



REPORT TO TASMANIAN RACING MINISTER

**Review of the adequacy of Tasmanian
thoroughbred racing track conditions,
safety, standards, maintenance
and inspections**



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A. ABBREVIATIONS USED IN REPORT

A & F	Assets and Facilities [in “Tasracing A & F Manager”]
CoS	Chairman of Stewards
Elwick	Elwick race track
Mowbray	Mowbray race track
ORI	Office of Racing Integrity
PRA	Principal Racing Authority (Code controlling body)
TJA	Tasmanian Jockeys Association
TMP	Track Management Plan
TRC	Tasmanian Racing Club at Elwick
TTA	Tasmanian Trainers Association
TTC	Tasmanian Turf Club at Mowbray
STC	Sports Turf Consultants (Peter Anderson)

B. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR INDEPENDENT INQUIRY

"The Terms of Reference for an independent inquiry into the adequacy of Tasmanian thoroughbred race track condition, safety, standards, maintenance and inspections were established by the Minister for Racing.

The Inquiry is to investigate and report to the Minister for Racing, on the following matters:

1. The causes of, and factors contributing to the late abandonment of race meetings at Mowbray Race Course on 19 November 2020 and the Elwick Race Course on 27 December, 2020;
2. The timeliness and adequacy of track inspection protocols by Tasracing and the Office of Racing Integrity (ORI) prior to race meetings;
3. The competence and training of Tasracing maintenance and turf curation staff including how the Elwick track was prepared and presented for racing on Sunday 27 December 2020;
4. The chain of authority within Tasracing and ORI for track maintenance, pre-race inspections and reporting;
5. The expectations of Tasmanian racing participants in relation to the role of Tasracing and the ORI in track safety, preparation, inspections, reporting and communication to participants;
6. The suitability, performance and durability of the Elwick Race Track and future management arrangements of the Track, including what guidelines/protocols, remediation and mitigation actions will be taken in the short, medium and long term to prevent this occurring again;
7. Any other matters reasonably incidental to the above matters.

The Investigation will include reference to track maintenance and inspection arrangements in other Australian racing jurisdictions.

Duration of Inquiry

The Inquiry is to commence on the appointment of the Investigator [it commenced on 4 January 2021] and will conclude by 1 March 2021."

C. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Elwick and Mowbray race tracks are operated by the Tasmanian Racing Club (TRC) and Tasmanian Turf Club (TTC) respectively. Tasracing has effective control of the race tracks for racing purposes, and it is responsible for funding all track-related capital infrastructure, equipment used thereon and all maintenance costs, including management and labour. Tasracing appoints a track manager for each of the State's racing and training facilities. The track managers report to the Tasracing Assets and Facilities (A & F) Manager, who is a direct report to Tasracing's Chief Executive Officer.

The Elwick racing surface was totally reconstructed in 2019, with specifications determined by Tasracing, with a return to racing in February 2020. Mowbray's racing surface was reconstructed in 2007 and is considered a mature track.

Both Elwick and Mowbray racing surfaces were built using a StrathAyr sand profile design. StrathAyr, a Tasmanian-based turf company, specialises in reinforced sand profile racing surfaces. Such track profiles came into use in Australia in the mid-1990s, as an alternative to loam/sand and sand/loam tracks. It is likely that the decision to specify a sand profile track at Elwick was due to the success of the Mowbray surface.

Initially, my review concentrated upon all documentation with respect to the design, construction and recommended maintenance of the Elwick track including contracts with StrathAyr, which importantly provided a maintenance manual and plan for the new Elwick track.

Tasracing assumed responsibility for Elwick's maintenance upon practical completion in December 2019, some 12 months before the issues which caused the cancellation of the 27 December meeting. I note that the 12 month warranty provided by StrathAyr, with respect to the Elwick track, has since expired. I am not aware of any warranty issues.

The Office of Racing Integrity (ORI) is a State statutory entity and is responsible for the integrity of Tasmanian racing, which includes the provision of Stewards on racedays. It should be noted integrity arrangements differ throughout Australia, with Queensland's integrity functions the most similar to those in Tasmania. In the other states, each Code's Principal Racing Authority (PRA) provides Integrity services, independent from their control of the State's racing activities.

I have reviewed available documentation from both Tasracing and ORI with respect to policies and procedures in place for raceday track inspections.

My focus has been to provide recommendations to ensure that the events which led to the postponement and/or cancellation of race meetings do not occur again, barring unforeseen events. In particular, I have sought to identify, with the assistance of the Flemington and Moonee Valley track managers and Sports Turf Consultants (STC), best practice maintenance guidelines for the sand profile track at Elwick.

It is clear from media coverage that industry participants and stakeholders lost confidence as a result of the cancellation of the Mowbray 19 November and Elwick 27 December 2020 meetings. This coverage, particularly after the Elwick 27 December cancellation, was intense and opinions were publicly given on the problems and frustrations with Elwick, and with Tasracing and ORI's handling of the matters.

Notwithstanding scepticism as to the suitability and performance of Elwick I am confident that with maturity and proper management it will become fit for purpose and prove to be a valuable asset for racing

in Tasmania, meeting all expectations. The conduct of feature race meetings at Elwick in late January and early February proved that with good maintenance practices, even after the concerns from the 27 December meeting, the track can race well.

Subsequent to the events at Elwick on 27 December, the Tasracing CEO in a proactive move decided to seek the advice of Melbourne track managers to assist in managing Elwick, in preparation for feature racing in January and February.

This involved two of Australia's senior race course managers – Liam O'Keefe from Flemington and Martin Synan from Moonee Valley – inspecting the Elwick track. They made a series of joint recommendations to the Tasracing CEO to assist with the maintenance of Elwick leading up to the Summer Carnival and on an ongoing basis. See **Attachment 4**. Tasracing has already acted upon this advice.

I have been provided with a copy of this report to the CEO of Tasracing, which has assisted me in formulating recommendations relating to the future maintenance of Elwick. Subsequent to this I had ongoing discussions with the Flemington track manager regarding a number of key track maintenance issues.

Liam O'Keefe also attended track gallops on 19 January, at which Elwick was passed for racing on 24 January, and I spoke to him after the gallops. The Victorian track managers' ongoing interest, and offer of assistance to Tasracing track managers over the next 12 months, is very important.

To enable me to gain an understanding of the profile of the Elwick track, and its compliance with Tasracing's contractual specifications with StrathAyr, I engaged, with the approval of the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, the services of STC's Mr Peter Anderson, who provides valuable turf/agronomy services and assistance to the Flemington, Caulfield and Sandown race tracks. STC's advice is summarised in **Attachment 3**.

It is vital that such a review is undertaken at least twice per year on sand profile race tracks, given that their performance and their maintenance requirements are different from those of conventional tracks. The challenges presented by sand profile tracks, particularly in their first three (3) years, are not widely understood or appreciated by the broader racing community.

An important part of my review was engaging with interested parties with respect to the Terms of Reference (ToR) provided by the Racing Minister. In this regard, I conducted 33 face to face and phone interviews to gain an understanding of these parties' impressions of the problems that occurred at Elwick and Mowbray. The details of those with whom I consulted are in **Attachment 1**. This process assisted in framing recommendations to the Minister for Racing and has informed the whole report.

During interviews I became aware that Tasracing and ORI were both working on a revision of their track inspections policies, for racedays and pre-racedays. Tasracing sought the assistance of the Tasmanian Jockeys Association (TJA) for a senior jockey to walk the tracks two (2) days prior to meetings and this process was implemented prior to Elwick's 24 January meeting. The revised inspections policy and procedures document will also refine the process for dealing with race meetings being called off.

As required, I reviewed track inspections procedures, including the effectiveness of current practices and responsibilities relating thereto, arising from the race meeting abandonments.

It should be noted that, not unexpectedly, a number of issues outside the terms of reference were raised. I have summarised the issues raised in **Attachment 2** and highlighted a few points under term of reference 7, for review and consideration by the Minister for Racing, in consultation with Tasracing and ORI.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Elwick Race Track

To instil confidence in Elwick and its presentation on racedays, it is recommended that:

1. Management

- i. Tasracing review the effectiveness of its current track management structure, including key competencies and performance of managers reporting through to the CEO.
- ii. Tasracing review resources allocated for the management and maintenance of both Elwick and Mowbray. Currently establishment numbers differ for each track.
- iii. Tasracing facilitate training for all track staff to upskill them with modern maintenance knowledge for sand profile tracks.
- iv. Tasracing purchase mower/catcher and multi-corer equipment as recommended by the Melbourne track managers.
- v. Tasracing produce annual Track Management Plans (TMPs), for both Elwick and Mowbray. The integrated plans should include race meetings, rail movements, planned official trials, work to be undertaken between race meetings, and an annual shutdown of six (6) weeks to allow for major renovation works.
- vi. The annual TMP to incorporate the findings/conclusions contained in the STC report, a copy of which has been made available to Tasracing.
- vii. Tasracing consult with industry participants on the TMP prior to its finalisation and distribution to the industry.
- viii. Tasracing continue to enlist the ongoing practical advice from the Flemington and Moonee Valley track managers, who have indicated a desire to assist.
- ix. Tasracing conduct a track management forum, inviting industry participants, to explain and educate on track maintenance. The assistance of the Flemington and Moonee Valley Track Managers is to be sought in this regard.

2. Use of Elwick for training, trialling and/or gallops

- i. In future the inside 16 metres of the track be reserved exclusively for the conduct of race meetings.
- ii. For the next 12 months, trials and grass gallops only be conducted on the outside 12 metres of the back straight. Thereafter consideration be given to additionally using the outside 10 metres in the straight. Such uses to be included in the annual TMP.
- iii. Witches' hats, spaced 100m apart, as used throughout Australia for training gallops, to serve as a guide in trials and gallops. This will free up valuable time for track maintenance rather than having to erect and dismantle the running rail for such track usage. The Tasmanian Jockeys Association (TJA) is to be consulted on the use of witches' hats for trials.
- iv. In the future consideration be given to limiting the use of the home straight for grass gallops to runners engaged in feature races, as determined by Tasracing, such as the Derby and Hobart Cup. Witches hats are to be used to provide a running guide.

3. Maintenance of Elwick

- i. The Elwick track is presently immature and requires careful management and maintenance. This will mean limiting its use for racing, for at least another two (2) years, to 20 programmed meetings per season. This may increase, when the track is mature, to 25 or more per season. Any departure from this recommended approach will affect the performance of the track on racedays.
- ii. Repair of the race track, the day after racedays, must take priority over all other uses and work on the track.
- iii. Elwick must have at least one six (6) week break each year, to enable an annual renovation. Such renovation should be timed to coincide with good growing weather. **(See attachment 3 for STC's maintenance plan.)**
- iv. Consideration be given by Tasracing to engaging contractors, with adequate resources and the skills to undertake major works, to minimise time taken. This occurs for the Melbourne tracks.
- v. Tasracing refrain from scarifying Elwick to remove thatch unless a ten (10) week shutdown can be created for the works to be effected and for the track to suitably recover.
- vi. Coring of Elwick be the primary means of controlling, removing or thinning the thatch layer in line with the annual TMP.
- vii. Adoption of best practice management for sand profile tracks, as recommended by STC and supported by Flemington and Moonee Valley track managers.
- viii. Tasracing's detailed annual Track Maintenance Plan (TMP) for Elwick shall include the Melbourne track managers' recommendations (**Attachment 4**) and STC's maintenance plan recommendations (**Attachment 3**), which have been reviewed and supported by the Melbourne track managers. STC's key recommendations are:

ix.

