibly we could. Just remember that the Auskick is here —

The CHAIR: Okay; well, junior football itself? The two AFL clubs in Western Australia generate a lot of revenue between them. Do you think there is an avenue for more funding to come from that source?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Yes, possibly there is. As a general statement, yes. They do deliver a lot out there, as we know. I think when you look at Perth Football League and the engagement they have with the West Coast Eagles and you look at the different visitation days they do and the different academies they run, they invite juniors to come in and be involved in the different programs they offer. They are delivering a lot into the community. One thing I have seen over my journey is that I do not think we are good enough and smart enough on how we celebrate what we actually do out there. It astounds me now, 11 years on, that people I have known who I may have coached against when I was a coach in junior football will come to me and go, “RDC–DFDC.” We do not celebrate enough what we deliver. We do some magnificent things. We do things wrong on occasions because we are human. We upset people because we are human, and that is the nature of what we are. I think if we came together, going right back to where we started here about bringing community together and having us all working on the same page, what a celebration, and we actually celebrated it and put it out there so that people saw it, felt it and were engaged with it and came along on the journey rather than being suspicious of the different segments of the journey.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: I have a quick question about the relationship between AFL-funded Auskick and footy commission-funded junior football. Of course, parents fund that as well. As a parent, I have had my kids come through Auskick and then into the junior football. When my oldest first started doing Auskick with the clubs, at Pally Demons, I still thought of us as being a family of that club, so I guess my question is: although it is funded separately, it is still seen as that one club, which is really important. But from your experience and the position that you sit in, is the Auskick

somewhat of a burden on those junior football clubs or is the relationship between the two and the different funding streams working well?

Mr WOLFENDEN: I believe it is. If we look at that in a very high level, realistic, line-the-dots-up, if kids come into Auskick and they do not enjoy that experience and we cannot transition them into junior footy clubs, what have we got? We have got nothing. We are dropping that pool of potential. Do not quote me: I think for Auskick, the figures that came in there were more of, and I think the indicators are that there is more of them transitioning through to junior footy.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: So the retention is there?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Yes, so retention is getting better. They are fundamentally the things that we need to work on as well, because we want that big pool of 10 going through and adding to the junior football club and making it 20, and so on and so forth. We do not want anybody rolling off it if we can possibly avoid it.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: So you do not see that as a financial burden on the clubs themselves to be hosting the Auskick in a sense?

Mr WOLFENDEN: No, it has never been raised with me and I have never had that conversation, Lisa.

The CHAIR: We do need to wrap up. Geoff, in your submission, you say that community football makes up 99 per cent of participants across the state—54 per cent represented by the RDCs and the other 45 per cent are community stakeholders. Can you just clarify what you mean—the RDCs I kind of understand—by the 45 per cent community stakeholders?

Mr WOLFENDEN: Community stakeholders?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr WOLFENDEN: Probably referring to the Perth footy leagues and our leagues.

The CHAIR: And country leagues?

Mr WOLFENDEN: And country league. My colleagues are the same as other—country RDCs and the likes of that. Yes, that whole body.

The CHAIR: All right. Thank you very much 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 these 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 to elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. Thank you again.

Mr WOLFENDEN: Thank you for having me.

Hearing concluded at 10.16 am
