

## **Auckland Thoroughbred Racehorse Owners Association**

### **PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2023-2024**

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It is my pleasure, as President of the Auckland Owners Association, to report on the 2023-2024 year. It's been a season of ups and downs, with abandonments and frustrations, alongside wins and celebrations and some fabulous race days.

The challenges that arose with the new Ellerslie track were unfortunate but were efficiently and effectively addressed by Paul Wilcox, the Board and staff of Auckland Thoroughbred Racing, and it's great that Ellerslie is back in business – and better than ever. Pukekohe was a fantastic back-up with meetings being held there while the Ellerslie track was rectified. We are fortunate in having CEO Paul speak to us at this year's AGM to give us a full update on all things related to ATR – thank you, Paul. Thank you also to Kim Steven-Riley, Paul's Executive Assistant, who is always a friendly face on race days and a reliable contact behind the scenes. Ruakaka is a bit further to venture for a racing fix, but a day on course up in the north is always a fun and friendly experience. Avondale has had its ups and downs, but it will be good to have it back up and running for trials and meetings into 2025.

A Social Race Day for members was held last year at Pukekohe on 28 October 2023 – another successful gathering with good racing and good cheer. We were unable to plan for a Race Day during 2024 due to uncertainties around availability and costs of holding an event at one of our local race venues. We do plan to hold a racing event during the first part of 2025 and this is likely to be a Racing Soiree at Ellerslie. We will advise more in due course but this will be something a bit different – a fun evening with a racing focus.

We enjoy being able to put on events for members and, with a view to finding out what our members would like us to organise, we sent out a Survey in May 2024. The Soiree idea was very much embraced, along with stud and stable visits, and we'll consider what's feasible for next year.

Over the past year, the Auckland Association Committee has met a number of times and discussed various industry matters.

- A Strategic Proposal put forward to Members Council and NZTR by President Bernard Hickey and the Executive for Owners and other stakeholder RIOs (registered industry organisations) to become voting members of NZTR. This would mean Owners, Trainers, Breeders and Jockeys also get a voice alongside Racing Clubs who, at present, are the only ones who have a vote. The NZTR Board supports the proposal and the NZTR Constitution is currently being refined to allow for this. When this has been done, it will be presented at a special NZTR Board meeting in 2025 and, once confirmed, the next steps can be considered.

With my NZTROF Vice President's hat on, I've been involved in discussions and process of this and it will be a real bonus for stakeholders to be able to have more visibility and voice.

- The proposed new jockey fees as presented by NZTR earlier in the year. While extra costs can be burdensome for Owners, we also recognise the risks and sacrifices a jockey makes. The Committee supported the proposal.
- The Committee also unanimously supported the retention and encouragement of jumps racing within the New Zealand racing structure and sent a submission to this effect. It will be interesting to what transpires in this regard.
- The IT capacity of NZTR to track and identify trends and issues regarding horse welfare, injury and ceasing of racing of a particular horse.
- At our May meeting we made a presentation to Mike Gething to thank him for his generous past service as President of the Association. Thank you, Mike, your continued membership on the Committee is valuable and appreciated, as is your work as our Welfare Delegate.

Neil Miller and I attended an NZTROF Executive Workshop on Sunday 26 May at which Waikato member Berri Schroder gave a presentation on IT and digitisation opportunities for the industry. Several Committee members attended the NZTR Roadshow on Monday, 16 September 2024 at Karaka. We try to get out and about and stay in touch with industry issues wherever possible.

Membership numbers fluctuate – some Owners are no longer racing horses for various reasons, some pass away, and others move overseas etc. We appreciate all our members and it was very pleasing to note that, in the Survey that was circulated, no one responded that they intended not to renew their membership. I want to acknowledge Denise Mayhew, Executive Officer of the Federation, for the work she does taking care of the national admin, accounts and wider membership matters.

My sincere thanks to all committee members: Lex Paterson, Neil Miller, Raewyn McKenzie, Mike Gething, Frances Crimmins, Elliot Wilton, Lex Paterson, Michael Dowd, Craig Leishman, Virginia Healey and Pat Woollaston. Also thank you and best wishes to Allan Pate who has stepped off the Committee for the present time due to health issues.

Voluntary organisations rely on committee members who work behind the scenes with enthusiasm to keep things ticking along, and this group is no exception. I've been on many committees over the decades and this one is right up there as being active and highly enjoyable. We'd love to have new members join our Committee – if you'd like to share your passion and skills, let us know!

I'd like to specifically acknowledge several people who go largely unsung. Firstly, thank you to our Secretary Raewyn McKenzie who keeps the wheels turning for our Committee meetings, finances, minutes and follow-up actions. Raewyn has been doing this for

many years now, taking minutes in good old-fashioned shorthand, and always being on hand when something needs checking or following through. Thank you, Raewyn!

Secondly, I'd like to acknowledge Neil Miller for his dedication to the production of the Federation's quarterly Bulletin. It's a full-on task that Neil has done on a voluntary basis for many years now. He puts one issue to bed and then turns his mind to the next one. Neil is always scouting industry communications to report issues of note, having conversations with anyone and everyone in the racing world, and his approach to getting each edition finalised is meticulous. He relies on a variety of scribes – including me – and it can be a mission for Neil to corral us and our writing efforts. I know that completing this latest Spring 2024 edition has been more trying than ever, with health niggles getting in the way, but Neil persevered through and another publication full of racing tales is hot off the press. Thank you, Neil.

I'd also like to acknowledge NZTROF President Bernard Hickey who works tirelessly on behalf of members, moving and shaking and rattling cages more than most may realise. Racing is an industry that is ever-changing, yet at the same time resistant to it. Innovative ideas and suggestions for the better can be difficult to get across to the powers that be, and changes in personnel within NZTR don't help as continuity is lost. Bernard never gives up putting forward the views of Owners, Members and the Executive. Thanks Bernard!

Congratulations to all those who have enjoyed success with their horses this year. May there be more winners in store!

Sally Blyth

**President, Auckland Owners Association**

**NZTROF Vice President**