

ANNUAL REPORT
2023–24

**VICTORIAN
RACING
INTEGRITY
BOARD**



Authorised by the
VICTORIAN RACING INTEGRITY BOARD

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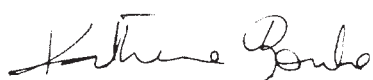
LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

To The Hon Anthony Carbines MP, Minister for Racing

I am pleased to provide you with the annual report of the Victorian Racing Integrity Board for the year ending 30 June 2024, for tabling in Parliament.

As required by section 95T of the *Racing Act 1958 (Vic)*, the report describes the board's activities in the past year, including the performance of its statutory functions and engagement with the Victorian racing industry.

I hope that this report will help to inform the Parliament, controlling bodies, thoroughbred, harness and greyhound racing industry participants, and the wider Victorian community about the Board's racing integrity oversight and advisory roles under the Act.



Her Honour Judge Katherine Bourke

Chair

31 July 2024

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CHAIR'S FOREWORD

This is my first annual report to the Minister for Racing since assuming the Chair position from my predecessor – the Honourable Justice Jack Forrest – on 1 August 2023.

Jack was the Victorian Racing Integrity Board's (VRIB) inaugural Chair and did a magnificent job laying down solid foundations for the Board and building strong working relationships with the controlling bodies as well as other key stakeholders right across the Victorian racing industry (VRI). His extensive knowledge of racing was integral to the Board effectively discharging its functions under the *Racing Act 1958* (the Act). Jack's influence has been profound, with his stewardship fostering a culture of enthusiasm, frankness and congeniality on the Board.

I would also like to thank my fellow Board members and support staff for their warm and generous welcome. I have felt extremely well supported since assuming the Chair position and have been impressed with the expertise and passion present on the Board.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the excellent working relationship the Board has forged with the Racing Integrity Commissioner (RIC), a relationship that is vital to the effective oversight of integrity within the VRI. In particular, I'd like to congratulate the Commissioner on the release of his *Independent Review Into Victorian Racing Industry Victim Support And Complaint Processes*. The Review provided an opportunity for victims of sexual and physical abuse, assault and harassment to come forward and safely share their stories. The Board engages regularly with the Commissioner on progress against the recommendations emanating from the Review.

FUNCTIONS UNDER THE ACT

The Board has a number of important functions to perform under the Act, these were all discharged during the reporting period.

Overseeing the Relationship Between Controlling Bodies and their Integrity Staff

The Board works to ensure that racing integrity officials can undertake their important roles without interference from their respective controlling bodies. VRIB received one complaint from an eligible integrity official for the reporting period. The complaint was progressed in accordance with VRIB's complaints policy and amicably resolved.

The small number of eligible complaints received by the Board – one since its establishment – is a result of VRIB's presence in the racing industry integrity space. The Board functions to remind controlling bodies that while it is important they maintain general oversight of integrity operations; they must not unduly influence or impede those operations.

Integrity Plans and Resourcing

The Board reviewed integrity plans from each controlling body during the reporting period. The review of the plans provides an opportunity for the controlling bodies to advise on the conduct of their integrity operations and strategy for the coming financial year. Importantly, the Board also considers integrity resourcing through the review process and was particularly keen to ensure that integrity functions continue to be adequately resourced given the challenging economic environment with which the entire industry is having to contend.

Review of Policies and Rules

Throughout the reporting period the VRIB Deputy Chairpersons have, via delegation, reviewed proposed new and amended integrity Policies and Rules of Racing and have made recommendations about these to the controlling bodies.

The review process works to ensure that any new or amended Policies / Rules are given independent consideration, and the Board enjoys constructive working relationships with all three controlling bodies in this space. The details of the reviews for 2023-24 are provided later in this report.

Liaising with the RIC and External Agencies

As noted above the Board has an excellent working relationship with the RIC. Regular meetings are held with the Commissioner and senior staff from his office, information – where appropriate and necessary – is shared. VRIB's liaison with the Commissioner is focused on ensuring effective oversight of integrity functions within the VRI, as well as facilitating an understanding of the regulatory burden being placed on the controlling bodies.

Further, VRIB often engages with other external agencies in relation to integrity matters, including law enforcement, advocacy groups and various other government entities.

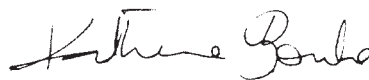
During the reporting period for example, the Board met with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to discuss that organisation's policy positions in relation to racing, as well as the Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria, to discuss various matters relating to veterinarians in the racing industry. Members also attended integrity forums organised by Victoria Police and the Australian Football League.

