

NATIONALS TIMING EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, attendance at the National Championships has been the best it has been for a long time, yet the 640 members in Canberra was only 17% of the total AMA membership and the 536 in Hobart only about 14%. While we know a great many members just like to compete in normal competition and are not interested in Championships, these percentages are particularly low.

Reasons suggested for this low attendance include:

- The most frequent reason is that younger members in particular want to spend time with their families at Easter.
- Religious reasons.
- Clash with the Stawell Gift (both competitors and spectators).
- Airfares and accommodation are too high at Easter.

AMA'S RESPONSE

On the basis of comment from members over the years, and the 2012 survey, the AMA Council (made up of representatives from all states) decided to trial a 2.5 day Championships away from Easter in Tasmania in 2014. It was hoped that this would achieve the following advantages and lead to an increase attendance:

- Members would be able to spend time with their families at Easter.
- It would avoid religious reasons for non-attendance.
- Members would be able to also compete or attend the Stawell Gift Carnival.
- Airfares and accommodation would be cheaper.
- One night less accommodation would be needed for most.
- It will be easier to secure Officials and Volunteers away from Easter.

Disadvantages include:

- Some members will have to take a day off work
- The 2 pentathlons were removed from the main program to cater for the 2.5 day program
- The tighter program meant some athletes had to be more selective in their choice of events

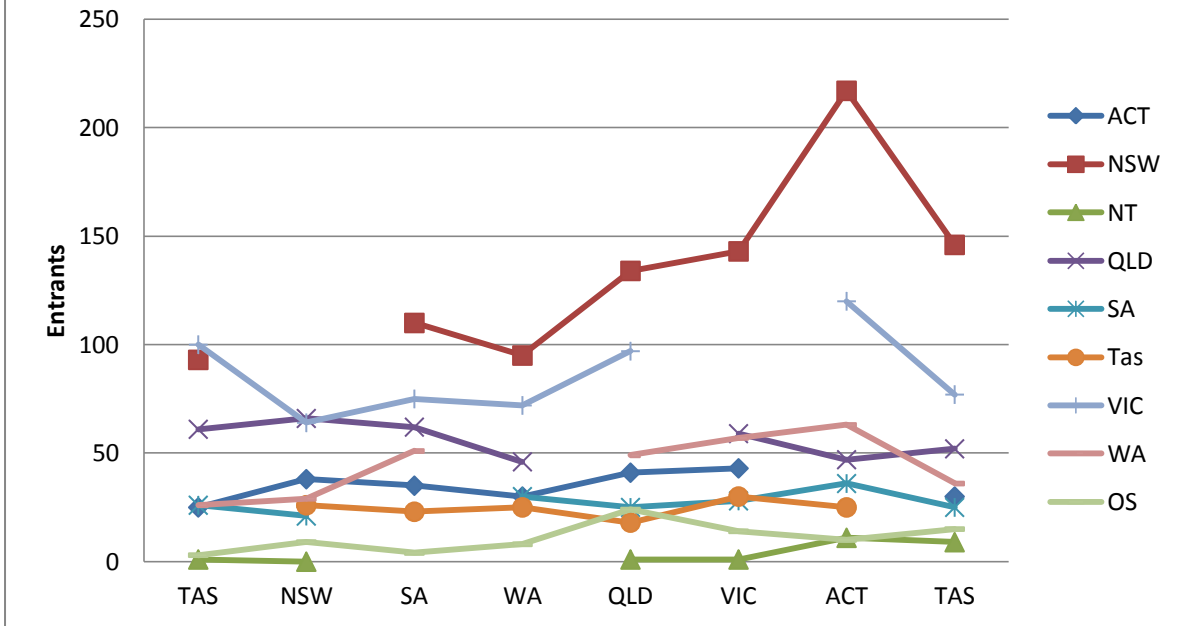
EVALUATION

There is no easy way to evaluate whether the Tasmanian Championships represented a positive or negative response to a non-Easter timing. Comparing against Canberra last year is the obvious comparison to make but Eastern States mainland venues have always achieved greater numbers, so any evaluation must look at trends. The other comparison is to the last Tasmanian Championships held in 2007.