- *A specific/tailored maintenance and management plan for Elwick, is critical to overall success of the racing surface.*
- *Elwick, as a juvenile track needs to be carefully managed. Overall good plant and root health is paramount in producing a suitable surface for racing without either of those the track will underperform.*
- *Thatch management is necessary to ensure a healthy organic layer is kept open and does not form a dense mat that impedes water and nutrient movement into the profile. Regular coring and slicing will be required, such as a phantom core machine or similar, to break and keep the thatch layer open/not compacted. This is to be undertaken as the racing schedule permits.*
- *All grass clippings must be caught in a catcher and not allowed to sit on the track surface as this will only encourage a scum and organic layer and further spread poa annua seeds. This does not presently occur, contrary to StrathAyr's maintenance Manual.*
- *The Poa Annuia infestation must as a matter of priority be addressed.*
- *Elwick racecourse to be rested annually, with the best window being from late August to Mid-October to allow for recovery following the renovation period.*
- *The renovation will be harsh and involve mowing the grass down to 50mm followed by a hollow core and possibly a light scarify. Finally, a 4mm depth of angular sand topdressing to be made to the surface. Importantly The grass will then have a six-week window in which to regenerate.*
- *A fertiliser program should only involve the use of slow release fertilisers, upfront fertilisers, plant hormones and specialty products to assist in strengthening the grass and which are specifically tailored to meet the tracks nutritional needs.*
- *The base levels of Phosphorus, Potassium and Magnesium need to be improved as per the STC report.*
- *No use of Organic based fertilisers e.g. Dynamic Lifter.*
- *Regular light topdressings with angular sands is required to keep the thatch layer diluted. This will be determined by the racing schedule.*
- *Root hormone products should routinely be applied to stimulate root growth around the track surface. Use of liquid Humic based products will assist in strengthening plant and root growth. Similar products have been used at Moonee Valley, which also a StrathAyr sand profile track, and proved successful.*
- *Use of wetting agents to assist in water penetration into the profile.*
- *Programming the computerised irrigation system is important given the windy [nature of] the site. The experience of Flemington and Moonee Valley in setting computerised watering programs should be utilised. Deep irrigation watering is required (10-20mm) rather than Light irrigation (2-4mm), which favours the development of shallow rooted turf species such as Poa annua (winter grass).*
- *Post-race meeting repairs must be planned and undertaken the day after every race meeting. The work will involve; Raco-vac the surface to pick up any leaf matter, deep set turf plugs 100mm diameter for smallish divots/holes and for large damage or bare grass areas, deep set slabs to fit the area. Divots and scuffed areas can also be filled with pre germinated seed.*
- *Rail movements that ensure the entire racing surface at Elwick [is used], over 12 months, particularly as the track is juvenile. Rail movements should be such that a pad of new ground is utilised for each*

meeting. Every effort must be made to not race on the same ground for more than one meeting.

- *Rail movements of True, 4m, 8m and 12m should be undertaken to provide fresh ground for each race meeting.*
- *Utilising the back straight for trials, jump-outs and grass gallops will reduce the works load on the course proper in the critical area from the 600 to Winning post.*

B. Race Track Inspections

A common policy, agreed upon by Tasracing and ORI, has been in operation for the inspection of grass racing surfaces at both Elwick and Mowbray. This has included the distribution of a document prepared by the Tasracing track manager to Tasracing Senior management, ORI and industry participant groups. **Refer Attachment 6.** The correct recording of track conditions for Elwick 27 December is in question.

Arising from the issues on both 19 November at Mowbray and 27 December 2020 at Elwick, Tasracing and ORI have been proactive in drafting amended policies and procedures, to reflect the need to provide the industry with more confidence in track inspections, to avoid the loss of race meetings. This includes having a senior rider take part in an inspection 48 hours before each meeting.

Recommendations for Race Track Inspections:

- Two days prior to each race meeting at Elwick and Mowbray a race track inspection be conducted by the track manager with an ORI appointed Steward and a Tasmanian Jockeys Association (TJA) representative, ideally a senior rider.
- The primary focus of this pre meeting race track inspection shall be the safety and welfare of riders and horses.
- The track manager must advise the Steward and TJA representatives of all maintenance work carried out on the track since the previous race meeting, particularly drawing attention to specific areas of the track that need to be inspected. Any works undertaken, such as Verti draining, coring, scarifying and sodding, are to be reported.
- The Steward delegated to inspect the track shall, after considering the advice of the track manager and the TJA representative, at his/her discretion determine if any remedial work is required in order to be satisfied that the track is safe for racing.
- The track manager will as soon as practical effect such work as directed by the Steward. The track manager shall advise Tasracing senior management, which shall apply all necessary resources and assistance to enable the track manager to effect such works.
- Tasracing shall as soon as practicable advise the Tasmanian Trainers Association (TTA) and TJA of any such works to be undertaken.
- During the raceday race track inspection, the Chairman of Stewards (CoS) shall inspect and approve any remedial work undertaken since the race track inspection 2 days prior. The CoS will continue to be responsible for determining an official track rating, after taking the advice of the track manager.
- To address concerns that messaging was deficient on 27 December, Tasracing and ORI to review communications processes to industry participants, to ensure broad and timely coverage.

E. TERMS OF REFERENCE FINDINGS

1. THE CAUSES OF, AND FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO, THE LATE ABANDONMENT OF 19 NOVEMBER 2020 AND 27 DECEMBER 2020 RACE MEETINGS.

a) Abandonment of 19 November 2020 race meeting at Mowbray

The situation which gave rise to the abandonment of the 19 November night meeting at Mowbray is well documented and is relatively easy to fix provided the parties responsible for the presentation and certification of the track fulfil their not unreasonable responsibilities.

A similar oversight had previously occurred in March 2020 and protocols were set in place subsequent to that event. These protocols should have ensured the circumstances at Mowbray did not re-occur on 19 November.

In essence a key Tasracing maintenance requirement, relating to the shifting of the moveable running rail between meetings, was the filling of slits/holes created by rail footings, and this did not occur.

This oversight was only identified by participants close to the running of the first race on 19 November and it was decided, after consultation with jockeys, to abandon the meeting for “safety” reasons.

Whilst I accept that Tasracing has determined that such slits/holes in the track must be filled, I have taken advice that in the majority of cases where footings are removed there is not a safety issue from racing over such small slits/indentations in the track when they have not been filled. It is acknowledged, however, that in levering the footings out some holes will be created, which will require some filling with sand and then compacting.

The Flemington and Moonee Valley track managers and the Chairman of the Australian Racecourse Managers Association have expressed the view that such filling is not normally required and the slits/ small holes do not present a safety issue. Tasracing, subsequent to the Mowbray meeting on 19 November, sought the advice of Mr Ray Murrphy, former Racing NSW Chief Steward, on the movement of running rails, and he has confirmed this view.

Given this advice it is appropriate for Tasracing, in conjunction with ORI and TJA, to review the need to fill rail footings after moving the running rail.

Nevertheless, as Tasracing’s track preparation policy deemed such filling necessary, it should have happened. That it was not done on 19 November was a mistake/oversight by the track manager, most probably as a consequence of not supervising staff responsible, or because staff had not been adequately trained to understand the need for the filling work, as a part of moving the running rail.

It is interesting to note that Mr Murrphy, in his report to Tasracing, has also recommended replacing the existing angular rail footings for the Mowbray rail with “smaller gauge galvanised steel footings such as or

similar to the Mawsafe product [which] will remove any need for widening and backfilling of the slits ...". I note Tasracing has accepted Mr Murrhy's recommendation and has placed an order for the new footings. **(Refer Attachment 8).**

During the interview phase of my investigation it was asserted that barrier attendant staff engaged by Tasracing, when requested to assist in filling slits/holes so the meeting could proceed, had allegedly refused to assist saying "The task was not within their duties."

In future if a race meeting is to be threatened, for whatever reason, and it becomes a manpower issue, it would be ideal if barrier attendant resources could be applied to assist. This demarcation issue should be considered by Tasracing.

b) Abandonment of 27 December 2020 race meeting at Elwick

The factors which led to the abandonment of this race meeting are more complicated. Ultimately, they relate to management, maintenance decisions and the implementation thereof, and preparation and oversight of the track, for some time leading up to the race meeting.

These factors started following the successful return to racing, after the 2019 Elwick race track reconstruction, and included:

- i. The forced shutdown of racing, which occurred with Covid restrictions applied by Government. The subsequent need/pressure to prepare horses for their return to racing in July led to a significant overuse of the race track for training and grass gallops.
- ii. The impact of this usage was in part responsible for the state of Elwick leading up to 27 December. However, it is my view that with proper maintenance and management the issue on 27 December could have been avoided.
- iii. The Covid shutdown of racing should have been used to assist the new track to settle rather than have 300 horses gallop on it over a two (2) week period.
- iv. Tasracing's decision on 26 November to transfer the Elwick 13 December race meeting created a four (4) week window, to enable necessary maintenance works to be carried out on the track leading up to 27 December. This was a good decision and it should have better readied the track for the upcoming summer carnival at Elwick.

It is vital that each year tracks should have at least one six (6) week break to enable significant maintenance works to be undertaken, which serve to ready the track for the year following.

- v. It was decided, after consulting with StrathAyr's Mr Frank Casimaty and his company's agronomist, that the track needed to be scarified to reduce thatch build up. Such works have proven to cause excessive damage and must be closely monitored if this course of action is decided. This work should have been prioritised at the commencement of the four (4) week break, but it was not.
- vi. Based upon the practical and extensive on the ground experience of the Melbourne track managers, the young Elwick track should not have been scarified.

For example, at a minimum, a ten (10) week break would be required if Flemington was to be scarified, as it then normally involves regrowing the turf, such is the damage caused. Flemington is

not now scarified, although it was some years ago when it contained kikuyu grass types and had longer breaks to undertake such work.

The Melbourne track managers now rarely scarify, preferring to core the track to reduce the thatch layer and also prevent the build-up of an organic layer on the surface. It also helps water drain through the sand profile.

It should be noted that scarifying of tracks is usually successful in warmer climates with creeping grass species – and neither of those circumstances exists in Hobart! The Melbourne experience has been learned over many years, and by making mistakes, and this experience should supersede advice previously provided to Tasracing to scarify Elwick.

- vii. The opportunity to commence the works was delayed by two (2) weeks, which was a lost opportunity. This set back the track for the Elwick 27 December meeting. Various reasons were provided for delaying works, but in my view, they could not justify this decision. The four (4) week opportunity was created, but against this the decision to scarify, and the timing and management of the maintenance, was deficient.
- viii. I cannot understand why trials, in which 57 horses ran, were allowed to be conducted on the renovated Elwick track on 15 December. This was only five (5) days after the scarification works and only twelve (12) days before the 27 December meeting. The time (1 ½ days) used for staff to move the rail – out 19 metres for the trials and back into position for 27 December – would have been much better used to ready the track for racing.
- ix. The scarification works brought to light an ongoing issue for Elwick and this is confirmed by the STC's report. There is a significant *Poa annua* or winter grass infestation at Elwick. *Poa* is very shallow rooted and not conducive to providing a good racing surface. In all likelihood this led to the damage in certain areas from deep scarification where the *Poa* was more prevalent. Given *Poa* was identified by StrathAyr and its agronomist prior to works commencing, it is most surprising more care was not taken with the scarification.
- x. It is important to understand that most tracks have some of this undesirable shallow rooting grass species, but certainly not to the extent of this new track. Elwick has an average of 25% of the *Poa* grass cover and up to 48% in areas, as identified in STC's report on the Elwick surface (refer Attachment 3). *Poa*, being very shallow rooted, provides uneven going with little resistance to divoting, particularly in winter months.
- xi. Failure to collect grass clippings and leaving them on the surface has most probably contributed to the infestation as the seeds from the *Poa* will have spread and germinated. The *Poa* has not been well managed and will present an ongoing problem, particularly with the conduct of race meetings in winter.
- xii. Given the significant amount of *Poa*, it is most likely that this grass was imported with the laying of the turf during the Elwick reconstruction.

Normally when turf is ordered for a race track, quality control KPIs apply, which include non-acceptance of the presence of *Poa* in turf delivered for laying. Tasracing could not locate documentation for the turf supplied by StrathAyr, which was a separate contract, for me to establish if such quality measures were specified. A separate contract was required as the turf had to be grown and matured twelve (12) months advance of it being laid at Elwick in 2019.

In future, when new turf is imported/used, Tasracing must clearly specify it must be Poa free. This was a prime stipulation for turf supply with both the Caulfield and Flemington track reconstructions, with which I was involved.

- xiii. Once the excessive damage to some areas was identified, a decision was taken to replace such sections with small plugs, in some cases numerous and inappropriately close together, particularly in the areas that came under scrutiny on 27 December.

The decision to use many small plugs, in the two sections identified at about the 300m mark, about 5m off the rail, caused the cancellation on 27 December. Other small plugs (30 or more) were properly used around the track and they could have been raced upon with safety.

For some reason it does not appear that the use of large grass carpet slab squares, as supplied by StrathAyr, was considered by Tasracing track management. These would have solved the problem and not presented a safety problem on 27 December.