Promoting Collaboration and Maintaining Effective Relationships with Controlling Body Boards

The Board has worked to promote collaboration between the controlling bodies through various mechanisms throughout the reporting period. VRIB has ongoing Racing Analytical Services Ltd and Intelligence & Investigations liaison sub-committees in place that bring members of each controlling body together to share information and work collaboratively toward common goals.

VRIB has also established a VRI Education Management Committee to provide oversight of the racing education program currently being delivered by Victoria University, identify education and training opportunities and provide guidance for the training of integrity officials.

In closing, and to reiterate a view put forward by the previous Chair, it has become apparent during my first twelve months on the Board that there remains several issues to do with the powers and functions of VRIB and the RIC that need to be resolved. In short, a legislative simplification and clarification of the powers and functions of both is required and I am hopeful that this will be progressed in due course.



Her Honour Judge Katherine Bourke
Chair

EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S FOREWORD

The 2023-24 financial year was particularly significant for the Board as its inaugural Chair, the Honourable Justice Jack Forrest, concluded his term in July 2023. Justice Forrest oversaw the Board's establishment, including determinations as to its scope and purpose, and ensured that it was able to effectively perform its functions under the Act. He was greatly respected by his fellow members, colleagues, and the entire VRI.

Justice Forrest was succeeded by Her Honour Judge Katherine Bourke as Chair from 1 August 2023. Judge Bourke has overseen a seamless transition and is working to ensure that the Board remains both focused on its core functions, while also recognising, and responding to, the rapidly evolving nature of integrity threats to the VRI, particularly those beyond race-day activities.

Perhaps the most notable feature of the 2023-24 financial year, from a regulatory perspective, were the challenges faced by the controlling bodies in relation to the cost-of-living crisis and difficult economic environment more generally. Given these challenges, the Board was particularly mindful of its responsibilities in relation to the oversight of integrity resourcing and integrity budgets. VRIB engaged extensively with the controlling bodies throughout the reporting period to understand and assess developments in this regard.

The Board also worked to adopt a more proactive posture during the reporting period, developing several strategic priority work programs, aimed at addressing emerging issues in the VRI. This work will ensure that the Board is well placed to both perform its core functions as well as respond to new matters as they invariably arise.

VRIB worked diligently in 2023-24 to assure the integrity functions provided by the controlling bodies. The Board will continue to work with the controlling bodies to realise the best outcomes for the VRI.



Aaron Campbell
Executive Officer

YEAR AT A GLANCE

2023

JULY

VRIB's inaugural Chair, the Honourable Justice Jack Forrest, concludes his term.

AUGUST

Her Honour Judge Katherine Bourke is appointed as VRIB's new Chair.

VRIB endorses a revised template for the development of controlling body integrity plans for 2024-25.

SEPTEMBER

VRIB commences development of an Investigations and Prosecutions Policy aimed at providing best practice guidance to the controlling bodies.

OCTOBER

VRIB holds first biannual cross-code integrity meeting for the financial year, bringing together controlling body Chairs, CEOs and government officials to discuss integrity matters and the racing industry.

VRIB members attend the Sporting Integrity Symposium organised by Victoria Police.

NOVEMBER

The VRI Education Management Committee holds its inaugural meeting, facilitating engagement between the controlling bodies in relation to integrity training.

DECEMBER

VRIB develops its Strategic Plan 2023-24 / 2025-26.

2024

JANUARY

Following its annual review, VRIB issues its complaints policy and process to those individuals eligible to make a complaint to the Board under the Act.

FEBRUARY

VRIB determines to develop and progress strategic work programs in relation to animal welfare; people matters; and, integrity governance and assurance.

MARCH

VRIB Intelligence and Investigations Liaison Group meets, providing a forum for integrity staff from the controlling bodies to discuss matters of mutual interest.

APRIL

VRIB holds second biannual cross-code integrity meeting for the financial year, bringing together controlling body Chairs, CEOs and government officials to discuss integrity matters and the racing industry.

VRIB engages with the Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria to discuss issues relating to veterinarians in the racing industry.

MAY

VRIB engages with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) to discuss the intersection of animal welfare and integrity and RSPCA policies for racing.

Training for the second year of the Racing Integrity Education Program commences at Victoria University.

JUNE

VRIB considers the controlling bodies' 2024-25 annual integrity plans.

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WHO WE ARE



BOARD MEMBERS

Established in 2019 under Part IVB of the Act, VRIB is an independent statutory authority providing oversight of integrity in the VRI.

