



NATIONAL FORUM EXECUTIVE

PO Box 31-209

Christchurch

HRNZ – NATIONAL FORUM – CONFERENCE REPORT - 2024

Presenter: John Hartnell (HRNZ National Forum Chair)

Conference 2023 laid the foundation for change within Harness Racing, it was unanimously agreed that the industry would embrace a directional shift, across the “grass roots” of our sporting code to the HRNZ governance board table.

It was noted at the time, this would require courage, a willingness to challenge past practice and seek to deliver a modern and agile, fit for purpose business model. All agreed the status quo was no longer an option.

A new structure was formulated and put in place. Sitting below the HRNZ Board, is now a National Forum, who are supported by three Regional Forums - North Island, Upper South Island and Southern Harness. These forums, representing the Clubs and Kindred Bodies, are the communications vehicle for the “Grass Roots” of our industry to discuss, debate, formulate their thinking and deliver, where appropriate, submissions to the National Forum to guide their rational as they look to share their knowledge, guidance and experience with the HRNZ Board.

This is what the industry called for, and this has been delivered. From a “Grass Roots” perspective, momentum is building, but we need to encourage greater participation and engagement. You can have a say, and it will make a difference, frustrated silence has never delivered positive results.

At this Conference a new era will be ushered in. One of the key requests underpinning these changes, was that a new and far more independent Governance Board would be established to lead our Code. This seven-person Board would be determined on some core principles, which included diversity of thought, experience, key industry touch points, strong governance and lastly leadership skills. To achieve this, the process and outcome has been managed by an Independent Appointments Panel, who following a competitive, skill seeking, merit-based nomination process would make their decision and complete their final appointment and nomination recommendations – 130 plus applications were received, the seven best sit with us today. The IAP Chair, Alan Isaac, will outline process etc, following this address.

The Code of Harness Racing should be congratulated for having the courage to step into the unknown, in doing so, having faith to trust the process and embrace the journey.



A journey that will no doubt have its moments, as change is never simple, nor effective if we are not bold, it does and it will make us a little uncomfortable.

Over the last three months, we have seen the appointment of Brad Steele, to the position of CEO, HRNZ. Brad has brought stability back into our industry. He has a wealth of experience gained from many years in the banking sector, and an extensive knowledge of horse racing and code leadership. His passion for harness racing is very evident, as is his desire to be the face on the ground for HRNZ, whether it is on the track, or rubbing shoulders with government and industry peers.

Part of the new ethos of HRNZ is being built on the platform of "we do what we say", something that has been missing from our code with previous leadership challenges.

Looking forward, we must be encouraging and supportive of the team at HRNZ as they adjust to the challenge of building momentum and increasing agility in their thinking and actions. We should be confident that Brad will build a solid leadership team, we need to give him space to get this done.

Relationships are critical and non-more than with our wagering partner ENTAIN, it has been a whirlwind of change from this quarter, and for all three racing codes a lifeline in what was a very turbulent period. Dean Shannon and his team are prepared to back a winner, they are investing heavily in the harness code, and we as an industry must recognise and respond to this with our support. Friday night lights, racing carnivals, supportive lead up racing programmes and breeding incentives must be embraced as we look to stabilise our horse numbers and re-build our racing stock.

Success will be judged by wagering performance for ENTAIN, we need to understand this and appreciate that our guaranteed income will come to an end. At that point we will have to swim with the sharks, so it is best we are a dominant hammerhead, rather than a bottom feeding minnow.

The National Forum met Thursday this week to establish a work plan for the next 6 months. The primary focus being on building positive momentum and developing key relationships with the incoming board of HRNZ. The National Forum is the pivotable link between you, the clubs and kindred bodies, and the industry governance table, it is essential that we have open dialogue, as we present your concerns and beliefs appropriately.

Finally, it is important that we recognise the outgoing board, who have been faced with many challenges over the last two years. It is never an easy task, when leadership on the shop floor is absent. This board has shown strength of purpose and considerable



professionalism, as they have navigated the change process which the industry determined was required. They have been ably led by Chair, Phil Holden.

To the board –

Phil Holden (Chair)

John Grainger (Vice Chair)

Shaun Brooks

Bill McDonald

John Coulam

Anna Gallien

Todd Anderson

Our thanks for your commitment to the sport of harness racing, nobody can question your desire to see the sport prosper. We wish you every success in your future business and governance aspirations and acknowledge the time that you gave to the governance of our industry.

I will now handover to Alan Isaac, Chairman of the HRNZ Independent Board Appointment Panel to cover off the process undertaken on behalf of clubs and kindred bodies, to identify, appoint or nominate the new board candidates.

Please trust the process it has been robust and thorough.