- xiv. The decision to abandon racing at Elwick on 27 December was appropriate considering the safety issues involved with racing over the damaged areas. It is unfortunate that the areas were not identified sooner (two (2) days prior) so that they could have been properly repaired to enable the meeting to proceed.
- xv. Photographs in **Attachment 7** clearly show how poorly parts of the Elwick track were prepared for racing on 27 December. I have not seen the like in my time, and they are not befitting the repair or presentation of a metropolitan race track.
- xvi. The application of dry sand, when the areas were identified, in an endeavour to consolidate the poorly repaired areas, only served to worsen the situation – including the physical presentation, which drew the attention of persons walking the track. The sand and plugs should have been individually watered in.
- xvii. At the time of my engagement tracks in Tasmania were certified as safe for racing on racedays, as is the case throughout Australia, no sooner than two (2) hours before the first race. However, this does not allow enough time for other than minor remediation works to occur if required by the Stewards.

On 27 December, during the inspection of Elwick, the CoS queried two (2) sections of the track near the 300m mark but relied upon the professional advice of the Elwick track manager to certify the track as safe for racing. The CoS did not test the stability of the grass plugs in the areas of concern. This should be the responsibility of Stewards when inspecting tracks.

At the time of preparing this report, ORI's position description for the CoS did not include the power to direct or overrule track managers, although it is clear that Stewards take effective control of a race meeting at least two (2) hours before commencement. This is normally to determine if a track is safe for racing and to endorse or alter the rating of a track.

If Stewards are to declare a track safe for racing, given ORI is taking such responsibility, the Stewards must understand that they have power to direct and overrule track managers, at their discretion. This happens in all other racing constituencies in Australia. In this instance the CoS indicated that he relied upon the professional advice of the track manager rather than taking independent action, as he didn't believe he was suitably qualified.

- xviii. I believe that ORI's Stewards Panel would be better equipped to understand track maintenance if they had appropriate education and training. ORI should work with Tasracing to facilitate such training

2. THE TIMELINESS AND ADEQUACY OF TRACK INSPECTION PROTOCOLS BY TASRACING AND THE OFFICE OF RACING INTEGRITY , PRIOR TO RACE MEETINGS.

It is generally accepted practice throughout Australia for Stewards to inspect race tracks on the morning (afternoon for night meetings) of race meetings, unless identified problems are brought to their attention which require inspections leading up to the day of meetings.

In most instances, the on-the-day race track inspections suffice in establishing that a track is safe for racing and to confirm the decision of the track manager in rating of the track. Most tracks are rated by the track manager at or about 6.30am prior to final scratching time (7.30am), so connections of horses can decide to run or not based upon the track rating.

Upon arrival on course, usually more than two (2) hours before the first race, one of the Steward's first duties is to thoroughly inspect the track and to certify the track rating, which can change due to weather from that given out at 6.30am. This practice was followed for the Mowbray 19 November and Elwick 27 December meetings.

On the 27 December, the CoS walked Elwick with the track manager and another experienced Steward. Generally, they would walk three (3) metres apart so that 10 metres off the rail, where racing will occur, is thoroughly inspected. The areas which caused the meeting to be cancelled were five (5) metres off the rail.

Normally with a race track inspection the track manager should explain the maintenance program for the track for the preceding week and bring to the attention of Stewards any out-of-the-ordinary issues or concerns so that the Stewards can direct their attention to those sections of the track. I note that routinely a five (5) day report for the days leading up to a race meeting is prepared by Tasracing's track manager. This document is provided to ORI and industry participant groups.

On 19 November at Mowbray the filling of the rail post slits/holes was not identified during the track inspection. On 27 December at Elwick the CoS did ask the question of the track manager as to whether the plugs used in two (2) areas in question would be suitable for racing.

As noted, it is fundamental that if Stewards are to declare a track safe for racing they must understand they have the power to direct and overrule track managers, at their discretion.

If it were not for the events on 19 November and 27 December, the race track inspection process two (2) hours before the first race would continue to be the norm. However, lack of confidence in the process requires consideration of inspections no later than 48 hours before a race meeting, so that if something is found which might jeopardise a race meeting, remedial action can be taken.

Such an inspection before the 19 November and 27 December meetings, particularly with a senior jockey in attendance, would most likely have identified the issues which caused the abandonment of the two (2) meetings, allowing time for their rectification and for the meetings to proceed.

Prior to race meetings Tasracing must ensure the track manager notifies ORI/Stewards as soon as there is an issue that requires consideration. This occurs in other States and if it needs to be documented as an obligation of the track manager, then it should be.

I note that Tasracing and ORI are currently working on a new Raceday Track Safety Inspections Policy and Procedure document and that they have consulted with the TJA. When I sighted the draft it did not cover pre-raceday inspections, but it should.

In a proactive move Tasracing has already provided for tracks to be inspected two (2) days prior to meetings with a TJA senior rider in attendance. This inspection is now included in the pre-meeting report prepared by the track manager for industry distribution. ORI should delegate a Steward to also participate in such inspections.

3. THE COMPETENCE AND TRAINING OF TASRACING MAINTENANCE AND TURF CURATION STAFF INCLUDING HOW THE ELWICK TRACK WAS PREPARED FOR RACING ON 27 DECEMBER 2020.

Elwick

I am satisfied that Tasracing has people in senior positions, responsible for grass tracks, with suitable turf qualifications. Tasracing's experience with managing Elwick's sand profiles has proven to be deficient, but this can be remedied. The Elwick track manager reports to the Tasracing Assets and Facilities (A & F) Manager, who in turn reports to the Tasracing CEO.

It was pleasing to note the extent of qualifications held by the non-management track staff at Elwick. The holding of horticultural qualifications is not a Tasracing job requirement but it would seem the track managers' recruitment of track staff has focused on this.

Given the track manager's qualifications and ten (10) years' experience in the Elwick role, it is hard to fathom how the Elwick track was presented as it was on 27 December. The decision to delay the major scarification works recommended by StrathAyr's Frank Casimaty, and endorsed by the Tasracing A & F Manager, by nearly two weeks, in only a four (4) week shut down period, does not make sense.

This decision, seemingly endorsed by inaction from those above, warrants review by the Tasracing CEO. Ideally all tracks should have a full six (6) week break annually, with works to commence immediately to allow time to recuperate.

Given the damage they caused, the scarification works were poorly supervised and could have been lessened. Proper supervision of the impact of scarification is a normal management practice, according to the advice of the Flemington and Moonee Valley track managers.

It must be accepted, in light of how the Melbourne tracks are managed, that the decision to scarify based upon StrathAyr's advice, particularly given the limited timeframe available, was the wrong one.

However, once the damage was caused, the decision to use small plugs on the larger damaged areas, rather than have StrathAyr supply larger turf rolls, was a mistake. In its Maintenance Program document, StrathAyr provided this supply option but it was not taken up by Tasracing management and it should have been.

Photographs in **Attachment 7** illustrate that "small" deep plugs were appropriate and safe in many areas (up to 30), whereas they were inappropriately used in the two (2) areas in question, being so close together with little support, and were later deemed unsafe.

As at other race tracks, plugs are usually obtained from areas of the track that are not raced upon, such as under the outside running rail. This ensures the grass and soil profile are compatible with the turf area they are to replace.

The plug extraction device used at both Elwick and Mowbray differs from that used with success by the Melbourne tracks. That device could be replicated for Elwick and Mowbray at minimal cost. I understand the Flemington manager has provided details to Tasracing.

Mowbray

The same management structure exists at Mowbray as for Elwick, with the track manager holding horticultural qualifications and Australian Track Managers Association (ATMA) membership.

Despite the Mowbray track manager's good turf experience, his performance was let down in this instance by a lack of attention to detail on established management procedures, when moving the running rail. His good management of the Mowbray turf is widely acknowledged in both Tasmania and in Victoria.

From my investigations the proper care and maintenance of Mowbray, other than the supervision oversight, is not in question. No one interviewed had any concerns with the actual maintenance of Mowbray and its performance on racedays. The observation was made that Mowbray is usually "a bit tired" at the end of the winter Wednesday night schedule of race meetings, and that consideration should be given to holding more meetings on the Devonport artificial surface, to better present Mowbray.

I cannot establish if the experience with the StrathAyr track at Mowbray was shared/sought out to assist with the new Elwick StrathAyr track. In all likelihood it was not. I am aware that Mowbray, when first constructed in 2007, experienced some issues associated with managing and maintaining the new sand profile.

As at Elwick, a good number of the track staff recruited at Mowbray hold horticultural and other qualifications.

General

Tasracing does not presently require track maintenance staff (below managers) to hold turf/horticultural qualifications. This requirement should be considered for all such staff, to upskill the work force and enable them all to understand why and how the tracks need to be managed/maintained and the significance of their work.

I have been advised that Tasracing has accepted the Flemington manager's offer to have Tasracing maintenance staff attend and learn during Flemington's Autumn renovation. This is a positive move as over a number of years it would be beneficial for all track staff to be given the opportunity to learn the techniques applied.

Consideration should also be given to educating Stewards on track maintenance, so issues that arise are not foreign to them and they can form educated views on how a track is presented and how it might perform, with various maintenance programs.

I note that the Elwick and Mowbray track managers are active members of the ATMA and have access to the experience of this group. In the lead up to the Elwick 27 December meeting I am not sure that the knowledge of this group was leveraged. I am aware however that the Mowbray track manager regularly leveraged off the experience of the Moonee Valley track manager, who also manages a StrathAyr sand profile track.

Sharing knowledge between the two Tasracing grass tracks, given they are both StrathAyr products albeit 12 years apart, is essential in the future, as well as accessing the knowledge from the Melbourne sand profile tracks. Tasracing must ensure this happens as a matter of course. Regular quarterly at

least) meetings of Tasracing track managers should be scheduled, to ensure shared rather than siloed knowledge. This is vital in an organisation the size of Tasracing.

The Tasracing A & F Manager should facilitate and attend such meetings and ensure that a coordinated annual Track Management Plan (TMP) is prepared for both tracks, for presentation to the Tasracing CEO and the Board for sign-off. The TMP should detail race meetings scheduled, proposed trials and grass gallops, rail movements and all maintenance to be performed on the tracks leading up to meetings, including an annual shut down period to undertake major maintenance.

The TMP will include all works planned to be undertaken. The Melbourne track managers have offered to assist Tasracing with the preparation of the TMPs and this should be accepted by Tasracing.

In the interests of sharing knowledge, the TMP should be made available to ORI and its Stewards and also shared with industry participants. This will enable Tasracing to explain how the tracks will be managed. Hopefully in the future this will enable Tasracing to provide valid reasons to avoid unplanned/unscheduled pressure to use the tracks for other than race meetings and use of the grass for training.

I note that subsequent to the loss of the two racedays Tasracing has since recruited additional experienced turf management staff to act as track managers for Mowbray and Elwick. These staff are well recognised in turf management and by the Flemington and Moonee Valley track managers.

4. THE CHAIN OF AUTHORITY WITHIN TASRACING AND ORI FOR TRACK MAINTENANCE, PRE-RACE INSPECTIONS AND REPORTING.

The chains of delegated authority from the Tasracing Board and ORI, a statutory body, ultimately rest with the CEO of Tasracing and the General Manager of ORI respectively. They in turn need to have adequate resources and clearly established responsibilities for their direct reports, being Tasracing's A & F Manager and ORI's Chairman of Stewards (CoS), respectively.

Tasracing

In the case of Tasracing the key role is that of the A & F Manager who has responsibility, amongst other things, for the track managers at both Elwick and Mowbray, and for the tracks' maintenance (three Codes), pre-race meeting preparation, and on-the-day track inspections. The ownership of such responsibilities should be clearly defined and without ambiguity.

Elwick has twelve (12) allocated track staff including the track manager and a leading hand to manage track maintenance. The Melbourne track managers have assessed staff numbers as adequate. Mowbray, by comparison, has seven (7) staff including the track manager. Tasracing should review this anomaly as it would expect the challenges at Mowbray would be the same as at Elwick. Tasracing should also consider being able to temporarily move staff between tracks to assist with major annual renovations at Elwick and Mowbray.

Mowbray

The events which occurred at Mowbray on 19 November were within the job description and hence the responsibility of the track manager. This was a notable event, particularly as it was the second instance when the slits/holes left by moving rail footings had not been filled and compacted in line with standard requirements. Apart from these repairs not being done, the track would otherwise have been considered safe for racing.

It is interesting that it is not a requirement to fill all slits/holes at either Flemington or Moonee Valley and the Chairman of the ATMA supports this position.