The Hon Justice Jack Forrest, Chair

Appointed: 1 August 2019

Term end: 31 July 2023

Jack is the former Chairperson of the Racing Victoria Integrity Council. He has a life-long interest in thoroughbreds and racing as a former licenced owner trainer, breeder, and rider. Jack was appointed a Queens Counsel in 1999 and was a Judge of the Supreme Court from 2007, and the principal judge of the common-law division from 2015, until he retired in March 2018. He now sits as an acting judge of the Supreme Court.

Her Honour Judge Katherine Bourke

Appointed: 1 August 2023

Term end: 31 July 2026

Katherine has served on the County Court of Victoria since 2007 and prior to that practised as a solicitor and barrister, specialising in personal injuries and administrative law. She also represented both stewards and licensed persons in matters relating to thoroughbred and harness racing.

She has extensive knowledge of the VRI, having owned horses for many years, as well as serving as the Chair of the Bookmakers and Bookmakers Clerks Registration Committee from 2000 until her appointment to the County Court.

Further, Katherine served as a Director of the Victoria Racing Club for 18 years.

Ms Elizabeth Clarke AM, Deputy Chair

Appointed: 1 August 2022

Term end: 31 July 2025

Elizabeth has had a long involvement with racing in Victoria. She served on the board of Harness Racing Victoria from 2012 to 2019 and as Deputy Chair from 2016 to 2019. She was also a member of the Harness Racing Victoria Integrity Council and Show Cause Committee Member between 2012 and 2019. Elizabeth was Club Manager at the Terang Harness Racing Club and the Terang and District Racing Club. She was an Adviser to the Racing Appeals Tribunal from 2000 to 2011 and a member of Harness Racing Victoria Racing Appeals and Disciplinary Board. She was Chair of the Harness Racing Victoria Industry Advisory Council from 2016 until 2019. In June 2021, Elizabeth was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for service to harness racing and the community.

Mr Bryan Gurry, Deputy Chair

Appointed: 1 August 2021

Term end: 31 July 2024

Bryan was a member of the board of directors of Racing Victoria from 2008 until 2017 and represented the Racing Victoria Board on the Racing Victoria Integrity Council. Bryan has enjoyed a successful career in the law that includes establishing his own legal practice and being appointed as Partner of several national law firms.

BOARD MEMBERS CONTINUED

Mr John Barrett, Deputy Chair

Appointed: 1 August 2023

Term end: 31 July 2026

John is a former Independent Member of the Greyhound Racing Victoria Integrity Council, Chief Executive of the Racing Industry Development Authority (SA), and General Manager of the Bookmakers Licensing Board (SA). He is an executive management consultant with extensive experience in governance, business performance and innovation across the public and not-for-profit sectors. A Member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, he has previously held several executive director, non-executive director, company secretary and statutory regulator roles.

Dr Catherine (Kate) Savage, Member

Appointed: 1 August 2023

Term end: 31 July 2026

Kate is an equine veterinarian and internal medicine specialist. She has worked in Australia, the USA and at the Beijing Olympics. Kate is the past President of the World Equine Veterinary Association and was a Member of the Harness Racing Victoria Racing Appeals and Disciplinary Board.

Ms Megan Hughes, Member

Appointed: 1 August 2021

Term end: 31 July 2024

Megan is a lawyer, writer and policy adviser with experience working in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. She has strong expertise in racing and administrative law, governance and integrity and has advised a range of racing bodies in Australia and Europe, most recently on animal welfare and social licence issues. Megan has worked on a number of significant justice and regulatory reforms, including the governance overhaul of the Victorian thoroughbred racing industry. She is currently a Senior Adviser, Research and Advocacy at the Centre for Innovative Justice at RMIT University. Megan is also a Director of Racing Analytical Services Limited.

Ms Amelia Lynch, Member

Appointed: 1 August 2021

Term end: 31 July 2024

Amelia is a Partner at Lander & Rogers and head of the Sports Business Group. She has developed a specialist practice in sports law, advising a broad range of clients in the sport, leisure and major events industry including national and state sporting organisations, professional sports clubs, racing clubs, major event organisers, venue/facility managers and government sport/recreation departments. She is a Director of the Victorian Institute of Sport and former Director of the Australia and New Zealand Sports Law Association.

Mr Tim Lyons, Member

Appointed: 1 August 2022

Term end: 31 July 2025

Tim has had 20 years' experience in the trade union movement as an organiser, advocate, policy specialist and senior leader. He has been a member of Federal Government boards and expert working groups on workplace relations, taxation, superannuation, procurement, and industry policy. He has had Australian and international leadership experience in relation to superannuation and retirement incomes policy, ESG and capital stewardship. He has had a long-term work focus on governance, compliance and accountability issues as a director, manager, and leader.

