



**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - MR TONY McGRATH**  
**AHRC ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 25 OCTOBER 2002**

This year saw a significant strengthening and reaffirmation of Council's unity as a group in working together. The role of Council, the relationships between Members, the focus on change and how it was to be evaluated led to a basic reconsideration of Council's current approach as a co-operative body; one which fosters and encourages each Member to assist and support each other wherever possible.

The events of Victoria leaving Council and then being re-admitted at the unanimous vote of all Members shows Council's great resilience to work together to ensure harness racing's national future. This vision "in moving on" to our future is one which we must all share unreservedly. The elements of change and market competition must be addressed together or we will surely fail to reach our shared vision.

In reviewing the year past it is pleasing to advise that integrity issues no longer predominant the press coverage of harness racing. The excellent work of Council's specialist Sub-Committee and the completion of the subsequent review on Processes and Procedures has left us well equipped in maintaining a vigilant approach to integrity through measured testing. The experience and evidence of the two differing racing environments in Australia and New Zealand now conclusively demonstrate that the Reviews and studied action on Prohibited Substances was appropriate. Our quest is to be ever vigilant so that we are always prepared to support the skilled technical professionals thereby ensuring the welfare of the racing and breeding standardbred.

Council has joined the States now in its conversion of the Council Australian Standardbred database. Last year, I was disappointed in not finalising this significant Project. This year, I can only talk about the success and widespread acknowledgement of AHRC On-Line, the closure and opening of the Breeding and Racing Season in the national AHRC system, the timely

development and completion of the Stud Book and the thorough and competent delivery of the revised user friendly AHRC system. It has not been easy but the professionalism of Council's staff working with the Joint Venture of HRV and HRNSW through all difficulties in the project's implementation has placed Australian Harness Racing in an unenviable position. We now integrate Council's upgraded technology with our Members systems and deliver "state of the art" customer friendly information over the internet as a racing technology leader. Council is the custodian of the national records of breeding and racing information and must remain so for the Breeders, Studmasters and Owners, who have contributed information and funding towards their development over an extensive period of time. Council's valuable database now on its enhanced computer platform allows all industry participants and fans alike to share information. This is our future communications channel. It allows us to strengthen our relationships with the racing and gaming market in which we operate to encourage and expand competitive opportunities for Australian harness racing at home and abroad. The growth in the market of our exported standardbreds to the American continent as New Zealand also does attests to our ability to breed quality competitive racing stock.

In future years this foundation will enhance Australia's reputation as a nation, which is innovative and prepared to create opportunities for its participants through listening and addressing their needs and aspirations. The progress in completing the major DNA Genotyping project is a key feature of promoting parental verification. It will support the integrity necessary in identifying our herd internationally. Consolidating this integrity measure with Maxxam Analytics Inc of Canada our service provider means that we are directly linked with the United States Trotting Association and Standardbred Canada in this initiative as we all use Maxxams Analytics Inc. It is vitally important that we progressively genotype the whole Australian herd to ensure its integrity and the international reputation of the standardbreds registered in the Australian Trotting Stud Book.

Council continues to contribute effectively at both the international level in our co-operation with other jurisdictions on a range of matters. Our closest partner has been Harness Racing New Zealand with whom we have an excellent, enduring and co-operative relationship. Jim Wakefield and Edward Rennell have progressed policies designed to further New Zealand harness racing in association with the Clubs and representative bodies of breeders, owners and others. Their preparedness to work with Council and its Members is recognised and appreciated. Similarly a closer liaison now occurs with Council and the Racing Ministers as a Group. Consultation derived through the periodic meetings has enabled a closer communication

on the political range of issues relevant to Racing Ministers. This ensures our industry's visibility with our other racing codes at a State Ministerial level on national issues in conjunction with the Australian Racing Board. Our code's work in training through Racing Training Australia and curriculum development by our Chief Executive as Chairman of the Product Steering Group furthers our industry's progress to professionalism through training and development.

Importantly, change is ever present and Council has taken positive steps to review what we do and how we operate. This Review is being undertaken by an external Consultant. You have a progress report in the form of a Discussion Paper today for information and consideration. Council has not been a deliberative body but in my time has been very successful in its achievements through consultation, discussion and negotiation whilst maintaining the rights and responsibilities of its Members. Each in the past has operated in differing market conditions and has responded individually. The Discussion Paper proposes a range of Recommendations in Council shaping its own future.

We currently function through an issues screening and generation process involving the Chief Executives in a co-ordinated approach. The Consultant Don Healy of Laysell Pty Ltd will provide options for consideration. This provides the opportunity for Council and its Members to focus on the future and how we wish to change our organisation to effectively operate. Although not completed this matter is before us in this meeting.

In reviewing our industry's operations Council has lead in developing initiatives promoting driver and trainer safety. We have debated then done many initiatives promoting safety. The program of removing internal running rails and upgrading tracks continues vigorously where resources are available to do the job. It is nearly complete. The provision of safety vests, reviews on gear and equipment including the discontinuance of wooden sulkies point to a common resolution in decision making towards the objectives of fostering a safer environment.

Building on this strength of purpose, Council has been able to develop and achieve a national insurance arrangements suited to the needs of our industry at a "value for money" price tag.

The events of September 2001 and the HIH collapse has meant that the Public Liability market only provided limited opportunities for harness racing. Council's work in extending the coverage through our Brokers Jardine Lloyd Thompson in their dealings with Liberty International Underwriters from their previous position on Drivers Legal Liability Insurance into coverage was

timely and critical to our racing future. To get coverage for Trainers and Conducting Clubs is a great achievement enabling harness racing to keep going.

Council's leadership proved to be a decisive factor in marshalling our State Controlling Bodies for this common purpose. The establishment of our own mutual discretionary trust fund with commercial and flexible underwriting provisions means that each can implement this public liability insurance coverage recognising past insurance arrangements. Importantly, our industry participants can operate in their racing environment with the surety that adequate and comprehensive protection is available to them. Otherwise the provision and continuity of the racing product was under threat. In particular, Council's policies ensure that equal or superior value than in the past was obtained. The majority of trainers did not previously have cover now they do have a universal national cover. This is valuable and important. Areas like the continuing coverage for children engaged in Mini Trotters events is now a negotiated reality because of the creation of Council's public liability scheme otherwise this important activity would, of necessity, have to be abandoned.

The past year has been a test of Council and its Members. The task ahead is to apply the willingness and careful thought of all Members in utilising the Review to take the positive opportunities provided to us. Our objective is to evaluate the recommendations placed before us by the Chief Executives in earlier meetings and the thoughts of the independent Consultant. Council's actions in establishing this Review recognise that we as a dedicated group for harness racing's betterment will not remain in the past but focus on our future.

Tony McGrath  
Chairman