Tasracing, in a proactive move, has sought the advice of respected former Racing NSW Chief Steward, Mr Ray Murrphy, who concurs with the above advice and has also recommended changes to Mowbray's older footings to make absolutely certain that the slits do not need to be filled (refer **Attachment 8**).

The track manager was responsible for walking the track and conferring with the CoS who was responsible for determining the track safe for racing. As noted, the CoS did not appear to take exception to the footings slits not being filled with sand.

Elwick

A number of individual events, over a six (6) month period, compounded to lead to the ultimate abandonment of the 27 December meeting. The decisions taken in each case need to be reviewed.

i) Use of track for 300 training gallops in June and July

The Tasracing Chairman, in the 2020 Tasracing Annual Report states: "It is worth noting that between 18 May and 21 June when it hosted its first race meeting, about 300 horses had either trialled or galloped on the track in preparation for a return to racing. For a new track, in a Tasmanian winter, this was a significant load."

Also, in referencing a pleasing rate of recovery from this use he referred to it as "unplanned heavy use". The Tasracing Board should have signed off on such usage.

From investigation, it would appear that about 100 horses competed in official trials and about 200 horses had a grass gallop to prepare for the return to racing. Allowing that volume of trials and grass gallop usage of Elwick – equivalent to four (4) race meetings over two (2) weeks – was most questionable.

Notwithstanding the return from the enforced Covid shutdown, allowing such a new track to be so heavily used, particularly at that time of the year, must have had a deleterious impact, which then required additional management and maintenance. This decision should have been the responsibility of the CEO, reporting to the Board. The Elwick track manager, reporting to the A & F Manager, would then have been responsible for trying to overcome the impacts of the overuse.

I have little doubt that this overuse, particularly with the running rail left in the same position, would have contributed to the poa annua infestation and in turn the extent of the damage caused by the scarification works, two weeks before 27 December, which was then poorly managed and repaired.

ii) Scarification Works (Also refer to my response to T o R, 1. b. vi)

I have ascertained that the Elwick track was scarified twice in 15 days during the five (5) weeks leading up to 27 December. The first was on 25 November and the second and more damaging event was on 10 December. Both were carried out because of a concern with thatch build up in the track.

The 10 December works were based upon a 3 December inspection of Elwick by StrathAyr's Mr Frank Casimaty and his company's agronomist. They recommended deeper scarification to Tasracing's A & F Manager and the Elwick track manager. The need for a more extensive scarification must have been identified because the 25 November works did not meet expectations.

Notwithstanding the decision to scarify was based upon best available advice at the time, I have concluded that it was the wrong decision with such a new track.

The prevailing knowledge of the Melbourne tracks is that they have not been scarified heavily for some years, and then only if a break of ten (10) weeks or more is available, due to the damage caused. This was a learned experience over a number of years and alternative less invasive ways were found to deal with the build-up of thatch.

For example, Flemington does not include scarification in its annual refurbishment, preferring to core the track regularly to reduce thatch. The track is also appropriately verti drained prior to race meetings to aerate the surface and assist with drainage through the thatch layer. The verti drain works also assist with easing compaction and firmness.

The consequences of this scarification work, on such a new track, were underestimated if not misunderstood. Unfortunately, it was then not well managed. This is confirmed by the views of the Flemington and Moonee Valley track managers.

I am presuming that the A & F Manager would have received updates on the progress of the 4-week renovation and also inspected the track on a regular basis leading up to 27 December race meeting.

The decision to delay scarifying Elwick until 10 December was wrong. This lack of urgency is hard to understand, as is why the track manager was not required to commence the works as soon as practical. I can only conclude that the extent of damage caused by scarifying was grossly underestimated by all parties to the decision.

The Elwick track manager was responsible for the on the ground supervision of these works, including stopping and reassessing them if he was concerned with the damage caused. This must not have happened.

Finally, on 15 December, 14 trials with 57 horses competing were held at Elwick only five (5) days after the scarification works and leading up to the important 27 December meeting. This further highlights the need for a Track Management Plan, and to consider the conduct of trials at Elwick in the back straight, away from the home straight.

In total I cannot imagine a worse set of circumstances in trying to prepare the Elwick track for a race meeting.

iii) Post-scarification repairs

The Elwick track manager elected to repair the significantly damaged areas (two at least) by resodding with small plugs (**refer Attachment 7**) rather than using more stable larger sods which could have been provided by StrathAyr.

In most cases smaller individual divots/holes can be replaced by plugs 100mm square, but the areas in question were much larger and small plugs were unsuitable.

The Elwick track manager's experience was relied upon to make this decision without being questioned by his superiors. He did not request the need to source larger sods, at a cost, from StrathAyr.

Notwithstanding the poor repair decisions, the track for the 27 December meeting was always going to be substandard due to the scarification decision.

ORI

Track maintenance

ORI has little or no involvement/input into track maintenance, or responsibility for the consequences arising therefrom. This is evident for both the Mowbray 19 November and Elwick 27 December race

meetings. This was confirmed when the CoS accepted how the tracks were prepared for racing on both days, declaring them safe.

With knowledge of maintenance and proper track presentation, I am certain that the CoS would have questioned the way the Elwick track was presented. ORI should consider bridging this knowledge gap, with the assistance of Tasracing.

On 19 November the CoS did not identify the non-filling of slits in the turf following the moving of the running rail. If it was a policy requirement of both ORI and Tasracing there is no reason why the issue should not have been identified.

It is standard practice for the CoS in Victoria to question issues with tracks and determine matters as they think fit. This in my experience has, at times, included going against the advice of the track manager.

ORI needs to empower the CoS to question and decide on track repairs presented for racing and this should be added to the position description for the role. I understand ORI has already done this and it will avoid any confusion or failure to question in future.

Pre-race inspections and reporting

At the time of my undertaking this review it was normal practice for ORI's CoS to only inspect the track on the morning of a race meeting. This is a delegated authority to the CoS or, in his/her absence, a Steward appointed by ORI to act as CoS. The control of a race meeting is an ORI delegated authority.

I note there is a policy with respect to cancellation/abandonment of race meetings, which includes consultation on racedays with TJA representatives. The CoS is responsible for facilitating this process and for making the ultimate decision, notwithstanding that TJA jockeys in attendance can refuse to ride after a vote of riders present (and have done so). Under the ORI Policy, the CoS then has no choice but to cancel the meeting.

When it was decided to cancel the Elwick 27 December meeting, the CoS then sought the approval of Tasracing and ORI before the decision was officially communicated to the industry. I understand all those involved in the decision-making process could not be immediately contacted.

The delayed announcement caused some angst for participants, particularly those who found the meeting had been cancelled only once they arrived on course with their horses. I am aware of one trainer arriving at Elwick at 4.30pm, as he did not listen to the radio and says he did not receive a text message.

Tasracing and ORI must jointly agree responsibilities and implement a timely communications strategy to inform all industry participants of important messages, on both racedays and non-racedays. This is needed as participants can be on the road for between 2 and 3 hours travelling from the North to Elwick and from the South to Mowbray. In Victoria the three Codes' Principal Racing Authorities have an SMS messaging system which works very well.

Given that Tasracing has already acknowledged the need to build confidence with earlier race track inspections, including a leading jockey, such a race track inspection should also include a Steward. ORI will need to consider how it will manage this attendance, two (2) days before all race meetings, and to whom it will delegate the role.

5. THE EXPECTATIONS OF TASMANIAN PARTICIPANTS IN RELATION TO THE ROLE OF TASRACING AND ORI IN TRACK SAFETY, PREPARATION, INSPECTIONS, REPORTING AND COMMUNICATION TO PARTICIPANTS.

Tasmanian participants must have confidence and trust in both Tasracing and ORI. They also have the right to expect professionalism from both in all matters relating to the presentation of race tracks and administration of racing.

The prime consideration, barring unforeseen weather events, must be that a track will be safe for both jockeys and horses. Both Tasracing and ORI understand this overriding welfare need.

As is the case throughout Australia, I find that participants have residual knowledge, through their years of involvement in the Industry, on how they would like a track to be prepared/presented. At times there are differing opinions, particularly in terms of firmness or "give" in a track to suit all or individual horses.

Tasracing's track managers are provided with guidelines on presentation of tracks, ideally to race as a "Good 4" throughout a race meeting. The track is usually rated at 6.30am. This can prove problematic as it is up to six (6) hours before the first race and weather can impact the final rating, and indeed the rating throughout a meeting. Ultimately the final or changed rating of a track is at the discretion of the Stewards. I assume the track rating guidelines have been agreed by both Tasracing and ORI, in consultation with participants.

While participants rely upon Tasracing's maintenance and presentation of tracks, there is a need to educate and provide participants with more information, particularly around annual rail movements and major maintenance works to be undertaken by Tasracing on both the Elwick and Mowbray tracks.

A seminar for participants, which could become an annual event, would provide an understanding of the difficult task that track managers have in dealing with such things as the impact of weather, damage from previous meetings, planning for upcoming feature meetings, and the use and impacts of techniques such as verti draining, coring, hollow tining and scarifying. The different roles of these techniques, and how each of these will affect presentation and performance of a track on racedays, is knowledge that should be imparted.

Issues identified

1. Based upon the loss of the two (2) meetings in question, there is a call for tracks to be inspected at least two (2) days before each race meeting, to identify any concerns. This would provide time to remedy issues and to allow a meeting to proceed. The 19 November and 27 December incidents have eroded participants' confidence in the on-the-day race track inspection by Tasracing and ORI, and their capacity to identify problems and then take action and remedy them so race meetings can proceed.

It may well be that after the Industry's confidence in the presentation of tracks is rebuilt, the need for a race track inspection two (2) days before each meeting can be reassessed. This assessment should be made after 12 months of the new pre-raceday race track inspection procedures.

2. The other concern raised, which seems to be justified, is the need for timely communication of important industry messaging relating to race meetings. This is particularly because many participants need to travel considerable distances to race. In the case of the 27 December meeting at Elwick, it would seem the messaging was delayed and/or was not effective in communicating to all affected that the meeting had been cancelled. Both Tasracing and ORI need to work on communications protocols and on which body will be responsible in the full range of potential circumstances.
3. The expectations of participants on how tracks are managed, maintained and presented on racedays could be improved by the conduct of track information seminars by Tasracing, at least annually at both Elwick and Mowbray, with the assistance of ORI.

A similar education process is in place in Victoria for Harness Racing, on track maintenance and preparation. Whilst it is a different Code, the seminar is well attended by local and interstate officials and participants, and provides vital information on this important issue, albeit without the significant issues of sustaining a turf surface.

4. An overarching issue emerging from the interview process, expressed by many, was a call for both Tasracing and ORI to be transparent, in order to build confidence and trust. If communications policies and strategies exist, then it is perhaps timely that they be reviewed.

6. THE SUITABILITY, PERFORMANCE AND DURABILITY OF THE ELWICK RACE TRACK AND FUTURE MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS OF THE TRACK, INCLUDING WHAT GUIDELINES/PROTOCOLS, REMEDIATION AND MITIGATION ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN IN THE SHORT, MEDIUM AND LONG TERM TO PREVENT THIS OCCURRING AGAIN.

The assistance and advice provided by the Flemington and Moonee Valley track managers, supported by the findings from testing and assessment of samples taken from Elwick on 19 January by Mr Peter Anderson of STC, have been invaluable in the framing of a plan for the future management of Elwick.

It is clear, given the success of sand profile tracks in Victoria and at Mowbray that with time the Elwick track will provide a racing surface that will consistently present fairly and safely for all horses competing. It is also clear that there is a lack of trust in the new track on the part of some participants, based upon its performance to date and in particular the 27 December event. These issues can be remedied with good and modern maintenance practices for a sand profile track.

I am satisfied, based upon the advice of the Melbourne track managers, that Tasracing does provide an adequate budget – including funding for human resources and equipment – for Elwick. A recommendation to acquire a new mower vacuum, to pick up grass clippings, and a multi-corer, has already been actioned by Tasracing. I also believe that Tasracing has ordered two (2) “Going Sticks” to more accurately measure the tracks for race meetings. These devices are heavily relied upon in Victoria.

The Elwick track, as a new sand profile track, has performed as expected, except for issues caused by how the track was used for grass gallops and trials during the lockdown, and then outdated and inappropriate maintenance and poor oversight and management of those maintenance actions.

In assessing how Elwick has performed, one needs to understand that the track is still very young and will not achieve peak performance for probably another two to three years. This however will be subject to how it is managed until then.