Mr Emmett Dunne APM, Member

Appointed: 1 August 2022

Term end: 31 July 2025

Emmett retired from Victoria Police in 2015 at the rank of Assistant Commissioner after a forty-year career in which he served in a variety of roles including as the head of the Prosecutions Division and the Professional Standards Command. He has recently concluded six years' service as a Director and Deputy Chair of Greyhound Racing Victoria, and he continues a life-long involvement in Australian Rules Football which incorporated 21 years as a member of the AFL Tribunal.

Meeting attendance

Board member	Eligible to attend	Meetings attended
Her Hon Judge Katherine Bourke	7	6
Elizabeth Ann Clarke AM	7	5
Bryan Gurry	7	7
John Barrett	7	6
Dr Catherine (Kate) Savage	7	7
Megan Hughes	7	7
Amelia Lynch	7	5
Tim Lyons	7	6
Emmett Dunne APM	7	6

VISION, PURPOSE & APPROACH



OUR VISION

A fair and trustworthy racing industry that champions high standards of integrity and proactively seeks to ensure a level playing field for all participants.



OUR PURPOSE

Promote confidence in the VRI through independent and transparent oversight of the controlling bodies' integrity functions, to maintain high standards and enhance accountability and collaboration.



OUR APPROACH

Provide independent, impartial advice and recommendations about integrity issues to the controlling bodies and government, oversee and facilitate industry collaboration, and promote innovation through identification and endorsement of integrity best practice.

WHAT WE DO

VRIB provides independent oversight of Victorian racing integrity by –

- ensuring that integrity functions are not compromised by the commercial considerations of the controlling bodies.
- increasing the transparency and accountability of integrity functions.
- enhancing cross-code collaboration about integrity matters.

Primary responsibility for the control of racing, including the performance of integrity functions and compliance with the rules of racing, lies with the controlling bodies.

VRIB's functions are set out in the Act and are advisory in nature. The board has oversight of the controlling bodies' performance in the following key areas –

- integrity plans, budgets, and resourcing.
- integrity policy and licensing policy and procedure.
- integrity-related rules of racing.
- complaints about integrity issues within a controlling body.
- disciplinary action proposed against a senior integrity official.
- shared services agreements between the controlling bodies.

VRIB's oversight of racing integrity is jointly shared with the RIC. In contrast to the Board, the RIC's focus is more operational, and includes the following core functions –

- the conduct of annual audits of internal integrity processes and systems of each controlling body.
- the investigation of complaints about integrity processes and systems.

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YEAR IN REVIEW



OVERVIEW OF FUNCTIONS & POWERS

Overview of VRIB’s performance of statutory functions under Part IVB of the Act

Section	Function	Performance
95H(1)(a) and (i)	Oversee and maintain relationships between and with the controlling bodies, their integrity staff, and boards.	Undertook regular liaison with the integrity heads, chairs, chief executives, and boards of the controlling bodies through formal and informal mechanisms.
95H(1)(b), 95R(2)(b) and (d)	Endorse and make recommendations about each controlling body’s annual integrity plan.	<p>Endorsed the 2024-25 annual integrity plans for Racing Victoria (RV) and Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV).</p> <p>Did not endorse the annual integrity plan for Harness Racing Victoria (HRV) – with the controlling needing to provide the Board with additional information prior to the plan being reconsidered.</p> <p>VRIB made 9 recommendations to the controlling bodies following consideration of their 2024-25 integrity plans (RV 2, GRV 3 & HRV 4)</p>
95H(1)(c)	Review and provide recommendations about integrity resourcing and the integrity budgets of each controlling body.	VRIB will review integrity budgets early in the 2024-25 financial year.
95H(1)(d)	Advise and make recommendations to the controlling bodies about integrity policy and policies and procedures for participant licensing.	<p>Reviewed and made recommendations in support of 10 integrity policies.</p> <p>Two of these reviews related to separate proposals for change to one policy.</p>
95H(1)(e)	Review proposals for new or amended, integrity related rules of racing and make recommendations.	Reviewed 38 proposals for new [6] and amended [32] rules / sub-rules of racing relating to integrity, suggested some enhancements and, ultimately, made recommendations in support / support in principle of 36 proposals, with one amendment not supported and a further one amendment withdrawn by the controlling body.

