

MINDARIE-HALIDON RACES – 29 Sept 2010

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:31): I want to speak about a community event, the Mindarie-Halidon races, which was held recently. The small farming town of Halidon comes to life once a year when cup day comes around and the Melbourne Cup of the Mallee, the Mindarie-Halidon Cup, is run. The club is supported by many of the farmers and businesspeople in the district, and this year it was ably supported by Regional Development Australia. Cup day is a picnic day, with buses coming from Adelaide, Goolwa, Hahndorf, Loxton, Murray Bridge, Strathalbyn, Mannum, Swan Reach and many other areas.

The first race meeting held by the Mindarie-Halidon Racing Club was on 3 September 1921. The club has come a long way since that meeting, with good facilities. The vision of the club is to ensure long-term racing in the Murray Mallee district, with the support of the committee and volunteers from the district, and to ensure the growth of the cup meeting and the club.

The club aims to create a friendly and relaxed environment for all race-day patrons and to promote thoroughbred racing in the Murray Mallee district, with the best thoroughbred racing that can be presented, with a view to increasing prize money for owners and increased patron numbers with promotions in the coming years.

The annual event is by far the major event in the community with a sparse population. It is the only race meeting of the year, and around 1,400 people attended the event on 19 September this year, the 90th in its long history. It is a vital fundraiser for the local community. At 8.30am on the Saturday directly before the day of the race meeting I had a call from Krystina Durdin, the secretary of the club, to say the phones were down and that the area around Halidon had been experiencing telephone problems in the district on and off for several weeks previous to this.

They were told the issue had been resolved and that the phone lines should be good. The Halidon exchange has had ongoing problems over the years that have caused regular outages of the phones in the area, and the people were nervous about whether the phones would work for the race meeting. I am informed that they have at least six lines into the meeting.

The secretary got a call at 8am from the President, who was in a panic that the phones were not working and that their biggest nightmare had been realised, especially since it was a Saturday, and they doubted whether they could be repaired for the Sunday meet. The implication of the phones being down was that no results could be sent out; therefore, no off-course betting revenue would be raised, the TAB would not work and therefore no betting for off-course races could happen, and the bookmakers would not be able to receive off-course clients for betting and results from off-course races could not be received.

Mindarie-Halidon races are accountable to Thoroughbred Racing South Australia and they are expected to be able to run a race meeting to their standards. This includes the facilities, the track conditions, client satisfaction, communication facilities and occupational health and safety, and not having the phones working on the day certainly does not reach the standards; therefore, they ran the threat of being moved to Murray Bridge or being closed altogether, which would be the end for them.

The race has been going for 90 years, and they want to reach 100 years and go further. It is run by a small group of local volunteers and, even though the race meeting involves gambling, they see the event as much more. It is a sign of survival for a small district in the Mallee where all communities are struggling. This also takes into account that the phones have been down at times when the local school, the East Murray Area School, which has students with epipens who are allergic to bees, has not been able to get contact out for health advice.

After Ms Durdin contacted me, I got in touch with Telstra and I am pleased to say that with the efforts of Nigel Johns, Lyndon Stoll and the technician, who travelled four hours to the job, they got the phones up and running by about five o'clock that night. I take my hat off to the technicians, Lyndon and Nigel for getting that accomplished. But the question I must ask is why was it an emergency? Why can't the people of Halidon have an upgraded phone system? They need the phones for every day of the year, not just for race meetings, but I certainly acknowledge the effort that Telstra and their technicians put in to make sure that, on the 19th, the show went on.

I certainly expressed to the people in Telstra that this would be a disastrous day for the Mallee if this race meeting did not go ahead because so much work had been put in by so many volunteers who live in tough conditions, who have had tough years, and they do a great job with the Mindarie-Halidon Cup.