There have perhaps been excessively high expectations placed on how the new Elwick should have performed, both by participants and probably Tasracing. This is a common problem with all new race tracks. Most people unreasonably expect new tracks to perform at their peak, on an ongoing basis, from day one.

In addition, the prime racing surface, which I define as the inside 16 metres, has been over used due to unforeseen circumstances and the fact that there is no other grass to prepare a horse for racing in the Hobart area.

Most other racing constituencies have dedicated grass training tracks separate from the race surface, which is only used in special circumstances for such work. The decision to have a 28 metre wide race track, when in fact the outside 12 metres is seldom used for racing, means that there is an underutilised resource.

I am confident that the advice of the Flemington and Moonee Valley track managers, together with that of STC, can chart a course forward for Tasracing to manage the Elwick track over the next two to three years, until it reaches maturity.

The details of how Elwick needs to be managed are encapsulated in **Attachments 3 and 4**. Importantly Tasracing must continue to seek and heed the assistance and advice of the Melbourne track managers, which they have unreservedly offered. This particularly relates to educating all Tasracing track staff in regard to best practice knowledge for maintaining a sand profile racing surface.

In addressing the timing of actions, the advice provided by the Melbourne track managers, supported by the science in the STC report, caters for both the short and medium term; in the next two (2) years that advice should be implemented. Tasracing must commit to preparing and adopting an annual Track Management Plan (TMP) for Elwick. Tasracing also must undertake to have the track assessed on a regular basis (quarterly for the next 12 months), as recommended in the STC report. This will enable the track manager, with the support of the Melbourne track managers, to make appropriate decisions for Elwick's maintenance.

For the next two (2) years Tasracing must take a conservative approach with Elwick, until the track matures and is able to cope with a full racing program and measured/planned use for trials and grass gallops. The protection of the surface for race meetings must take priority over all other track usages, notwithstanding pressure for gallops on the grass.

As far as the longer term is concerned, say three (3) years and beyond, I would expect Elwick to be mature and that the proper maintenance program will have been embedded at the track.

However, an annual TMP will still be an important ingredient to managing Elwick in the longer term. The plan will also, importantly, provide the Tasracing Board and CEO with comfort that there is a strategy in place for the Industry's most important asset. The plan will include appropriate risk mitigation measures to deal with all eventualities, recognising that issues can arise when least expected.

Finally, one issue raised by StrathAyr's Mr Frank Casimaty was that the pumping system, which ensures the Elwick watering/sprinkler system provides sufficient pressure to ensure an even spread of water, had failed for some months in mid-2020. It took some time for repairs to be undertaken. This compromised the watering of the track, which relies heavily upon consistent watering to provide a healthy and good racing surface.

Given the very fast drainage rate through the Elwick sand profile – more than 700mm per hour compared with that of Flemington at 120mm per hour – the watering/sprinkler system is fundamental to safeguarding the good health and condition of the track.

TR should consider investing in a backup pumping system, if it hasn't already done so.

7. ANY OTHER MATTERS REASONABLY INCIDENTAL TO THE ABOVE MATTERS.

Comments made during the interview phase of the review process touched on many related and incidental matters. I gained much insight from these interviews and they have informed my thinking and conclusions throughout the report. I have summarised the key points in **Attachment 2**, where I have grouped these summaries under the headings of **Elwick, Mowbray, Tasracing and ORI**. (Some comments were unsurprisingly outside the purview of the terms of reference).

Comments have not been attributed to individuals, in order to maintain confidentiality. This was essential so that there was open and frank dialogue with those I interviewed, particularly as I had no vested interests.

Below I've highlighted a small number of the key themes that emerged.

Governance

A number of comments/suggestions relate to Tasracing and ORI's governance, how they operate, and engage and communicate with participants, aside from the issues directly relating to the Elwick and Mowbray tracks. My summary of these comments should be reviewed by Tasracing and ORI, in consultation with the Minister for Racing.

The Elwick track and deficiencies with the track inspection process were seen in some ways as indicative of the interviewees' wider problems in their dealings with Tasracing and ORI, and as providing the opportunity to raise other issues.

My involvement with two (2) Racing Codes, including one as a Principal Racing Authority in Harness Racing in Victoria, leads me to believe that most of the comments will not come as any surprise to Tasracing and/or ORI.

Oversight of Tasracing and ORI dealings with participants and stakeholders

One matter raised during the interview phase was that Tasracing and ORI are not the subject of confidential and independent review with respect to complaints regarding their actions or treatment of participants. The provision of whistleblower options was also mentioned.

In Victoria all participants and stakeholders have recourse to a Racing Integrity Commissioner with separate powers to launch investigations, review the integrity arrangements for each code, and provide an avenue for participants to report activities which they believe impugn racing's integrity.

I understand that a number of options may exist for participants and stakeholders in Tasmanian racing to seek redress if they feel aggrieved or wish to provide confidential information for appropriate review by either or both of Tasracing or ORI. These options may not be well understood.

In this regard specifically I note that:

- ORI has an integrity function for Tasracing and racing in general. ORI's separation from Tasracing allows investigations of complaints;
- there is oversight of ORI Stewards' decisions and inquiries by the Tasmanian Racing Appeal Board;
- DPIPWE has a Complaints Policy which is accessible by participants;
- there is Tasmanian whistleblower legislation (the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2002*); and
- Tasmanians also have access to Ombudsman Tasmania and the Integrity Commission.

It is recommended for clarity that both Tasracing and ORI should provide, in a prominent position on their websites, all options available to participants. Whistleblowing should be encouraged, with appropriate safeguards for informers.

Elwick Track Crossing

Unlike all recent track reconstructions with which I have been involved, the Elwick track was reconstructed with a vehicle crossing past the winning post. It is probably one of the worst positions for a crossing, being on a downhill slope as horses are pulling up.

The prime reason why crossings are undesirable is they add an element of doubt in terms of safety for horses and riders.

Tasracing should investigate if it possible to relocate the Elwick crossing to an alternative position on the track.

F. ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1.

Persons interviewed during investigations (33)

Mr Ricky Aitken, Tasracing State Assets and Facilities Manager

Mr Peter Anderson, Sports Turf Consultants

Mr Edwin Batt, Racehorse Owners Association Tasmania

Mr John Bourke, Tasracing Mowbray Track Manager

Mr Frank Casimaty, StrathAyr

Mr Dean Cooper, Former Tasracing Chairman

Mr Drew Dalton, Dalton Consulting Engineering

Mr Brian Dunn, Tasracing Northern Operations Manager

Mr Paul Eriksson, CEO Tasracing

Mr Paul Geard, breeder/Owner

Mr Merv Hill, Chairman TAN

Minister for Racing, The Hon. Jane Howlett MP

Mr John King, Director Racing/ ORI General Manager

Mr Tony Latham, Racing Integrity Manager ORI

Ms Denise Martin, Owner/Syndicator

Mr Graeme McCulloch, Owner

Mr Brendan McCoull, Jockey

Mr Craig Newitt, Jockey

Mr David O'Byrne MP, Shadow Minister for Racing

Mr Liam O'Keefe, Flemington Track Manager

Mr Joe O'Neil, Prime Thoroughbreds/Owners

Mr Gene Phair, Chairman Tasracing

Mr Scott Quill, Chairman of Stewards

Mr Kevin Ring, Tasmanian Jockeys Association

Mr Andrew Scanlon, Chairman Tasmanian Racing Club

Mr Nigel Schuurung, Trainer/President ATA Tas

Mr Martin Synan, Moonee Valley Track Manager

Mr Adam Trinder, Trainer

Mr Brian Walker, Chairman Tasmanian Turf Club

Mr Joel Wallace, Tasracing Board

Mr Sam Webster, Tasracing Elwick Track Manager

Mr Leon Wells, Trainer

Mr Gary White, Trainer

Attachment 2.

Summary of Participant Comments

ELWICK TRACK

Participants provided information on track design and build. Tasracing engaged Daltons to the design track and tender document two years prior to build. StrathAyr was the successful tenderer. The build was locally managed. The track was delivered to satisfactory completion. StrathAyr were also contracted separately to grow and provide grass. It was identified that the biggest issue early was failure of water pumping system for a number of months which meant track was inadequately watered using mains pressure water. The warranty period expired mid-December 2020. A participant noted there was consultation during construction.

Participants noted that the track had raced well until issues emerged. There was a view from many participants that there is a need for good record keeping, regularly moisture and soil testing.

A participant identified that scarification was recommended with 4-week shut down. Renovation commenced 26/11 with a light scarify, top dress but nothing intensive. A deep scarification was then undertaken, based on advice. It was noted that in hindsight this was not the correct decision.

The track was closed between 29/11 and 27/12 to permit a major renovation in preparation for 27/12 meeting and summer carnival. Renovation didn't commence until 10/12. A participant noted that there was time wasted with major renovation started too late and lost best opportunity.

Others identified that scarification work in early December lead to 27/12 problem with wear 9 to 10m out from true rail position. One participant was of the view that deep scarifying as opposed to light scarifying and damage should have been re sodded straight after the damage was observed. One participant noted that, in their view, the 27/12 problems were largely caused by heavy wear on track, moisture stress and heavy scarifying. Another that root depth was lost in winter due to cold weather. Coming out of winter a lot of kick back.

Participants also queried the management of staff in undertaking the repair works, availability of staff manager and key staff on leave, and whether staff had enough experience and training.

A specific issue identified by many participants was the management of rails. One noted that the rail was not moved despite, in their view, adequate resources to do this. Another they couldn't race with rail out 15m because repairs were not done. Participants noted that as the rail was not moved / minimal movements, it meant sections of track were significantly overused. One participant asserted that the 30/12 race was called off because rail was out 15m where trials with 75 horses had been conducted.

One participant noted that jump outs a barrier trials were agreed in back straight but not implemented placing pressure on high wear racing areas. Some participants were of the view that track gallops partly caused the problems with the track. Also, that witches' hats were agreed for gallops but not trials.

Usage of the track was identified as an issue by most participants. Reference was made to the Annual Report – Chairman's report referred to "placed significant and unplanned pressure on the track". A participant noted that in winter (18/5 and 21/6) 300 horses trialled on the course (equivalent to 4 race meetings), in addition to race meetings. One participant noted that the track raced very well early but was probably overused, another that pressure for grass track gallops in year one was not good for the track.

It was asserted by some participants that post the Covid-19 shutdown in July the track was over raced and over used for track gallops. Some participants identified maintenance during shut down was not adequate and this was an opportunity not used. Some participants were of the view that during the Covid shut down there was a lot of pressure to trial on the track, and the track should not have been still used for gallops during shut down phase when it should have been rested/maintained. It was alleged that one trainer was given favourable access during shut down. A participant noted that winter use to ready horses for return after Covid shut down was a "cry for help" to get horses ready after the break.

There was a view by some participants that the track was not repaired straight away after meetings. It was reported on the other hand that the track is normally repaired Monday after a Sunday race day.

Management of plugs was also raised. One participant noted that it looked like there had been no special hand watering of plugs to get them growing and queried whether pre-germinated seed was used as it is at Mowbray. Whether the plugs were appropriate was also raised, with one participant noting some were very close together and not deep enough, and the plugs were compounded by decision to put dry sand on in an effort to still race.

A participant noted that you have accept tracks won't always be perfect as we are an outside sport and grass grows subject to many factors but the problems with the track "sapped confidence."

In term of the events of 27/12 most participants were of the view the issues were obvious and evident. It was noted that it took a trainer to identify the issue. Not identifying the safety issues was seen by participants as a "massive oversight." One noted: If it doesn't look right there was a fair chance it wasn't right. Another, that apart from the plug issues which were most obvious the rest of the track was very poorly presented and was inconsistent and very shifty.

The role of the Chairman of Stewards was raised by many participants. Participants identified that the Chairman fully accepted the Curators word that the track was fit for racing. Participants were of the view that the Chairman of Stewards has is responsible for track safety. Another noted that it took too long to come to a decision. A participant stated that while Stewards were not to blame for the way the track was presented on 27/12, passing it as fit for racing was an error.

In terms of future management of races, participants suggested that more than 2 could walk the track on race mornings so that 10 metres off the rail is fully scrutinised the whole way round and that senior and experienced riders are available and willing the day before.

Some participants advocated that the primary purpose of the Elwick track should be racing not training with the later only when compatible with racing schedule. One said that "a separate track for training is preferable." One participant noted that there should have been 2 tracks not one but were promised outside of track would be used for gallops and trials to train on. Another was of the view that Tasracing should push back on trainers wanting to regularly use the track for gallops.

