

16 November 2003

Dear Member,

I titled my last newsletter "Crucial decisions". Well, it's now time to decide, and that's why I need to dedicate a major portion of this e-mail to corporate governance and the composition of the National Board in particular.

EFA Corporate Governance Review - Another Lost Opportunity?

Although a vote has not as yet been taken - that is due at the EFA's AGM on Monday, 24 November 2003 - the outlook for reform is again looking bleak. For a moment, when the Victorian Branch voted to support the proposed changes, I thought we could all look forward to a revitalised Federation with a National outlook and a skills-based and independent Board that could provide leadership and vision to the sport as a whole. Then I was told that the Tasmanian Branch had voted to support amendments proposed by the WA Branch that would ensure a continuation of a "representative" board consisting of one Director from each Branch. This is basically what we have had ever since the Federation was formed more than 50 years ago.

To change the constitution, a 75% majority is required, which means 6 of the 7 "shareholders" (Branches) need to vote in favour. Right now, the 5 Branches supporting the change represent 86 percent of all EFA members (including Junior and Associate members) and 91 percent of "Senior" members who are entitled to vote. Draw your own conclusions!

Some of you might say: "Is this not Board business? How come the CEO is entering the debate?"

Well, I reckon if I can't express my concerns about the organisational future of the Federation, there must be something wrong. Yes, the Board appoints me; yes, I report to the Board; yes, the Board can dismiss me. But also, yes, the Board holds me responsible to implement a vision, a strategic plan, national policies and procedures, etc. etc.

I have seen this Board operating. I was a Director and could observe the functioning of the Board for quite a few years. Now, as CEO, I am also part of Board meetings. In fact, I have more dealings with directors now than I have ever had. I have studied corporate governance systems and am convinced that what has been happening has been far from ideal. The implementation of the Governance Review would give the EFA opportunities to "go forward", to use a tired expression. The amendments proposed by WA and supported by Tasmania would actually make the system "worse" in the sense that they would remove a number of independent directors from the current Board.

The plain fact is that Directors who represent Branches quite often put on their "National hat" while they are meeting but continue to evaluate issues from their State Branch perspective. What else can they do? They are there for their Branch, are they not? The level of interest in National policies, National plans, a National vision goes only as far as it does not interfere with what happens at the Branch level.

The Federation has been through a number of reviews, going back into the late 1980s. We have had public meetings, open forums, reports, questionnaires, proposals, more meetings, subcommittees, consultants, Australian Sports Commission (ASC) involvement and encouragement. Nothing of substance has changed.

Now with funding and more encouragement from the ASC, expert study and analysis by a corporate governance consultant involving a cross-section of EFA members, another report, a tour of Branches to explain the plans and a final proposal unanimously supported by the National Board (including all the Chairs of all the Branches), it looks as though we will still not have any substantial change.

I am worried about the future functioning of the EFA, about future funding by the ASC, about our ability to attract and retain members willing to offer their services as directors and senior staff at the National level, give the Federation a vision and make it work. So far, we have not been able to take full advantage of our Olympic success. And we are still operating like EIGHT separate sporting organisations, not one National Federation.

2005 - 2009 EFA High Performance Plans

You may recall that this planning exercise driven by the Australian Sports Commission has been underway for a couple of months, with forums and meetings taking place in a number of locations. Our High Performance Manager Gareth McKeen has done an excellent job putting all this information together and submitting it to the ASC. Our thanks also to all those who made a contribution to the plan. Gareth, Wayne Roycroft and I will now go to Canberra this Sunday to present the plan to a distinguished audience of ASC management and Institute of Sport directors. Let's hope we make the right impression. The facts and figures speak for themselves.

Applications for Grants from the International Competition and Development Fund (ICDF)

This is just a reminder that Organising Committees and other applicants should make submissions for ICDF funding for events and projects planned for 2004 right now. The ICDF Committee needs to get an overview of applications for the coming year to be able to allocate funding to the most appropriate causes. There are only so many dollars to hand out.

EFA Logo and Name

In my last e-mail, I asked you for input on the question whether the EFA should have a new logo and whether it should change its name. Many other sports have made these types of changes in recent times. Well, your response was split almost equally for and against both ideas. My feeling is, however, that there is pressure to look at the logo and come up with something that may also suit the various disciplines.

My personal preference would be a design that has basic and easily recognised features but has different designs for each disciplines. A good example is the set of "pictograms" produced for sports taking part in Olympic Games (I know I am somewhat biased here). You see one pictogram and you immediately know that it is part of a set that belongs to the Olympic Games. World Equestrian Games have been adopting a similar approach. Just look at the set produced for Jerez. Maybe one or two of you have the graphic design ability to develop this idea. You could win a decent prize

Sydney Office

Our new crew is "settling in" very well and are gradually taking on jobs that I have been forced to do in the last 12 months or so. I don't want your sympathy but let me tell you that it is not easy to move an office 1,400 km, replace the majority of personnel and still deliver an adequate and gradually improving service. We are now about to appoint a replacement for our hard-working National Coaching & Officiating Manager, Barbara Fenner, who has continued working from Adelaide on a part-time basis.

WADC List

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has released the World Anti-Doping Code (WADC) List of prohibited substances that will become effective from 01 January 2004. The new list drops caffeine and pseudoephedrine but includes the banning of cannabinoids and glucocorticosteroids (when administered orally, rectally or by intravenous or intramuscular administration) in all sports in competition. More on our web http://www.efanational.com/content/high_performance/h_p_notices.htm , including links to ASDA and WADA.

Events

Equitana starts next week and 12 - 13 December, there will be Dressage and Jumping with the Stars at Werribee. More details and links on our web.

There is much more but there are Board papers to be written for the forthcoming Board meeting (after the AGM) and stuff to get ready for Equitana where the EFA will have a stand. Please come and visit, or better still, stay and help out for a while. We are surprisingly short of volunteers to staff the stand for the period so if you are willing and able Free entry, some food, and a number of breaks to be able to have a look around.

Make it a good day!

Franz Venhaus