

MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MAC) UPDATE

Further to the MAC update sent out in last week's newsletter, following is an article by Brian de Lore that was published in The Informant on Saturday. Many thanks for them allowing it to be reproduced here so all members can hear the latest:

McKenzie reassures racing industry: *The times, they are a changin'*

Brian de Lore

Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) Chairperson Dean McKenzie wasn't singing the iconic Bob Dylan ballad, "The times, they are a changin' ", but that was the message conveyed when he spoke openly about MAC for the first time since its establishment in December.

MAC delivered its interim report to Racing Minister Winston Peters on schedule on February 28 and the Minister was impressed, saying last week, "The government wishes to acknowledge the excellent work of the panel so far and for its productive interactions with the racing industry and government officials."

The Terms of Reference under which MAC was formed and has since operated did not allow for any communication with the industry stakeholders during the process of compiling its list of prioritised recommendations as first tabled in the Messara Report.

This racing industry, however, has been kept in the dark for years by administrations that were supposed to do the opposite – stakeholders are accustomed to that treatment. Lack of communication has been the order of the millennium but is rivalled now by the ever-widening gap of costs to stakeholders against potential returns.

If we took a very pragmatic and cynical view of the plight of racing people in this country, we might say that despite all the big salaries and all the meetings that were ever convened to solve the problems, nothing has improved. The end to another racing season looms fast without any tangible improvements in place upon which we can hang our hats.

That's not the fault of MAC which formed only in December. The Minister and his newish committee are not responsible for this industry's ills of the past, but they undoubtedly will be responsible for the make or break of the future. McKenzie understands industry frustration and may have sought Ministerial approval before breaking the previous protocol of silence to talk to The Informant.

"This is a climate for change, and it's happening," he stated. "I know it won't be fast enough for some, but this is major reform and you don't do major reform in a few short months.

"There's a lot that's happened; a lot of work has been done, and we have made very good progress, but there's still a lot of work to do."

McKenzie was referring to the limited time between the formation of MAC and the delivery of the interim report by the end of last month. That period transversed

Christmas and New Year, but McKenzie made no secret of the inordinate amount of time and effort put in by the five-person committee to deliver a report that will serve the industry to its best advantage.

“Even though the process has been going for some time without any information released, it’s at a very positive stage as we move forward to the remaining stages to complete the process,” said McKenzie

“The next step is for Cabinet to approve both the interim report and the advice from the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA). The interim report will not be released at this point of time, but a further announcement on the next steps will be made following Cabinet decision-making in the coming weeks.

“This is likely to set out a busy legislative calendar and the establishment of a transitional racing authority (RITA) as previously indicated in the Terms of Reference.”

McKenzie’s awareness that the racing industry has been incredibly frustrated by a lack of information to stakeholders made him keen to explain further:

“Up until the end of February when we handed the report in, we had met on five separate occasions as a full committee, excluding our meeting on the day we first met the Minister,” he said. “That was from the middle of December, and effectively we had 77 days to complete the interim report, which included Christmas and New Year holidays.

“That excludes any subcommittee meetings or other meetings involving some individual members of the committee. Quite early in the piece we had engaged with the codes and NZRB with Sport NZ, and we have continued to liaise with all those bodies from the middle of January.

“Over Christmas and New Year our small team put together the first set of papers for a January 6th and 7th meeting – a Sunday and Monday. Then we met again two weeks after that, and then three weeks later again; that was the full MAC but also during that time there were various sub-meetings set up to get all the other work underway and get it done in time.

“As per our Terms of Reference, we had two milestones to achieve; one being the end of February with the interim report and the other still to be done with the end of June being the deadline for the final report.

“Our workload has been constant through that period, and the work delivered in the interim report doesn’t stop at that point. If you read the Terms of Reference, it keeps coming back to things we have to do ongoing – work plans and identifying roadblocks and procedures. There’s a work plan for the issues and the interim report, when released, will show both what we have done and what is coming up.

“We have a schedule of various tasks at different time points, and in the interim report we had to show the Minister how each of those work-streams were to be implemented by the 30th June and in some instances after that date.”

McKenzie couldn't elaborate on the details of the work completed by MAC but once approved at Cabinet level the interim report will be released. Also to be released at some point will be the submissions on the Messara Report which have influenced MAC's work after all submissions were thoroughly analysed.

"In the time available," continued McKenzie, "we could only genuinely engage with the industry wider public on the Messara recommendations in two ways. The first was consulting with all three codes and NZRB with Sport NZ separately at an early meeting, and the second was through the nearly 1700 submissions.

McKenzie also said that MAC quickly developed and has maintained an excellent working relationship with both the Minister's office and the DIA. And having a small but highly experienced team in New Zealand racing assisting MAC was instrumental in meeting the tight deadline.

Where is all this taking us, you may well ask. The answer lies in the Minister's original plan to leave the racing industry with legislation that will still be in place 30 years hence and serving racing well – unlike the Racing Act of 2003.

That's why Peters put a stop to the original racefields legislation going through about 18 months ago. If it was not going to serve racing well and give it the desired result, why proceed?. Peters knew not to send it through parliament when he found it to be a poorly written document. Eventually, it would have ended up on the same scrap heap as the Racing Act of 2003.

MAC was set up to prioritise the Messara Report because it's still the blueprint for change. Part One of the report talks about structure, finances, and legislation. If you are restructuring properly and starting from a blank sheet of paper as Messara said more than a year ago at the very start of this process, then a very wide broom needs to go through all three codes as well as NZRB – a prediction to dwell on.

"The racing industry can be assured that this government is highly motivated to deliver reform and revenue to the three codes," said Minister Peters last week. He also made a similar statement when campaigning for the last election and this industry is keen for him to deliver.

Peters talks about revenue, and that's what racing needs in mountain-like proportions for stakes and associated needs. The FOB isn't shaping up as the silver bullet the NZRB predicted it would and, revenue of the magnitude required must surely come from maximising income through outsourcing the TAB and cutting costs with a frugal administrative structure.

Reform will come with new legislation, and MAC is playing its part in furthering that cause. Last week the Minister said, "MAC has produced an interim report which reflects the submissions from the racing industry which establishes options at technical, legal, financial and process-orientated steps to be taken."

It seems clear from that statement the Minister is pleased with everything MAC has achieved thus far. And equally, McKenzie displayed both optimism and no shortage of confidence in Peters when he stated, "The Minister is an engaging person who is passionate about reforming racing."

The industry waits as it has done before – perhaps not now holding its breath, but in McKenzie the action is aplenty, and hope springs eternal.

2019 NZTR RACING POLICY

The NZTR Racing Policy has been revised and released. Several minor changes have been implemented. The changes that have been made have been consulted with the Regional Programming Chairmen, Racing Integrity Unit, New Zealand Trainers' Association, New Zealand Jockeys' Association and New Zealand Jumps Inc.

The policy has been simplified as much as possible and as such, has introduced a new race category. **MAAT Races** are Maiden races for horses that were classed as maiden horses at a particular date (eg; Maidens as at 5 June 2019). Previously these races have had Special Condition tags on the races, but this terminology has been replaced, as the 'special conditions' terminology will be used for races with more unique conditions (Naki Challenge etc).

The latest NZTR Racing Policy can be viewed on the NZTR website. <https://loveracing.nz/nztr/resources/rules-directives-and-policies>

QUICK MESSAGE FOR NORTHERN TRAINERS

Auckland Racing Club has arranged and paid for Corey Campbell to be riding on 30th March. He is the leading NZ apprentice and has a 2kg claim. Please support him with suitable rides.