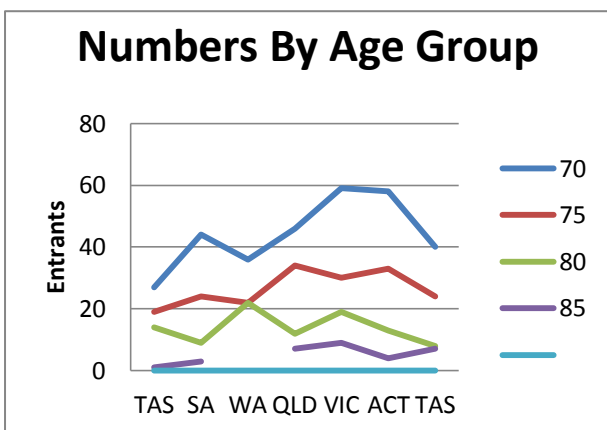
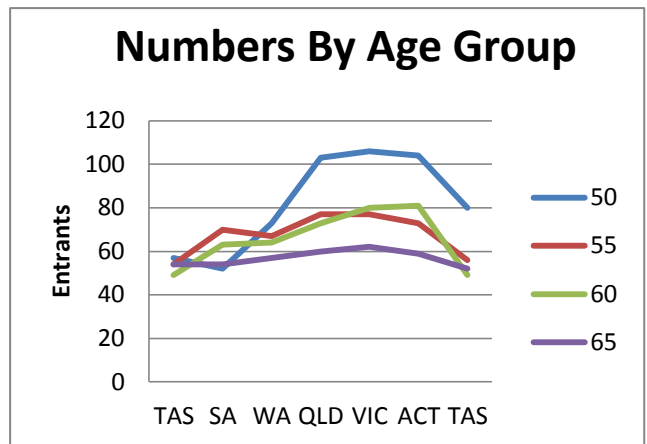
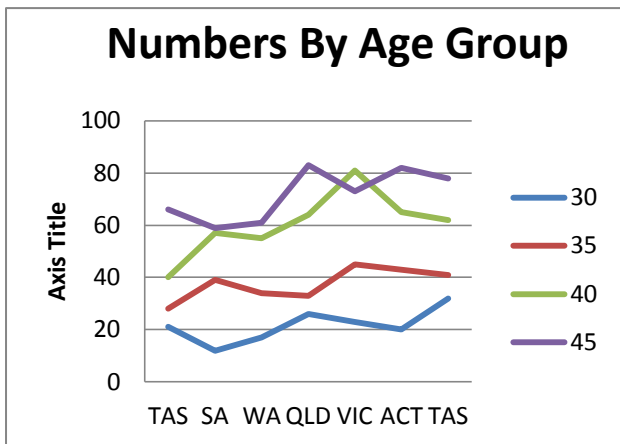
Comparison with previous championships

From the statistics over the last 7 years it is apparent that there has been a trend upwards in the numbers attending the Nationals. The chart below shows each state plotted against the host state on the bottom axis. The home state numbers have been omitted in each case because they naturally swamp the data. Ignoring initially the drop to Tasmania this year, the overall steady growth is dominated by NSW, but all other states except Queensland show some growth. Queensland is the stand out with a flat to declining trend. The only saving grace here is that Queensland bucked the normally expected downturn in Tasmania.