OVERVIEW OF FUNCTIONS & POWERS CONTINUED

Overview of VRIB's performance of statutory functions under Part IVB of the Act, Cont.

Section	Function	Performance
95H(1)(f) and (g)	Receive, review, and investigate or refer to the RIC, complaints made by a member or a director of a board of a controlling body, an integrity manager or the Chief Steward or Deputy Chief Steward about integrity issues within a controlling body.	Received 1 complaint during 2023-24.
95H(1)(h)	Liaise with the RIC and external agencies about integrity matters.	Engaged in regular, informal, and formal liaison with the RIC and other agencies.
95H(1)(j)	Provide direction about disciplinary action proposed by a controlling body against a senior integrity department staff member about internal integrity matters.	Was not required to provide direction in relation to matters involving disciplinary action proposed by a controlling body in 2023-24
95H(1)(k)	Oversee the development of memorandum of understanding or shared service agreements between the controlling bodies.	A common service level agreement between RASL and each controlling body has been established.

Overview of VRIB's performance of its statutory powers under Part IVB of the *Racing Act 1958*

Section	Power	Performance
95H(1)(l)	Issue directions to a controlling body regarding integrity matters.	Power was not exercised during the reporting period.
95O	Direct a controlling body to provide information relevant to a complaint.	Power was not exercised during the reporting period.
95P	Give directions to a controlling body about a failure to comply with a recommendation.	Power was not exercised during the reporting period.
95R(2)(a)	Require a controlling body to provide further information about an annual integrity plan.	VRIB made 42 requests to the controlling bodies for further information following consideration of their 2024-25 integrity plans (RV 6, GRV 9 & HRV 27)
95R(2)(c)	Require a controlling body to make changes to the annual integrity plan.	Power was not exercised during the reporting period.
95S	Advise the Minister of any failure by a controlling body to prepare and submit an annual integrity plan; consider, respond to, or implement a recommendation; or comply with a direction.	Power was not exercised during the reporting period.

ANNUAL INTEGRITY PLANS & BUDGETS

The annual integrity plans and budgets identify each controlling body's strategic priorities, the operational activities they will undertake in the year ahead, and the resources required to do this.

VRIB's oversight function in relation to the integrity plans and budgets is to review, provide independent feedback, and ultimately endorse them once confident the plan is in the best interests of the industry.

The controlling bodies provide their annual integrity plans and budgets to VRIB at the end of May each year.

The interdependent nature of the board's functions in relation to both means that VRIB assesses the plans and budgets concurrently.

VRIB subsequently considers what, if any, recommendations / requests it should make to facilitate continuous improvement in integrity outcomes through the annual integrity plan process and communicates these to the controlling bodies.

Integrity plan template

The Board has developed a template for use by the controlling bodies in developing their plans. The template ensures that VRIB is provided with the information it requires to assess each plan in a structured consistent manner.

VRIB liaises regularly with the controlling bodies on the template as part of a continuous improvement process and to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

The template requests that controlling bodies provide information in relation to:

- Integrity Governance –
 - Oversight and performance monitoring
 - Risk management
 - Integrity Budgets
- Integrity Performance –
 - Core integrity functions (BAU)
 - Integrity initiatives, projects or infrastructure (additional to BAU)
 - Collaboration
 - Education, training & induction

The template also requests that controlling bodies provide an overview of significant changes in the current plan as compared to its preceding iteration, information in relation to any VRIB recommendations that were to be addressed in the plan and confirmation of board approval (i.e. the approval of the controlling body's board).

Endorsement of 2024-25 integrity plans and budgets

The Act requires VRIB to be satisfied that its endorsement of each controlling body's annual integrity plan and budget is in the best interests of the racing industry.

Prior to the controlling bodies commencing the development of their plans for 2024-25 VRIB undertook a consultation process with them to review and amend the VRIB integrity plan template. This process saw several amendments proposed by the controlling bodies incorporated into the template, these worked to facilitate the development of plans in the most efficient manner possible.

ADVICE ABOUT INTEGRITY & LICENSING POLICY

As for previous years, in 2024, VRIB again provided an opportunity for the integrity head of each controlling body to present their annual plan to the Board and respond to members' queries.

After reviewing each plan in turn, VRIB determined that the 2024-25 annual integrity plans for RV and GRV were in the best interests of the industry and should be endorsed. As they were not available for consideration at the time, the Board's endorsement was subject to the assessment of integrity budgets at a later date.

Further, VRIB determined that HRV's 2024-25 integrity plan could not be endorsed as being in the best interests of the industry, and that the controlling body would need to provide the Board with additional information (see requests and recommendations below) prior to the plan being reconsidered by the Board.

