



PRESIDENT'S REPORT: 2010-11

It has been both a very encouraging, yet also frustrating, year for the Football Media Association in the 13 months of this report since last year's Annual General Meeting in October.

We commenced the 2011 calendar year with a plan to meet with as many members as possible throughout the year by arranging informal events in conjunction with key football matches. We also had planned to host a seminar on football tactics and techniques, by way of professional development for our members.

Networking

On the first matter, we were pleased to be able to arrange get-togethers with members in Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane to coincide with international matches against New Zealand, Serbia and Thailand.

The most successful of these was the Adelaide event which attracted approximately 15 attendees on a Sunday afternoon. The Melbourne event attracted only a handful of people on a Tuesday evening and no one turned up at Brisbane on a Friday evening. Feedback suggests that, while members are enthusiastic about and enjoy the opportunity to meet one another, it is not always convenient to do so prior to a match and particularly if it is held on a week day. This is especially the case for the local members, as opposed to the interstate members who may be visiting for that match. Some grounds also lend themselves more efficiently to a social get-together as they are closer to suitable venues.

In future, we will continue to offer this opportunity depending on the time, day and location of the match or – if possible – arrange another event on the day prior to a match.

Professional development

Along with advocacy, networking and member services, one of our core objectives is to gradually build and offer professional development opportunities for members.

To this end, at the beginning of the year, we proposed a seminar on football tactics and techniques with Han Berger, Holger Osieck and Alistair Edwards from FFA along with commentators/analysts from SBS and FOX Sports and one or two A-League coaches. Informal inquiries of all personnel indicated that they were willing to participate.

However, the participation of Osieck, Berger and Edwards is ultimately the prerogative of their employers, FFA. On three occasions this year, we have attempted to organise and settle a date for the seminar.

- On the first, the then Head of Media Relations (Rod Allen) said the trio were not available and he was arranging such a seminar already. Subsequently, FFA held a media briefing to which only selected media were invited.
- On the second occasion, after the arrival of the new Head of Corporate Affairs and Communications (Kyle Patterson) in April, we had no response despite several promptings from our former Committee member, Murray Shaw.



- And on the final occasion, we wrote directly to the FFA CEO (Ben Buckley) for his agreement to hold the seminar in conjunction with this year's AGM. We have not received a response but we learned through accounting firm PwC that the "seminar would not be going ahead".

As we have been focussed on this, we have not yet considered other professional development opportunities but will do so in 2012.

We are both surprised and disappointed that we have not even had the courtesy of a response from either Mr Patterson or Mr Buckley. We would have thought that it was in the interests of the football family for the FFA to foster a good relationship with the industry body representing football media in order to advance the brand of football in Australia. This has not proven to be the case.

Advocacy

This leads to the issue of concerns we have taken up with FFA on behalf of members throughout the year.

Most of these have been relatively minor in scope – though important to individual members – regarding accreditation and access to matches. The vast majority of these have been resolved satisfactorily for members, although one matter is still ongoing in respect of a photographer.

The major issue of advocacy concerns a complaint from a member regarding alleged intervention by FFA in editorial policy of a major media organisation, a matter which had been independently corroborated by another member. We wrote to FFA on 4 July 2011 regarding this allegation seeking their comment. On 27 July we received a brief response from Mr Patterson advising there was insufficient detail for him to respond and inviting us to 'close' this matter. On 4 August, we provided further detail and particulars requested (without identifying individuals or organisations but identifying individuals within FFA who were allegedly involved) and invited the FFA to investigate the matter.

FMA has never received a response from FFA.

Three months later – with no response received - the Committee was of the view that there was an important principle at stake and agreed to schedule a meeting with Mr Patterson to be attended by my predecessor, Steve Dettre, the Secretary, Ezequiel Trumper and Committee member, Murray Shaw. Two days prior to the meeting, Murray resigned from the Committee for personal reasons. On the day of the meeting, we were advised that Mr Patterson refused to meet with us if one of the proposed attendees was in attendance. In other words, Mr Patterson took the view that it was up to the FFA to decide which elected FMA member(s) should attend on behalf of FMA.

We were given no reason for this unprecedented request of Mr Patterson so my predecessor wrote to Mr Patterson again on 9 November advising that we wanted to open dialogue to discuss this and other matters (including the seminar and the outstanding accreditation issue). Mr Patterson again refused to do so. Subsequent to this, Steve resigned as President and, as Vice-President, I stepped into the breach. At this time, the Committee also appointed Michael Lynch of *The Age* to the Committee in Murray Shaw's place.



On 24 November, I again wrote to Mr Patterson seeking a meeting. I followed this up in person at an FFA media event on 29 November. Mr Patterson indicated that he would contact me soon.

From the Committee's perspective, it is very disappointing that Mr Patterson has been in the role for eight months but has not found time to meet with us or engage with the Committee in any way. (Prior to writing to him in July, he had also been invited to attend a meeting to meet with the Committee). FMA's experience with his predecessors was very different.

We also record our concern that we cannot report back to the individual member who made the complaint and also highlight our disquiet that FFA seems to have taken no steps to investigate what, if true, would have constituted a very serious matter affecting freedom of speech in the football industry.

Major Event

On a happier note, FMA held its first 'major event' in 2011 – a fundraising trivia night to aid the Centenary Institute of Medical Research based at the University of Sydney/Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and in celebration of the recovery from cancer treatment of our co-founding member, Michael Cockerill from *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

It was a terrific night. Approximately 150 people attended; there was a lot of camaraderie and fun; I thought the questions were a little tough in places – even though News Limited won; Mike was chuffed; but, importantly, we also raised around \$6,500 for the Centenary Institute.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank the following individuals and organisations for their generous support by way of auction prizes:

- SBS
- Giles Park (Photographer)
- The Point, Coolum Beach
- Everton Football Club and Tim Cahill
- Sydney Football Club
- Barilla Pasta

In 2012, we are already planning to hold our second annual fundraising trivia night in Melbourne on Tuesday 28 February at the Niagara Hotel in the city. Proceeds will go to CanTeen, the national organisation that assists and supports teenagers with cancer. I hope to see as many of you as possible there, as it is the night before the Australia v Saudi Arabia World Cup qualifier at AAMI Stadium.

Committee

I would like to thank the Committee members throughout the past year for their work and dedication: Steve Dettre, Trent Dickeson, Bonita Mersiades, Murray Shaw and Ezequiel Trumper. All of us give our time voluntarily between our work, family and other commitments and their time is appreciated. I am also delighted to welcome Michael Lynch to the Committee and I look forward to working with him in the coming year. It is good to have a Melbourne Committee member on board!



I would also like to flag that, while I intend standing for President of the FMA at today's AGM, it is also my intention not to stand again this time next year. As a founding member, and after what will be five years on the Committee by the end of 2012, it is time to move on both personally and for the benefit of the turnover of the Committee and the football media.

We remain committed to helping provide knowledge, understanding and encouragement to those working in football media and those aspiring to do so.

I look forward to meeting as many members as possible throughout the coming year.

Ray Gatt

President

5 December 2011