Numbers by State with home champs ommited

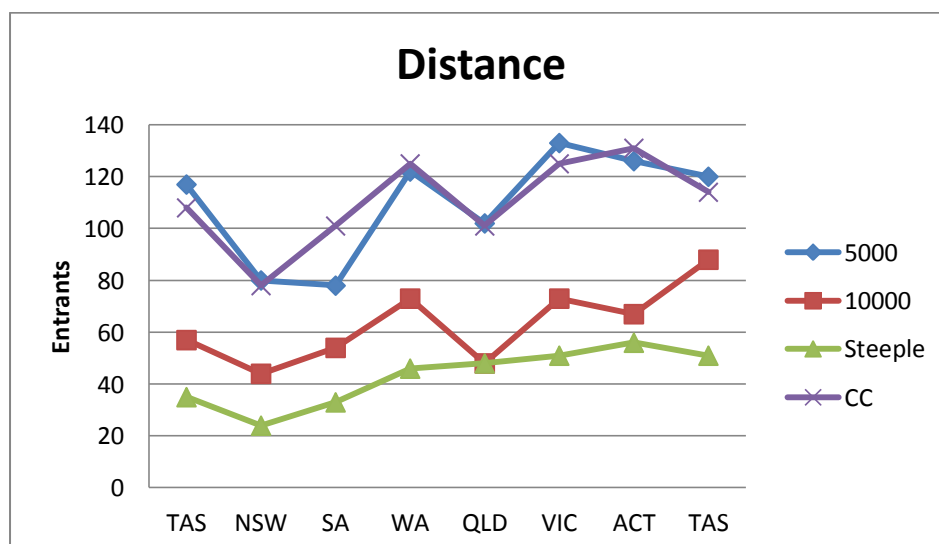
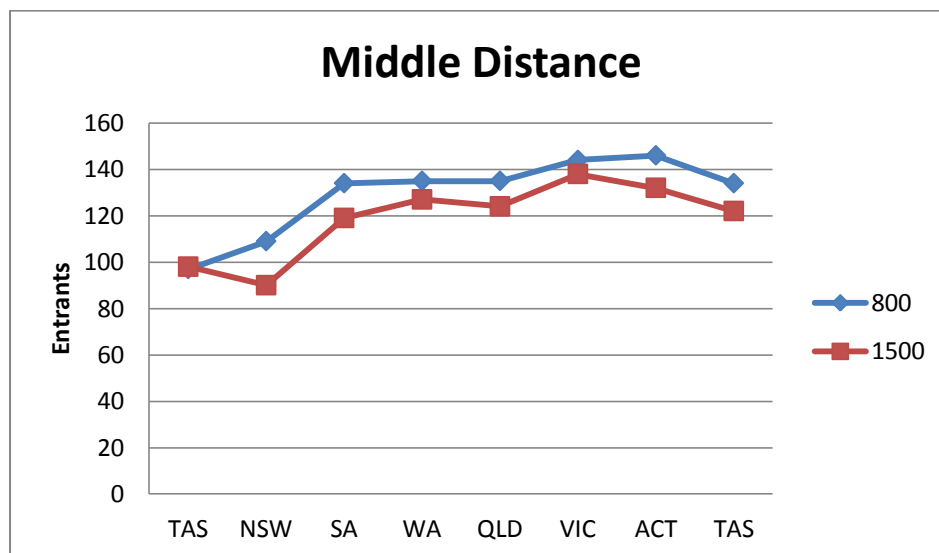
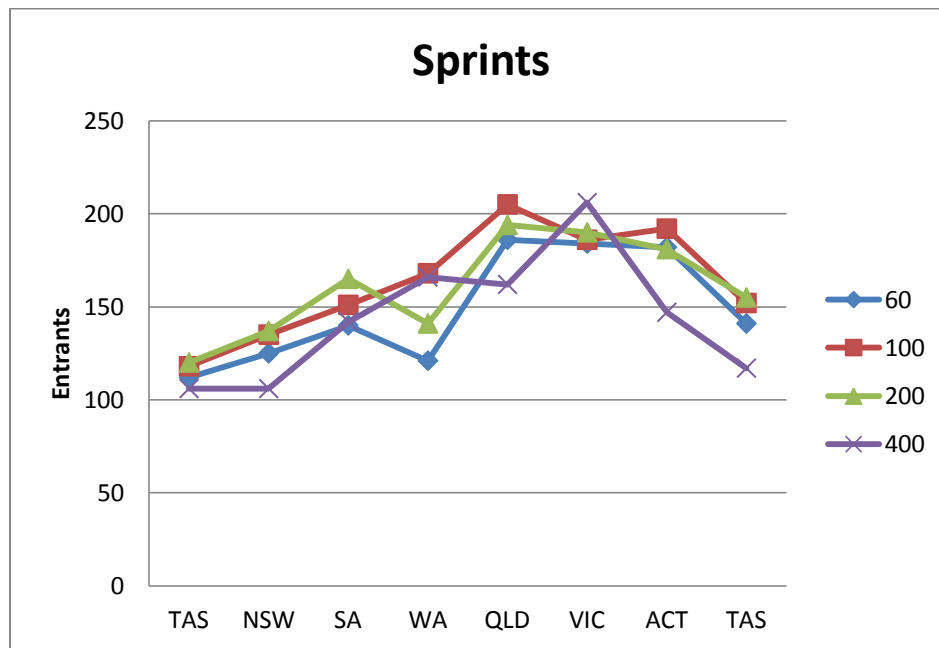