Requests & recommendations relating to the 2024-25 integrity plans

VRIB issued – under sections 95R(2)(a) and 95R(2)(b) of the Act – a number of requests and recommendations to the controlling bodies following consideration of their 2024-25 integrity plans.

For RV and GRV, the requests and recommendations made by VRIB were to supplement information already provided by the controlling bodies in their plans and to provide additional commentary and context.

For HRV the requests and recommendations made by VRIB were to address gaps identified in the controlling body's plan and provide assurance that key resourcing decisions were appropriately assessed and supported by thorough analysis and evaluation.

VRIB's function under section 95H(1)(d) of the Act is to advise and make recommendations to the controlling bodies about integrity policy, and licensing policies and procedures.

The performance of this function is ordinarily delegated to the deputy chairs unless the specific policy or procedure raises matters of cross-code application. In providing advice about these matters to the controlling bodies, the deputies draw on their significant knowledge of the applicable greyhound, harness, or thoroughbred racing code.

VRIB reviewed and made recommendations in support of 10 integrity policies 2023-24.

The policies related to:

- Betting Policy (RV)
- Private Interest and Probity and Conflict of Interest Policy (RV)
- Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy (RV)
- Step Aside Policy (RV)
- Thoroughbred Racehorse Welfare Policy (n.b. reviewed twice) (RV)
- Participant Protection Policy (RV)
- Safeguarding Young Persons Policy (RV)
- Speak Up Policy (RV)
- Prohibited Substance Control Policy (GRV)

Further, VRIB reviewed and made recommendations in support of:

- Code of Conduct for the Safety of Children and Young People (RV)
- Public Commitment Statement (RV)

REVIEW OF PROPOSED AMENDED & NEW RULES OF RACING

The review of proposals for new or amended rules of racing relating to integrity is a core VRIB function.

To increase expediency and efficiency, VRIB's deputy chairs perform this task under delegation from the board. Each deputy has extensive knowledge of the relevant racing code, including a practical understanding of the application of the rules and interplay between the local and national rule-making bodies for greyhound, harness, and thoroughbred racing.

The controlling bodies' internal processes permit a detailed examination of the potential impact of new and amended racing rules, including consultation with each code's industry stakeholders.

At the conclusion of this process, the proposal for a new or amended rule is referred to VRIB for its review. The relevant deputy chair also considers whether the proposal raises cross-code or other issues that warrant review by the full board.

During 2023-24, VRIB reviewed 38 proposals from the controlling bodies to amend or introduce new rules / sub-rules of racing for their code. Of these 34 related to thoroughbred / harness racing and four to greyhound racing.

These reviews included consideration of various changes to the Australian Rules of Racing, Australian Harness Racing Rules, as well as feedback provided on the GRV proposed local rules stakeholder consultation process.

Further, deputy chairs considered the renumbering of four existing rules / sub-rules resulting from the introduction of new, or amendments to existing, rules / sub-rules, and encouraged a controlling body to consider the introduction of one new rule.

After reviewing each proposed rule, VRIB ultimately made recommendations in support or support in principle of their introduction or amendment, with the exception of one amendment which was not supported, and a further one amendment which was withdrawn by the controlling body.

The internal scrutiny applied by the controlling bodies to proposed rules means that it is unusual (but not unprecedented) for VRIB to recommend a course other than introduction of the new or amended rule / sub-rule.

COMPLAINTS ABOUT INTEGRITY ISSUES WITHIN CONTROLLING BODIES

VRIB has a very limited complaint function under section 95H(1)(f) of the Act. It is protective in nature and intended to ensure the integrity department of each controlling body is free from undue internal influence.

Who can make a complaint to VRIB?

Designated persons who hold the following specific roles at a controlling body can make a complaint to VRIB:

- a board member or director
- an integrity manager
- a chief or deputy chief steward.

What type of complaints can VRIB receive?

VRIB can act on complaints about integrity issues within a controlling body made by a designated person.

Under the Act, VRIB cannot accept or respond to complaints that are:

- made by any other person (including industry participants)
- made anonymously
- about any other matter that is not an integrity issue within a controlling body.

Complaints received under section 95H(1 (f) during 2023-24

The Board received one complaint from an individual eligible under s.95H(1)(f) during the reporting year. This was the first eligible complaint VRIB has received since commencing operations in 2019.

VRIB considers that this reflects the deterrent impact of its statutory independence and its ability to proactively respond to any attempt by a controlling body to influence its integrity department.