Others suggested the following:

- the track is to both race and train on.
- Another proposed trials and jump outs should only be run on outside of course proper. Trials and track gallops should be run in back straight from 1600m chute to lessen wear on prime racing surface. Also use of witches hats rather than needing to move rail every time. This system works in Victoria.
- Trials and track gallops should be run in back straight from 1600m chute to lessen wear on prime racing surface.
- One participant suggested the use of witches' hats rather than needing to move rail every time noting this system works in Victoria. Another noted that they could be used but there would be a requirement to consult with track users.

In terms of the track profile and composition, the track design is sand profile and due to availability issues for sand types it drains at 700mm per hour. It was asserted that it still drains at a high rate. It was noted that Poa has built up very quickly and was "a big problem" by more than one participant. Some participants were of the view that Poa existing when the turf was originally laid and had increased. Some participants advocated for a program to eradicate the Poa.

A participant noted that they were concerned about the crossing after the winning post advocating that a track should not have a crossing in that location if serious about safety of horses and riders.

Future management of the track was identified by many participants with suggestions including:

- a daily log and plan that is published to show participants what work is being done on the track.
- that the annual rail movement plan be published for the benefit of participants.
- a decent annual renovation period is needed at a time of the year, with good growing conditions, to aid recovery.
- Tasracing needs to keep good records.
- need for track inspections with a senior rider the day before to identify safety issues and to act upon them to save meetings.
- need for improved messaging system as many on 27/12 only learned of meeting being called off on arrival on course with a number already having travelled from North.

Several participants identified that they wished to see passion and pride for the job by track management and track workers. Some participants were of the view that industry advice should also be better heeded. One participant noted that speaking up should be encouraged and contrary views given credence.

Participants identified that the management team should better utilise networks (Mowbray Manager and Melbourne Track Managers) to seek advice. One participant noted: are track maintenance people up to the job – there are divided opinions. Further, that track management requires appropriate expertise and track staff need to be up skilled.

MOWBRAY TRACK

A participant noted that the ground staff have failed to fill in holes/slits from moveable running rail sleeve when rail is moved twice (March and November) in 12 months. This is accepted practice but has been missed causing two meetings to be called off.

It was advised that Tasracing employ a track manager and 5 staff all with a number of years' experience. The track manager has been in the role for 12 years and Mowbray track is acknowledged as providing a consistently good racing surface.

In terms of management of the track, it was noted that Grass clippings removed as part of routine maintenance for healthy of track.

It was noted that there is a documented procedure for when moving rails which requires back filling, but this was not followed.

A participant advised that at the second event in November staff attempted to do the filling work to enable the meeting to go ahead. It was alleged that barrier staff refused to assist saying "it's not our job". It was the view of the participant that if assistance had been provided that the meet might have gone ahead.

It was noted that prior to the November race the October weather was shocking.

One participant noted that while Mowbray has had issues over the years and is now racing well the non-filling of rail leg holes did not pose a risk. However, with perfect practices it would not have happened. Another observed that it was their understand that Flemington and Moonee Valley do not fill slits in surface caused by removal of rail footings, and it is not considered a safety issue. They asked: does this practice need reviewing?

The role of the Chairman of Stewards was raised by with one participant querying: why didn't Stewards pick it up?

In terms of the March event, one participant noted that the loss of March meeting was trivial. Another, that the first meeting called off was also influenced by a Covid scare but the second incidence of rail holes not being filled should not have happened again.

One participant felt that the loss of the November meeting was an overreaction.

Participants observations on future management of the track included:

- during summer time race every Wednesday at Mowbray. It should be every fortnight with more meetings on the Devonport synthetic track to provide the best grass surface possible.
- at the end of summer Mowbray needs a good rest.

- the track manager be supported.
- industry participants need education on track maintenance and preparation for race meetings.

Issues/observations from VRC and MVRC Track Managers inspection

a. Immediately following cancellation of 27 December

- Primary purpose of inside 12 meters should be solely for Racing. This area must be protected and not used for training.
- There is a significant Poa Annuia infestation. It is now as high as 30% which is unacceptable. Needs to be eradicated/managed while racing.
- In all likelihood because of the coverage of Poa it must have been in the grass when it was laid and exacerbated with not vacuuming grass clippings when mowed.
- The thatch layer is immature but healthy. Ideally it should be deeper.
- Good root health and depth at time of inspection.
- Track drains at 700mm per hour compared with Flemington @ 120mm to 160mm and MV @ 80mm to 100mm.
- 12-month plan is needed for rail movements, and these should be advertised and not changed without good reason. This will assist in resisting pressure to use race track for training which will compromise racing surface.
- A lot of things good are being done but little things which are important are wrong are letting the track down.
- Should use of the back section for training and only outside of straight.
- Need for conservative approach with meetings and training use is needed for 2 years
- Pre germinated seed should be used. It is at Mowbray.
- Grass clippings must be removed.
- Shared knowledge North and South? Who determines major maintenance and when? There must be a coordinated approach.
- Education/training is needed for track staff on managing sand profile, with visits to Melbourne during peak maintenance times.
- Use of witches hats back in straight like at Flemington, Caulfield, Sandown and MV for trials and gallops
- Decisions to Scarify....Who determines this and depth. Who checks as it occurs to see that damage is not excessive?

- More frequent Verdi Draining is needed to the open profile.
- A dedicated six-week major maintenance break each year. Consider using contractors with equipment and manpower to minimise time taken.
- Budget, equipment, watering system, drainage and staff resources are adequate BUT there is a knowledge gap with managing a sand profile. This must be improved.
- Believe track was last Verdi drained in August. This is not sufficient.

b. 19 January Inspection by Flemington Manager

- The track had improved significantly and was fit/safe for racing
- This was not unexpected given maintenance since 30 December.
- One section of track from 300m to 150m was wetter than the rest when horses galloped. Moisture levels were taken to compare with rest of track. May have been caused by sprinkler system being impacted by winds the night before. It improved after a couple of hours.

c. Flemington and MV TM's Review of STC Assessment

- Scarification works carried out prior to 27th was too severe.
- Track managers first-hand experience is more precise than that of track builder.
- The true rail position should be used more often. This is the only way it will improve if there is a bias. Also, more experience over a year will prove or disprove the bias perception. The pattern of riding can produce a bias that is not a track issue. TM's happy to visit and look at track after true rail position has been given a chance. It could be rectified by more precise maintenance strategies.
- TR should review arc/spread of sprinklers particularly on turns to ensure equal coverage and to avoid overlaps. Flemington and MV have precise settings based upon prevailing wind forecasts and alter settings from day to day, based upon data over a number of years.
- Meeting on 24 January the track raced well as expected.
- The drainage rate through Elwick profile is a significant management issue. It is 4 times faster than Flemington and Caulfield and will take very careful management to keep moisture levels right.
- More use of Verdi draining and hollow tining and only once per year with Scarification.
- Appropriate top dressing need throughout the year. Not to be overdone with application.
- Flemington takes quarterly soil, grass and root samples.
- Testing of chemicals to reduce poa annua should be tested on an unused section of the track before it is applied across surface to check it does not do too much harm to good grass species. New products are coming onto the market which need to be tested in the field for race tracks in particular.

In undertaking the Review, other matters outside the scope of the Terms of Reference were raised. These are summarised below. They are not ascribed to individuals. Where directly quoted, these statements, analysis, opinions and conclusions are those of individual participants in the review, and do not reflect the views of the reviewer. No responsibility is accepted for the accuracy, reliability or correctness of any information provided and by individual participants and the reviewer makes no findings or recommendations on these matters.

TASRACING ISSUES RAISED DURING INTERVIEWS

Participants raised concerns about the Tasracing Board, Tasracing structure, culture and relationship between Tasracing and the Code.

Regarding Tasracing, participants spoke of the need for strong leadership and confidence in the Board and CEO. Some noted that the Tasracing Chair was not very well known and that meant that there was therefore a lack of trust. Some felt the Tasracing Board did not have the right skill set.

Regarding the CEO and Tasracing structure some participants felt that Tasracing was too top heavy, whereas another participant suggested that a Chief Operating Officer was needed. Also, that CEO needs the right structure and support. One participant observed that more resources are required but this will be resisted by some who think Tasracing has enough resources. Many interviewed identified that racing participants needed to have more confidence in the CEO and the leadership of Tasracing.

There were views that the CEO and Chairman do not understand the industry and they should get out and meet with industry members and build trust. One participant stated that many people are calling for a review of the industry and Tasracing.

One participant observed that tracks and Integrity are biggest issues facing racing in Tasmania.

The history of Tasracing and legacy culture from Tote Tasmania days was seen by a participant as negatively influencing Tasracing. Differing views on decision making between Tasracing and TRC was noted as potentially destabilising for Tasracing. It was also suggested that there was a lot of work to do as the 3 Codes have different cultures.

Comments were also made about managers:

- hiring of managers with turf not race track experience. The alternative view was that the basic principles are the same.
- State manager should live closer to Elwick and Launceston.

Accountability and responsibility for decision making was raised by participants. Some observed that the management structure for tracks is not right. One stated that Tasracing must own the responsibility for outcomes. Another that cultural issues impacted Elwick track management with no responsibility taken for decisions, yet Tasracing was blamed as a whole. CEO sets culture and it was advocated more work needs to be done.

Many participants were of the view that industry advice should also be better heeded.

Regarding staffing:

- Passion is missing. Everyone watches their backs. No transparency.
 - Got to have pride in work...its missing.
 - Staff not attuned to job. Those responsible have turf credentials but not with race tracks.
 - State Tracks and Facilities Manager should take more responsibility for state of tracks and issues that arise.
-

Other matters raised:

- Brighton training track is not well maintained. Can't get things done.
- Need to offer a standard /consistent product for Sky – Every Wednesday night?

OFFICE OF RACING INTEGRITY ISSUES RAISED DURING INTERVIEWS

Issues were raised about the general role and functions of ORI.

One participant stated that ORI now sits under Parks and Wildlife and saw that as "ridiculous."

Another stated that ORI GM has 2 roles

- A) GM ORI within Primary Industry Department, 25 FTE's and 15 casuals
Determines fields for Greyhounds and Harness but not Thoroughbreds. Question why not with the Codes and consistency?
Responsibility for Integrity, Stewards and Welfare.
- B) Statutory Role as Director of Racing which causes conflicts. There is no separate role like with ORIC in Victoria. Need for an auditing function.

Some participants questioned the separation of the integrity function from Tasracing. One participant noted in their view it was sometimes difficult to differentiate between responsibilities but both at times are equally responsible.

The independence of ORI was raised.

One participant highlighted the lack of power to hold enquiries like with VIC ORIC and new VRIB. Others that observed that there is a big need for a "whistle blower" role which ORI cannot perform because it would be conflicted. In Victoria The Racing Integrity Commissioner independently performs this role which has all-encompassing powers to investigate Including delving into the roles of the PRA's for each Code.

Some participants suggested that the separation from TR racing functions should be reviewed in interests of ensuring/reducing shared responsibilities, based on other State's experiences.

Another participant noted that the relationship has improved significantly with good collaboration. TR CEO and ORI GM have worked well together.

On race day management, it was noted that it is important to get race day staff right about safety.

It was noted that process and responsibilities for certifying track were not fully documented. In particular, Stewards responsibility for declaring track safe. Policies and procedures are being reviewed by ORI to make clear responsibility and expectations. While not currently written down they are obvious as in the past the right decisions have been made regarding track safety by the Stewards.

One participant noted that they continued to have Faith in the Chairman of Stewards.

Participants noted that Stewards must control sign off of tracks and there must be an appropriate procedures, including timeframe allowed, to enable potential issues to be addressed to ensure racing occurs. Culture of care and responsibility is essential from ORI.

After earlier Mowbray abandonments processes with ORI tightened. It was noted that a Raceday guiding document is to be agreed by TR and ORI. It is in draft form.

The relationship between Stewards and industry was also raised by some participants. One participant was of the views that while relationships are important Stewards are little too friendly and have lost respect. The role of stewards should be held in respect.

One participant was of the view that stewards pay rates are not enough to attract good talent from Interstate.

Ensuring stewards have a knowledge of industry and can 'read a race' was seen as essential.

Stewards need to be mentored by Senior retired Stewards (Des Gleeson and Ray Murrinh are 2 that were mentioned).