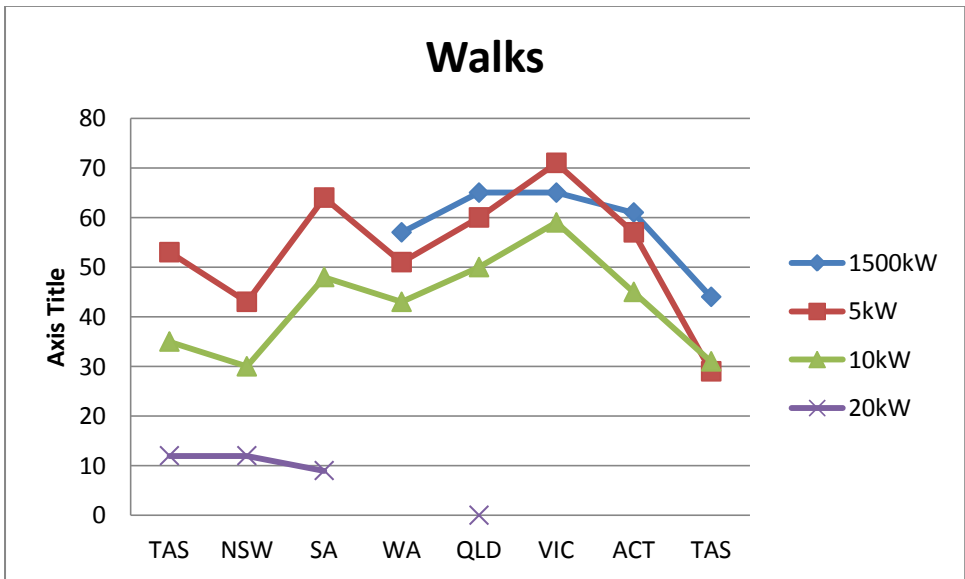
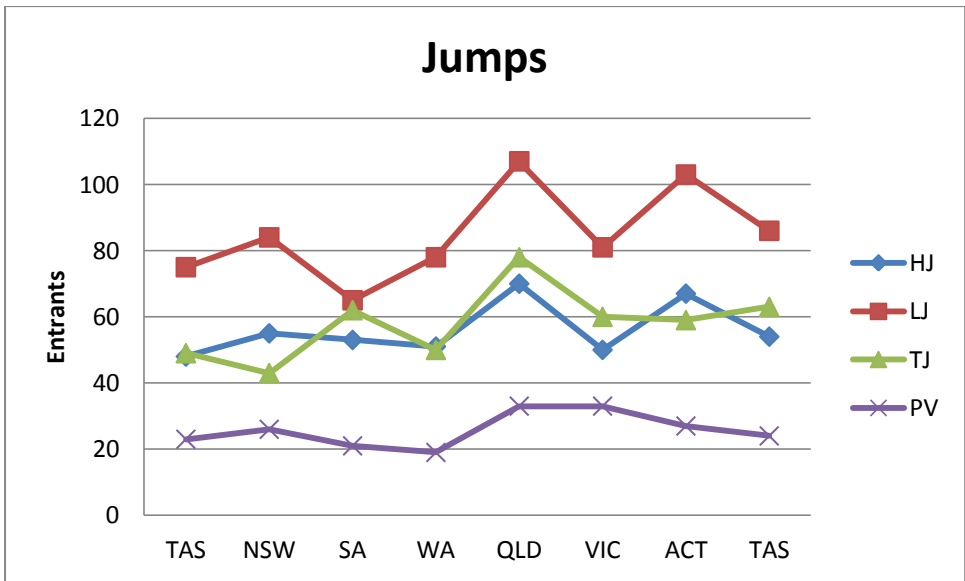
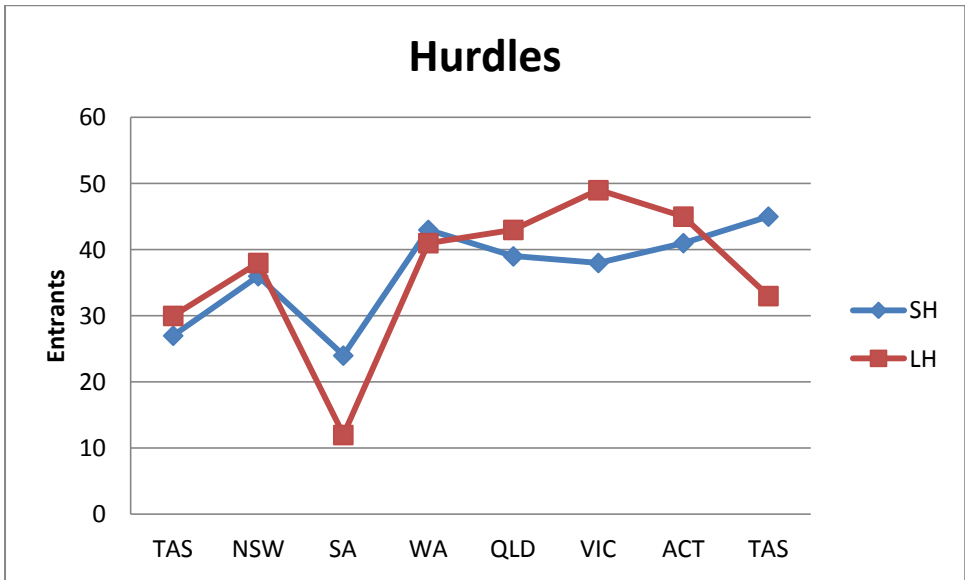
The following group of charts shows the trends in age group numbers. No data was available for the NSW Championships.