The complaint was progressed, investigated, and finalised in accordance with VRIB's complaint handling policy. This process demonstrated that the policy is fit for purpose and does not require material amendment or revision at this time.

Complaint handling policy

VRIB has a complaint handling policy that has been provided to all eligible persons. The policy includes information about the Board's role, how to make a complaint and how VRIB will respond to it. The policy was reviewed in January 2024 and then provided to all eligible controlling body staff.

Other complaints

If VRIB receives a complaint that falls outside its statutory power, it will refer the matter to the appropriate entity. Ordinarily, this will be the relevant controlling body or the RIC for Victorian matters, or the responsible interstate authority. VRIB received six complaints of this nature in the reporting period.

CONSIDERATION OF DISCIPLINARY ACTION PROPOSED BY A CONTROLLING BODY

Section 95H(1)(j) of the Act vests VRIB with an oversight role to consider and provide direction to a controlling body about disciplinary action it proposes to take against a senior member of an integrity department about internal integrity matters.

The function is protective in nature and is intended to ensure that adverse action is not taken against a senior integrity official 'whistle-blower' for raising concerns about integrity issues within a controlling body.

Controlling bodies bear sole responsibility for their employment relationships with staff, including the consequences of any disciplinary findings made and action taken. VRIB therefore considers that, ordinarily, it will not be appropriate for it to express an opinion about how a controlling body weighs competing considerations in favour of, or mitigating against, the different disciplinary options available to it. However, VRIB may provide guidance to assist the controlling body to determine what, if any, disciplinary sanction is open to it.

VRIB was not required to provide direction in relation to matters involving disciplinary action proposed by a controlling body in 2023-24.

RELATIONSHIPS

Controlling bodies

VRIB's endeavours to foster direct relationships with the controlling bodies and their integrity staff and works on a number of fronts to ensure that interactions remain active and beneficial, this includes:

- VRIB providing regular written updates to the controlling body chairs, chief executives and integrity department heads throughout the reporting period and seeking their feedback and input about the Board's activities and plans.
- VRIB deputy chairs liaising with the controlling bodies, providing counsel and guidance directly to integrity department heads and their senior staff when, and as, needed.
- VRIB sub-committees facilitating formal, cross-code touchpoints between VRIB and integrity staff throughout the year.
- scheduling 'cross-code integrity meeting' with controlling body chairs, CEOs, the RIC and government officials to discuss industry wide issues.

the VRIB chair, deputy chairs and executive officer maintaining regular contact with the VRI integrity heads and CEOs. In its interactions with the controlling bodies, VRIB is conscious of the need to balance the performance of its statutory functions to oversee and maintain relationships while not placing excessive burdens on those organisations.

INTEGRITY INITIATIVES

Racing Integrity Education Program

The Racing Integrity Education Program commenced in May 2023, with the controlling bodies entering into a 2-year service agreement with Victoria University (VU) to provide training to integrity staff at the graduate certificate and vocational levels.

The graduate certificate is targeted at stewards and integrity officials employed within the thoroughbred, harness and greyhound racing industries. It includes training on investigations and evidence gathering as well as integrity and ethics, data management and strategic planning.

The vocational education package is a short course package for professionals working in the racing industry and includes units on work health and safety, conflict management, facilitating responsible behaviour, effective collaboration, racing operations and animal welfare.

The Government, via the Victorian Racing Industry Fund (VRIF), funded the first year of training while the controlling bodies are funding the second. The program for 2024 commenced in May, with VU taking on feedback provided by the controlling bodies in training design and delivery for the second year.

Importantly, following completion of the program later this year RV, as the "Recipient" of the VRIF funding on behalf of the controlling bodies, is required to provide a final report to the Office of Racing assessing the success / value the program. VRIB will also engage with the controlling bodies and VU to assess the program and determine whether an offering will be developed for 2025 and beyond.

Should a VU offering not go ahead in 2025, VRIB will continue to work with the controlling bodies to assess whether alternative training opportunities for integrity staff could be pursued.

VRI Education Management Committee

The VRI Education Management Committee (VRIEMC) held its inaugural meeting on 28 November 2023 and is now in operation.

The committee is comprised of nominated representatives from each controlling body as well as a representative from the Office of the Racing Integrity Commissioner.

As detailed in VRIB's Education Policy the VRIEMC will function to provide oversight of the racing integrity education program currently being delivered by VU as well as working to provide guidance for the training of integrity officials and to encourage a collaborative 'whole of industry' approach to the development of integrity training material and programs.