Participants raised other issues outside of scope of the review:

- concern that a disqualified trainer can transfer all horses to another trainer with same staff looking after horses. Perception that disqualified trainer is still looking after horses or directing their work.
- fit and proper person test needs to apply to persons holding licenses if charged by police.
- unreasonable delays with Appeals should be addressed. Recent appeals against suspensions have taken 3 to 4 months and jockey is stood down for the original sentence when if appeal had been heard the sentence may not have stood. Is it a resource issue?
- jockeys forced to plead not guilty as at times as if do plead guilty they are given excessive penalty and then must appeal. If had known penalty wouldn't have pleaded guilty.

Attachment 3.

Sports Turf Consultants Report

A full copy of the Report has been provided to The Minister and it has been forwarded onto Tasracing for early referencing and action

STC Executive Summary and Conclusions

SportsTurf Consultants (Australia) Pty Ltd (STC) was commissioned by Dale Monteith to undertake an assessment of the Elwick course proper to provide an independent “health check” and to investigate possible causes for the perceived poor racing and growing performance of the surface.

STC has extensive experience in the formulation of technical specifications for sand-based horse racing profiles as well as grass selection for Melbourne Racing Club (Caulfield, Sandown & Mornington Racecourses) as well as the Victorian Racing Club (VRC) Flemington Racecourse. All these racing surfaces have performed to club and participant expectations.

STC also undertakes regular benchmarking assessments on these racing surfaces to ensure track management and maintenance issues are highlighted well before they become issues.

A range of soil & agronomic factors were assessed and included, Botanical Composition, Root and Thatch Depth, Root health and density of root systems, Disease & Nematode Analysis, Soil Nutrient & Leaf Tissue Analysis, pH, Salts, Particle Size & Drainage and Particle Shape.

Ryegrass is the dominant turf species on the course proper in combination with Kentucky Bluegrass. The percentage of *Poa annua* (Winter Grass) is considered high for a juvenile racing surface and needs control. The high percentage of *Poa annua* (Winter Green) is of concern given its shallow root system that does not make it ideal for a racing surface.

The root depth and overall root health and density is moderate to good and acceptable for sand profile racing surfaces. It is critical a good root system is present to produce a stable racing profile.

Disease, Nematode and Insect Pest are at levels and populations that are not harmful to grass health or performance.

The sand chosen for the Elwick track profile is extremely fast draining (700mm per hour compared with Flemington at 120mm per hour) and has a moderately alkaline pH level. The fast draining nature of the sand in combination with the moderately alkaline pH level makes maintenance and management of the grass difficult due to leaching of nutrients and the upkeep of nutrients to compensate for the alkaline pH level.

The issues with the racing surface stem from issues around management and maintenance of the racing surface. The use of poor plugging techniques, not catching clippings and overall fertiliser practices have placed stress on the surface. The fast draining rate of the profile will also make for high maintenance inputs and if that is deficient then this surface will rapidly deteriorate.

Future maintenance is critical to success for the new Elwick Racecourse course proper. The track must have

an available budget to allow for all necessary maintenance to occur. If maintenance and management is restricted on this type of racing profile therefore issues will arise regarding track health and racing performance. Adopting better sand profile track maintenance practices in line with that of similar racing surfaces around Australia will assist Elwick.

The maintenance and management of sand-based racing profiles is critical to overall success of the racing surface. When juvenile these tracks need to be carefully managed. Overall good plant and root health is paramount in producing a suitable surface for racing without either of those the track will underperform.

TR efforts need to focus on modernising track maintenance and management practices using the best advice available (which has been offered by the Melbourne track Managers).

Amongst other things this should include the catching of grass clippings, track repair and recovery post-race meeting, turf plugging (Deep Set Turf Plugs), Pre germinating seed of divot mix, control of *Poa annua*, smarter rail movements to minimise usage issues, use of the outer half of the racing for trials and jump outs. It is expected that this racing surface will from time to time have issues as it is still juvenile therefore overall usage of the surface plays an important in shifting wear and allowing for necessary maintenance and repair to the surface.

If all these updated practices are adopted, then the course proper will consistently perform to the industry participants expectations for most race meetings.

General comments

- Ryegrass is the dominant turf species on the course proper and ranges between 33 to 62%. The overall percentage of Ryegrass in the racetrack is 52%. The highest percentage of ryegrass was detected at five locations around the Elwick Course Proper these being inside 9, 400m and outside 9 at 1000, 800, 600 and 200m locations.
- Kentucky Bluegrass makes up a 23% of the total turf cover % on the Elwick Course Proper. The percentage of Bluegrass ranges from 14 to 29%. The highest percentage of Kentucky Bluegrass was detected at five locations these being inside 9, 600 and 400m location and Outside 9, 1400, 1000 and 600m marks.
- *Poa annua* (Winter Grass) makes up a high percentage at 25% of the turf cover. This is a shallow rooted turf species not ideal for racing surfaces. The percentage of *Poa annua* ranges from 14 to 48% around the C.P. The highest percentage of *Poa annua* was detected at the 1200m inside 9 location.

Mix of turf species Ryegrass dominant, *Poa annua* showing up as light green patches

Conclusions

- The current turf composition has the potential to provide a good racing surface at Elwick Racecourse. The presence of ryegrass and bluegrass within the course proper provide a robust durable grass blend to withstand the rigours of racing.
- The issues with the racing surface stem from issues around management and maintenance of the racing surface. The use of poor plugging techniques, not catching clippings and overall fertiliser practices have placed stress on the surface. The fast draining rate of the profile will also make for high maintenance inputs and if that is lacking then this surface will rapidly deteriorate.
- Sand based racing profiles are very delicate and it is critical to have a strong healthy grass cover as well as a density of roots. Without a good grass cover or a lack of root system the racing surface will always be at a predisposition for excessive damage or poor racing performance.

At present the ryegrass and bluegrass have acceptable healthy root systems.

- The presence of *Poa annua* in the course proper is a significant issue as this grass is shallow rooted and a prolific seeder. *Poa annua* is an undesirable turf species for racecourses Australia wide. The grass is prone to stress and will cut out more readily than other turf species.
- The thatch layer is not excessive but was dense and needs ongoing management.
- Based upon the thatch assessment the organic layer is dense and indicates that ongoing management is required to improve the quality of thatch in the racing surface. The dense nature of the thatch may be due to having no window to undertake necessary works.
- Scum layer on the surface reflects the non-catching of clippings for a period, it is understood that these practices have now changed, and that clip is caught during the mowing process.
- The root depth can be classified as good (125mm). The root density and Root health was moderate and there is room for improvement to establish a more vibrant root system. Roots were typically white and visually of good health, root hairs were visible on the root systems and this will assist with anchorage.
- The particle shape of the sand used in the rootzone is sub angular to sub-rounded and this is the ideal sand for use in a horse racing sand profile to provide the necessary inter-packing.
- Sand particle size analysis shows little variation and will not restrict grass or root growth.
- The drainage rate of the sand is extremely fast and will be difficult to maintain in terms of nutrition and irrigation practices. As the track matures the drainage rate will slightly lower but in the short term this racing surface will require significant maintenance inputs.
- Future maintenance is critical to success for the new Elwick Racecourse course proper. The track must have an available budget to allow for all necessary maintenance to occur.

If maintenance and management is restricted on this type of racing profile therefore issues will arise regarding track health and racing performance.

- The presence of disease, nematodes and incidental insect attack are periodical factors which may reduce grass anchorage and leaf strength. Based on findings no issue regarding disease, nematodes or insects will be currently influencing track health and performance.
- The pH level of the track profile is higher than desired therefore this must be factored into the fertiliser program for the racing surface.
- Adopting better sand profile track maintenance practices in line with that of similar racing surfaces around Australia will assist Elwick. The selection of an extremely fast draining sand during the construction phase has made for difficulty in managing and maintaining the surface. I will expect that this racing surface will from time to time have issues as it is still juvenile therefore overall usage of the surface plays an important in shifting wear and allowing for necessary maintenance and repair to the surface.

Attachment 4

Flemington and Moonee Valley Track Managers' Report

From: Liam O'Keefe <L.okeeffe@vrc.net.au>

Sent: Saturday, 9 January 2021 1:49 PM

To: Paul Eriksson <P.Eriksson@tasracing.com.au>

Cc: s.webster@tasracing.com.au r.aitken@tasracing.com.au c.hoy@tasracing.com.au; Martin Synan <Martin.Synan@mvr.net.au>

Subject: Elwick

Hi Paul

Please find below a short report from Martin and I, if you have any questions please shout out. All the best over the next couple of weeks and we look forward to working with you when required.

Regards Liam and Martin

Track inspection following the cancelation of the Hobart Guineas

Following a call from Ricky Atkins Regional Track manager TasRacing and Paul Eriksson CEO TasRacing myself and Liam O'Keefe VRC flew to Hobart on Tuesday 5th Jan to look at the track following the cancelation of the Hobart Guineas meeting due to issues with the track following damage after the track was scarified in early December and some work carried out to repair the damaged areas.

The early work carried out which caused the cancelation was not available to be viewed but both Liam and I have seen photos. Since the cancelation of the meeting work has been carried out to repair the affected areas and I can report they have been done to a very good and professional standard and a fit for racing.

While the inspection was taking place we had several people on site and as we walked a lap of the course it was a good time to discuss many of the issues the track was having.

(This included) Frank Casimaty StrathAyr, Kevin Ring Jockeys OH&S manager, Bruce Free Stewards, Ricky Atkins, Bryan Dunn, Chris Hay, Sam Webster, Paul Eriksson, Chairman Gene Phair all from TasRacing.

We also spent several hours on the Wednesday with Ricky and Chris to discuss works moving forward and what they are currently doing. Below is a list of what we looked at and some of our recommendations moving forward.

Track inspection

- Carried out going stick readings
- Took soil samples

- Inspected sod replacement works. (very well done)
- Noticed large amount of Poa annua in track
- Track had 20mm of irrigation applied the night before we arrived
- Track had a great cover of grass
- Rail was set up in the 15m position

Items discussed

- Work carried out which caused the issues
- Type of turf doctors used and quality of installation
- Decision to approve track before meeting then decision to cancel meeting following further inspection. (correct decision was made) unsafe for both horse and Jockey
- Safety for Horses and Jockeys
- Discussion with Jockeys association to conduct all trial on outside of track using witches hats or cones and also conducting trail along back straight to protect track and race meeting surface

Rail Position

- Looked at race program and planned rail positions for remainder of the years. Looks good and is able to be changed if needed

Fertilizer program

- Current products are good and current programs seems to be working. Plant looks healthy and root systems is at a good depth and is strong and healthy

Equipment

- The club has a good range of equipment to maintain a good racing surface
- Need to store equipment in sheds to protect from weather and service regularly
- A new track mower with a catcher will assist with Poa control and eradicate the need to run the amazon over the track to collect clippings
- A new multi corer will assist with thatch control and can be used more often and complete work faster than Verti Drain

Aeration program

- With the track only being 12months old the team need to maintain the thatch layer but also allow it to grow to create a surface suitable for horse racing
- Only scarify when major renovation takes place
- Verti drain when needed but at least 4-6 times per year (12mm) and larger tines when doing major renovation
- Hollow tine every 3-4 months depending on racing program give at least 4 weeks before next race meeting and remove cores with Vac
- Solid tine monthly to allow air into profile and encourage root growth. Depth 100-200mm

Poa control

- Was disappointing to see so much Poa annua in a very new track
- Cannot see any planned program to control Poa
- Need to plan an ongoing program to kill and control the existing Poa. Current levels could take up to 2 years to get to a level to control
- Need to spray heavy during major renovation and the manage throughout the remainder of the year. Several product are available but suggest the club trial several products to see which works best and gives best results. Most products also have some impact on the root system of rye grass so again need to work around race meets and available breaks in races to carry out this work

Spraying applications

- Looked at current methods of applying fertilizer and chemicals
- PPE needs to be worn.
- Equipment need to be serviced and working correctly before using
- Need to update method of application. 1 pass per application not 4 (Easily Calibrated)

Trials

- All trials need to be conducted on the outside of the track
- Club should have the option of rail or witches hats
- For twelve (12) months rials should only be conducted in the back straight on the outside 12 m of the track from the 1600m barrier position to the 800m mark. (This was amended after speaking to L O'Keefe)

Recommendations

- New catcher mower
- New multi-corer
- Use of witches hats for gallops and trials out wide
- Turf Apprentices
- Control Poa
- Rail 12m-15m for 24th , True for Derby, 6m for Cup
- Verti drain all of track with 12mm tines
- Continue to water grass plugs 2 x daily
- Maintain a strong fertilizer program leading into January 24th to establish excellent grass cover in turf areas that are recovering

Liam O'Keefe | **Senior Manager Flemington Racecourse**

Attachment 5

Elwick Rail movements 2020, including race meetings, trials and track gallops.