There has been a small but steady increase in all age groups except for the 80+ group, though numbers in these older age groups are too small to really make any judgement on this.

In looking at individual events the same overall slow growth is evident in most cases. However the sprint events seemed to have been declining since Queensland. Pole vault also shows something of a declining trend since Queensland. Of particular interest is the steady increase in the 10000m which many of us intuitively thought was declining.

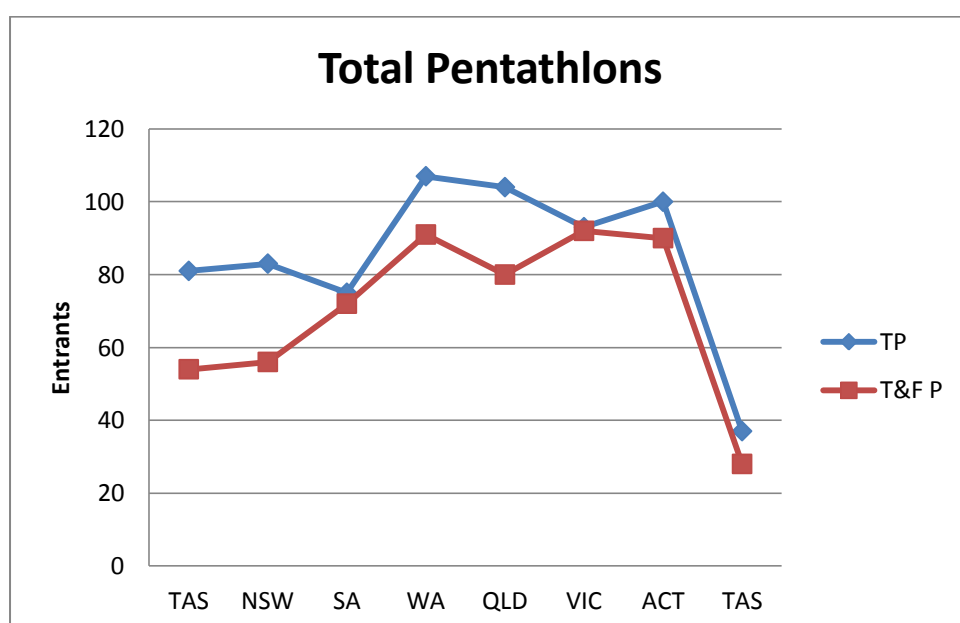
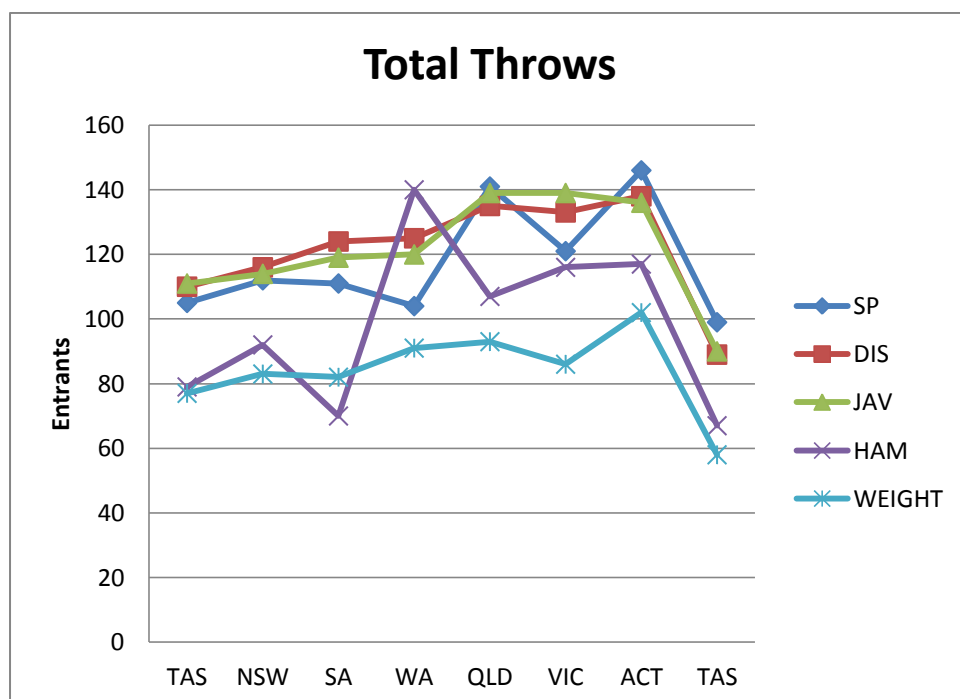




