

Submission re: Proposal by Fairfax to disestablish Regional Sports Reporters

Dear Fairfax,

We are writing on behalf of the Council of the New Zealand Historical Association to register our concern with the proposal to disestablish regional sports reporters. As historians, we rely extensively on newspaper reports to learn and understand what has happened in the past. If regional sports reporters are disestablished then much of the collective historical memory of sport in our regions will be lost, because it will not have been recorded. Regional sports reporters are far more than chroniclers of sporting results, they record and convey the flavour of sport in their region, interpret the contribution of key personalities and provide crucial insights into what sport means to everyday New Zealanders and the communities to which they belong.

In its statement on Corporate Responsibility, Fairfax states ‘We play an active role in supporting local communities’ (<http://www.fairfaxmedia.co.nz/Company/corporate-responsibility>). It is argued in this submission that maintaining regional sports reporters, and indeed regional reporters more generally is essential if Fairfax Media is going to fulfil this commitment. Sport has long played an essential role in forming and promoting community identity in New Zealand. The ‘Save the Turbos’ campaign in 2009, in which Manawatu successfully opposed their proposed exclusion from the then National Provincial Championship underscored the depth of community commitment to sport. It is through reading about local sporting heroes that many New Zealanders first become interested in sport. Coverage of school sports is particularly important because this provides positive male and female role models for young people. This sort of coverage simply cannot be provided remotely. Historically, experienced regional sports reporters have interpreted and recorded all levels of sport and in so doing provided an enduring record for both present and future generations. As such, they are a vital resource for members of the New Zealand Historical Association, which represents professional historians from Universities and the public and private sector. Accordingly, we strongly advocate for the retention of regional sports reporters.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Geoff Watson, NZHA Council Member for Manawatu and Dr Aroha Harris, President of the New Zealand Historical Association