



NATIONAL FORUM EXECUTIVE

PO Box 31-209

Christchurch

## **HRNZ – NATIONAL FORUM – CONFERENCE REPORT - 2025**

**Presenter:** John Hartnell (HRNZ National Forum Chair)

A year of change – 2024/2025 will be seen as a tentative, but positive step forward under the new governance model that member clubs and kindred bodies put in place at the 2024 Conference.

We have seen the new HRNZ Board assume responsibility for the future direction of our industry, under the leadership of Chair, Grant Jarrold, supported by CEO, Brad Steele.

Substantive change takes time to bed in, it can be frustrating when all eyes are looking for immediate results, but as noted in last years report, there was a requirement for patience as all parties got up to speed, and a solid foundation was formed.

Over the last 12 months we have seen a big focus on the “look north” strategy, supported nationally with positive movement on the stakes front, a review and change to the handicapping system (still a work in progress), programming and breeding initiatives, all designed to build future confidence in our Code.

Have we, did we, get this right?

Clearly the answer is no, not always, but simply put, if you don't try you will never know, this is the change process, a willingness and the courage to have a go, learn from the results, explore more options and champion the good ideas this generates.

As an industry we must work together, we appreciate the passion that our stakeholders have, but we must harness this in a positive way and avoid excess negativity as we are simply beating ourselves up. We must challenge where appropriate the decisions made but make sure, we have and are willing to table an alternative solution or sound idea to remedy the concern, this is taking a responsible position.

Throughout the last 12 months we have seen the Regional Forums build momentum and understanding. This has been a big step, but without question our regional and national unity as clubs and kindred bodies has never been as strong, we are beginning to appreciate that most issues are common to us all, and that a collective approach will find solutions and add weight to any call for change.

As the National Forum we are charged with providing a knowledge resource to the HRNZ Board to use as a “sense check” within their decision-making process. This resource has not been utilised to any substantive degree, which is concerning issue that has been raised between the National Forum and the Board. The knowledge that sits at the



Forum table is a substantive asset to the governance board. Using this experience fills gaps within the Boards knowledge base, particularly around racing, breeding, and club operations, it must not be ignored!

HRNZ Operations is also a key focus for the National Forum. One of the core requirements outlined to the Board on day one was the formation of a smart and agile leadership team. While we are seeing some progress towards this, and well done for that, it is important that we do not lose focus on this primary objective, we need to find and appoint the best people available to our industry in their relevant field to strengthen our knowledge base and to work positively as part of the leadership team on a day-to-day basis.

Communication – this is one key issue that remains front and centre, what is the most effective way to deliver key messages and information across what is a broad range of harness racing stakeholders, and how do we ensure that we are heard, and that the information is received?

It is a busy world, and we are all busy people, if it does not arrive in our email inbox or in a text then frankly it is potentially missed or ignored. We need to understand how our stakeholders operate and what best suits them, is it a text for some, an email for others or even a short video blog. We must find the answer as feeling isolated and not cared for leads to rejection and eventually the impacted party disengages from the industry, we must be very mindful of this.

In 2024 we signalled the importance of relationships particularly our wagering partner ENTAIN. It is appropriate to acknowledge Dean Shannon and Senior Leadership team at Entain who were prepared to stand with us as a critical partner in Harness Racing. The Friday night lights programme, racing carnivals, supportive lead up racing programmes and breeding incentives gave all stakeholders something to aspire to. This supportive team have now moved on, but we owe them a debt of gratitude. We welcome the new ENTAIN team lead by Sam Moncur and look forward to working with them to extract maximum performance from the Harness Racing Code.

Looking forward we will be judged as a Code; by wagering performance and delivery for ENTAIN, we need to understand this better, what does this mean? We will hear from ENTAIN at this conference. Do we have confidence we are tracking in the required direction, are we delivering what they require, what does this look like, and how can we do better?

The National Forum met Thursday this week to review our first year in operation, to hear from clubs and kindred bodies as appropriate and to meet face to face with the HRNZ Board. It is a critical that the Forums are used as the first point of call for all Harness



Racing matters at club and kindred body level, we must find a way to cater for the diversity that we have within our industry.

My thanks to the Regional Forums and the National Forum Executive for their commitment and support, to the HRNZ Board for their bravery to challenge the norm, and to the HRNZ Operations team for the passion that they bring to harness racing daily.

[Communication discussion.....](#)