Note Rail only in true position twice.

Date	Meeting Type	Rail	Track Condition	Races	Starters
21/01/2020	Trials	True	Good 4	11	54
1/02/2020	Race Meeting	+3m	Good 4	8	82
9/02/2020	Race Meeting	+6m	Good 4	10	119
11/02/2020	Trials	+6m	Good 4	7	37
4/03/2020	Race Meeting	+10m	Good 4	9	87
5/03/2020	Trials	+10m	Soft 6	4	19
13/03/2020	Jumpouts			N/A	10
13/03/2020	Track Gallops			N/A	35
24/03/2020	Track Gallops			N/A	13
29/03/2020	Race Meeting	+12m	Good 4	9	75
29/03/2020	Trials	+12m	Good 4	1	5
22/05/2020	Trials	+8m	Good 4	4	16
22/05/2020	Track Gallops	+8m	Good 4	N/A	22
29/05/2020	Trials	+8m	Good 4	11	40
29/05/2020	Jumpouts	+8m	Good 4	N/A	24
29/05/2020	Track Gallops	+8m	Good 4	N/A	23
5/06/2020	Trials	+8m	Good 4	12	45
5/06/2020	Jumpouts	+8m	Good 4	N/A	12
5/06/2020	Track Gallops	+8m	Good 4	N/A	30
21/06/2020	Race Meeting	+8m	Soft 5	8	84
26/06/2020	Trials	+8m	Soft 5	2	9
26/06/2020	Track Gallops	+8m	Soft 5	N/A	11
5/07/2020	Race Meeting	+13m	Soft 5	10	98
6/07/2020	Trials	+13m	Soft 5	5	21
6/07/2020	Jumpouts	+13m	Soft 5	2	9
19/07/2020	Race Meeting	+13m	Good 4	10	105
20/07/2020	Trials	+13m	Good 4	7	25
20/07/2020	Jumpouts	+13m	Good 4	1	5
4/10/2020	Race Meeting	True	R1 - Soft 6 / R4 - Heavy 8	8	60
17/10/2020	Race Meeting	+3m	R1 - Good 4 / R2 - Soft 5 / R4 - Soft 7 / R6 - Heavy 8	7	53
3/11/2020	Race Meeting	+7.5m	Good 4	7	67
15/11/2020	Race Meeting	+11.5m	Good 4	8	70
16/11/2020	Trials	+11.5m	Soft 5	9	47
29/11/2020	Race Meeting	+15m	Good 4	7	59
15/12/2020	Trials	+19m	Good 4	14	57
29/12/2020	Track Gallops	+15m		N/A	2

Attachment 6.

Tasracing Track preparation form for 5 days leading into 27 December meeting (completed by track manager and extensively circulated to Tasracing, ORI and Industry participants, prior to meeting).

Completion of this form is standard practice required by Tasracing.

Tasracing Pty Ltd tasracing Thoroughbred Form Thoroughbred Race Track Inspection Form TSD0025				
VENUE: TRC - Elwick			RACE MEETING DATE: 27/12/2020	
Action Required	T1 5 Days Prior	T2 2 days prior and before 2:30 pm on that day	T3 1 day prior and before 2:30 pm on that day	T4 Race Morning at Daylight
Time and Date of Inspection	Date: 23/12/20 Time: 8:00am	Date: 25/12/2020 Time: 10:30am	Date: 26/12/2020 Time: 8:00am	Date: 27/12/2020 Time: 6:30am
Penetrometer Reading	4.63 (Soft 5)	4.60 (Soft 5)	4.65 (Soft 5)	4.62 (Soft 5)
Rainfall Reading (Last 24 hrs)	16mm (34.5mm Last 7 Days)	0mm (34.5mm Last 7 Days)	0mm (16mm Last 7 Days)	0mm (16mm Last 7 Days)
Weather Forecast (Next 24 hrs) < 1 mm 1-5 mm 5-10 mm etc.	19C (20% <1mm)	19C (5% <1mm)	25C (30% <1mm)	28C (90% 5-10mm)
Irrigation	0mm – Entire Course	Proposed: 10mm – Entire Course	Proposed 5mm – (1200m – W/P) 8mm – (Remainder) Additional 5mm @ 1400m Chute Action from T2: Executed As Proposed	Action from T3 Executed As Proposed
Have the irrigation ring mains been shut down & the lines drained?	NO	NO	NO	
Follow up Actions Has the follow up action from previous report been completed?	N/A	YES	YES – Track groomed to remove clip debris	YES
Rail Position	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE
Rails Are all the running rails and joins safe and correctly aligned? If NO, provide details of areas of concern	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Tasracing Pty Ltd tasracing Thoroughbred Form Thoroughbred Race Track Inspection Form TSD0025				
Action Required	T1 5 Days Out	T2 2 days prior and before 2:30 pm on that day	T3 1 day prior and before 2:30 pm on that day	T4 Race Morning @ Daylight
Surface Has the racing surface enough "give" and consistency in it to enable safe racing with no injuries to the horses? If NO, provide details of areas of concern.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Has the racing surface been repaired (divot replacement / track filled) to a standard acceptable to the industry? If NO, provide details of areas of concern.	Yes	Yes Divot repairs are growing in well.	Yes	Yes
Are there any areas that are dry or showing wilt? If YES, what is the action required?	No	No	No	No
Is the racing surface ready for racing? If it is not or won't be ready for racing, describe in detail why?	Yes	No Track requires grooming on outside lap to remove minor mowing clip – TBC 26/12	Yes	Yes
TTC ONLY Have the light and generator been checked?	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
DRC ONLY Have the kerbs and rail bases been covered with Tapeta?	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Tasracing Pty Ltd
 Thoroughbred Form | Thoroughbred Race Track Inspection Form

TSD0025

Rail Support legs
 Has all holes from rail support legs been correctly backfilled from the previous race meeting?
 If NO, provide details of areas of concern

Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
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Tasracing Pty Ltd
 Thoroughbred Form | Thoroughbred Race Track Inspection Form

TSD0025

Other notes
 19/2 – Top Dress
 22/12 – PhantomCore (x2)
 23/12 – Humic @ 20L/ha, Kelp @ 10L/ha, Granular (S/A Mix) @ 250Kg/ha
 24/12 – Agrivator (No PTO)
 26/12 – Groom (Amazon)

Contact Details for duty staff (including race day contact person)	Name:	Sam Webster	Name:	Sam Webster	Name:	Sam Webster	Name:	Sam Webster
	Mobile:	0429 023 588	Mobile:	0429 023 588	Mobile:	0429 023 588	Mobile:	0429 023 588
	Name:		Name:		Name:		Name:	
	Mobile:		Mobile:		Mobile:		Mobile:	

INSPECTION COMPLETED BY:

NAME:	Sam Webster	Sam Webster	Sam Webster	Sam Webster
POSITION:	RM	RM	RM	RM
DATE:	23/12/2020	24/12/2020	25/12/2020	26/12/2020

COPIED TO:

DISTRIBUTION:	23/12/2020 @ 3:15pm	24/12/2020 @ 12:40pm	Date: 25/12/2020 Time: 10:10am	Date 26/12/2020 Time: 8:00am
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			ATA	Nigel Schuuring	nkschuuring@gmail.com

Attachment 7.

Photos of Elwick track on 27 and 28 December indicating poor maintenance, repair and presentation of the track.

Plugs used inappropriately: not deep enough and easily lifted.



Note very dry sand profile and shallow plugs, placed very close together with little surrounding support. Easily lifted by hand.



More evidence of damage and excessive dry sand use.

The sand was applied to try to address concerns with the plugs, following later inspection by jockeys on 27 December. Excessive dry sand applied is inappropriate. It should have been watered in.





Excessive damaged caused by 10 December scarification still evident on 27 December. Track very stressed and poorly repaired.





Plugs normally used to repair singular deep divots.

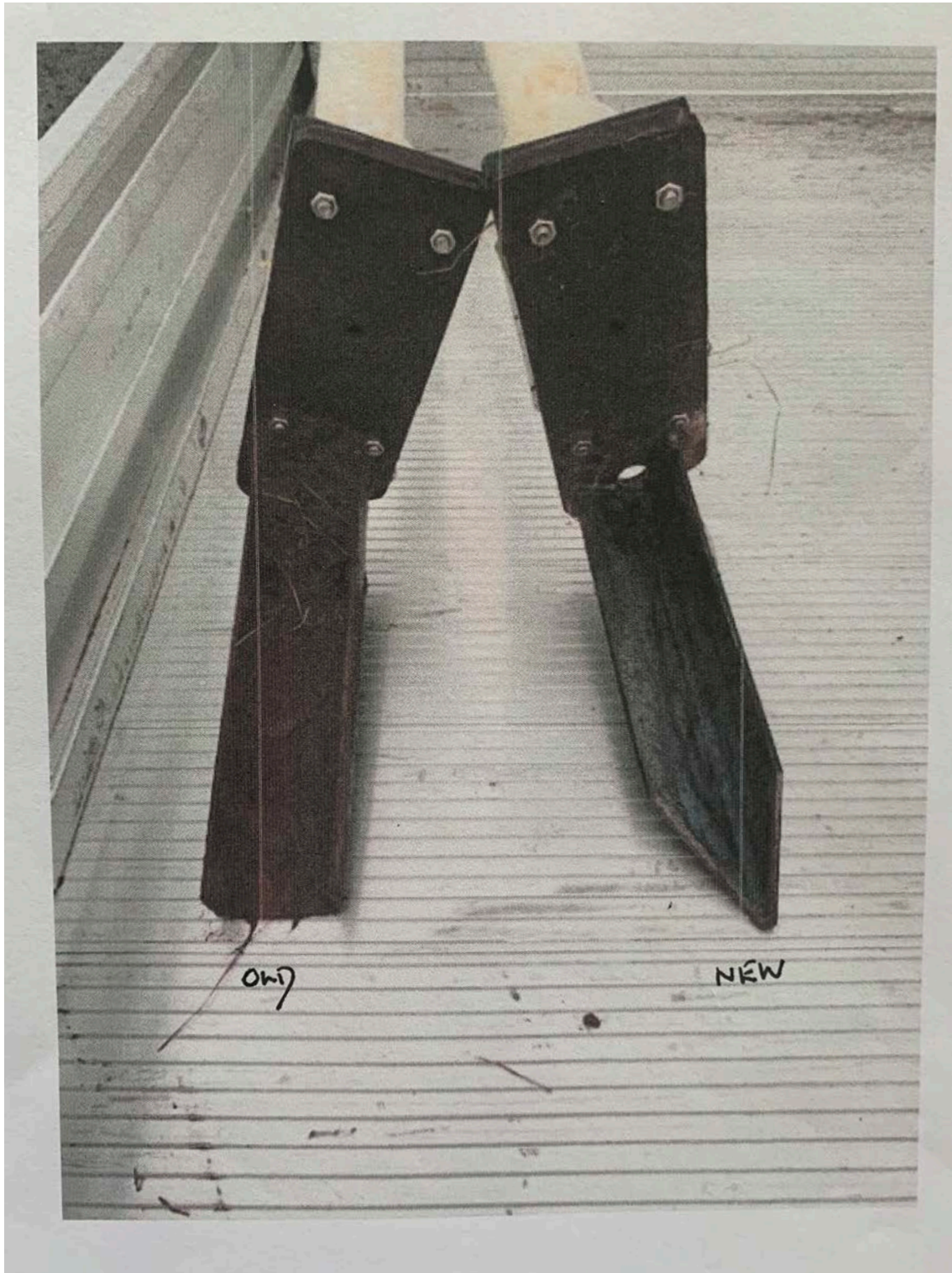
The use of turf plugs is standard practice to repair small divots/areas of surface damage on racetracks. Horses can race safely over these deep-rooted plugs. Apart from the larger areas at about 300m mark where these were inappropriately used on 27 December, there were numerous effective plugs in the track which were not a safety issue.





Attachment 8.

Moveable running Rail footings sleeves. Notwithstanding the policy to fill holes/slits, these normally cause minimal damage which will create a safety issue.



Alternative moveable rail footings

Mr Murrhly recommended affixing footings sleeves like these and particularly the “Mawsafe” footing to minimise resistance when removing them from the track and to reduce potential for damage.

