

**PRESS RELEASE**

**FROM**

**HARNESS RACING GOVERNANCE WORKING GROUP & NZ STANDARDBRED BREEDERS ASSN INC**

**Proposed Constitution Changes on Consultation, Regional and National Forums and HRNZ Director Selection and Election**

The Harness Racing Governance Working Group and NZ Standardbred Breeders Assn have today sent to Harness Racing New Zealand a proposal for new constitutional arrangements on establishing regional forums and a national forum to enhance communications, consultation and coordination within the sport and a new process for electing its board.

These proposals will be up for consideration at the HRNZ annual meeting on 14 October in Christchurch.

The proposals are based on work of the Harness Racing Governance Working Group over the last three months and wide consultation. The group is chaired by Penny Baynes of Southland with members from throughout the country.

NZ Standardbred Breeders Assn had been working on a separate but similar proposal for the election of directors.

“The Working Group and the Breeders came together at the request of the clubs to bring one proposal to the AGM,” said Penny Baynes

“We all realised the critical need to make significant change given the issues facing the sport. A single proposal for the AGM is the best way forward.

“The HRNZ board needs to be made up of the people with the best set of skills we can attract. We must have a board with knowledge and commitment to harness racing, but a wide mix of skills is paramount,” she said.

Colin Hair, chair of The Breeders said the Governance Review of NZ Rugby proved timely. It reinforced much of our thinking and that of the working group.

“The National Forum will be where the views from across the sport on national issues will come together to advise the Board on the strategic direction of the sport and national issues,” said Hair.

“We believe that having the three regional forums can be key to implementing a “think national, act local” implementation approach, it expands the current Southern Harness model,” said John Hartnell a member of the working group.

“With a wide range of clubs, kindred bodies and other key stakeholders as members we know the regional forums can be effective in giving stakeholders a voice in the management and direction of the sport, and helping to increase the number of horses racing, turnover and then stakes.”

“The National Forum with club and kindred body representatives can be the link to the Board on national strategy,” said Hartnell.

If adopted at the AGM, during 2024 the new five-person Directors’ Appointment Panel will be established with an independent chairperson.

If adopted by the code at the October AGM the Panel will be busy as at the 2024 AGM all director positions would become vacant and seven directors will be elected. Current directors can reapply. The existing arrangements with ATC and NZMTC appointed, and four club-elected positions will dis-established if the AGM adopts these changes.

“We look forward to supporting our directors to take that additional step that is the hallmark of true independence: the willingness to pose the really difficult questions and to challenge even the holiest of cows,” said Hair.

“Through these proposals we are asking the Board and individual directors to step up and take responsibility and provide leadership, with support from our sport. In doing so, greater courage will be needed. Together we can succeed to promote and grow the sport” said Hartnell.

We await the outcome of the AGM.

14 September 2023