INTEGRITY INITIATIVES CONTINUED

Strategic Priorities

During the reporting period VRIB updated and endorsed amendments to its Strategic Plan to include strategic priorities relating to:

- Animal Welfare
- Governance & Assurance
- People Matters

The amendments to the plan were progressed with the aim of VRIB adopting a more proactive stance in relation to contemporary and emergent issues of strategic importance, and to identify activities that could be progressed in relation to each priority that would benefit the controlling bodies and/or the VRI more generally.

VRIB established short-term working groups (comprised of members) to develop each priority through the consideration of existing contextual factors, the identification of key issues, and the formulation of proposals (activities) aimed at addressing those issues.

A work program has been developed to progress each of the activities emanating from the priorities and will involve VRIB engaging with the controlling bodies and other stakeholders throughout 2024-25.

Investigations and Prosecutions Policy

A piece of work emanating from VRIB's Strategic Plan is for the Board to develop an Investigations and Prosecution Policy that will set out best practice in relation to the conduct of investigations and prosecutions for use by the controlling bodies.

The Board has now progressed a procurement process and engaged specialist assistance in developing the policy.

It is anticipated that VRIB will be able to commence consultation with the controlling bodies on a working draft of the policy in early 2024-25.

The development of an Investigations and Prosecutions policy follows on from VRIB releasing Education and Fit & Proper Persons policies in 2022-23. Policy development aligns with the Board's legislative remit to provide integrity related policy advice as per s.95H(1)(d)(i) of the Act.

Cross-code Integrity meetings

Having commenced in the 2021-22 financial year VRIB convened two cross-code integrity meetings in 2023-24 (October 2023 & May 2024).

The meetings bring together controlling body Chairs and CEOs to discuss integrity issues in general, as well as the challenges and opportunities in relation to improving integrity oversight. The RIC and other senior government officials also attended. Moreover, the meetings have worked to provide a forum for the frank and constructive discussion of key issues facing the VRI.

VRIB believes that these bi-annual meetings strike the appropriate balance in relation to the Board performing its statutory functions to oversee and maintain relationships with the controlling bodies while not overburdening the codes with an excessive meeting schedule.



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GOVERNANCE

CORPORATE REPORTING

VRIB has a corporate governance and legislative compliance program to ensure it meets its legal and governance obligations, including the development and regular review of VRIB policies and processes for conflict of interest, fraud, confidentiality, document and records management, risk management, financial management and workplace standards

Financial reporting

VRIB is funded by the VRI on a cost recovery basis through the Department of Justice and Community Safety (the Department). Detailed reporting about its financial performance, workforce data and other disclosures under the *Financial Management Act 1994 (Vic)* are included in the Department's annual report.

Shared services

VRIB receives support from the Department for a range of corporate services, including information technology, human resources, and finance.

Public sector conduct

VRIB and its staff abide by the Victorian public sector codes of conduct.

Conflicts of interest

VRIB abides by the Victorian public sector model conflict of interest policy and maintains registers of private interests and gifts, benefits and hospitality. Board members and the executive officer complete an annual declaration of private interests.

Risk management

Risk management processes to meet the requirements of the Victorian Government Risk Management Framework 2016 and Risk Management Standard ISO 31000:2018 are in place, which includes compliance with the Victorian Protective Data Security Framework.

Consultancies

VRIB made two engagements in relation to the development of an Investigations and Prosecutions Policy during 2023-24.

VRIB also co-funded an engagement, for the provision of legal advice in relation to stewards' powers of entry, made by the RIC.

Freedom of information

The *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)* (the FOI Act) provides the public with a right to request access to information held by VRIB. No freedom of information (FOI) requests to access information under the FOI Act were received during the reporting period.

An FOI request must be made in writing, clearly describe the information or document sought, and be accompanied by the prescribed application fee made payable to the Department.

Public interest disclosures

The *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012 (Vic)* encourages and facilitates the disclosure of improper conduct and corruption in the Victorian public sector by providing protection to people who make disclosures in accordance with its provisions.

Enquiries about access to VRIB documents can be made to –

Freedom of Information Request Victorian Racing Integrity Board

Level 16, 121 Exhibition Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
GPO Box 4509 Melbourne Victoria 3001
enquiries@vrib.vic.gov.au

Any disclosure of this type about VRIB or its staff may be made to either –

Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission

Level 1, 459 Collins Street (North Tower)
Melbourne Victoria 3000
1300 735 135
www.ibac.vic.gov.au

Victorian Ombudsman

Level 2, 570 Collins Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
03 9613 6222
www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au
www.vic.gov.au/victorian-racing-integrity-board



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