Victoria is always strong in the walks so if that influence is taken into account it would appear that the walks have also declined since Queensland.

Comparison of Tasmania 2007 and 2014

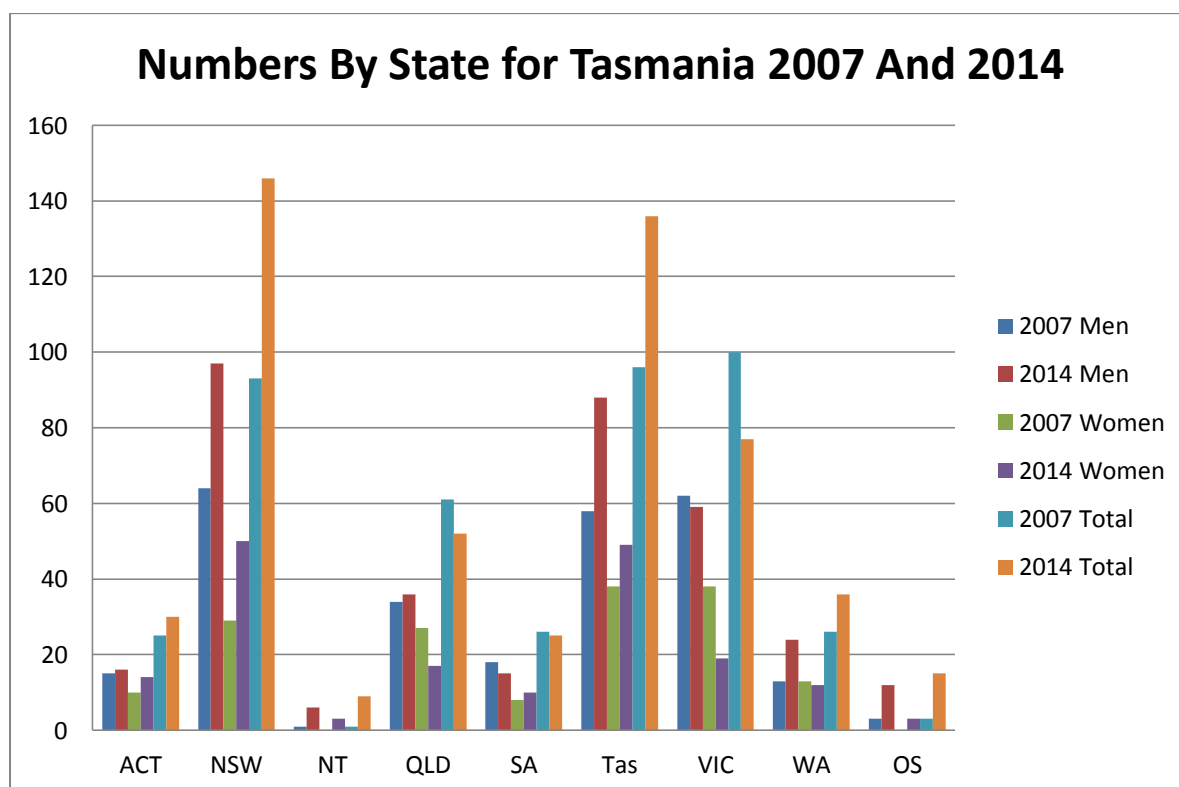
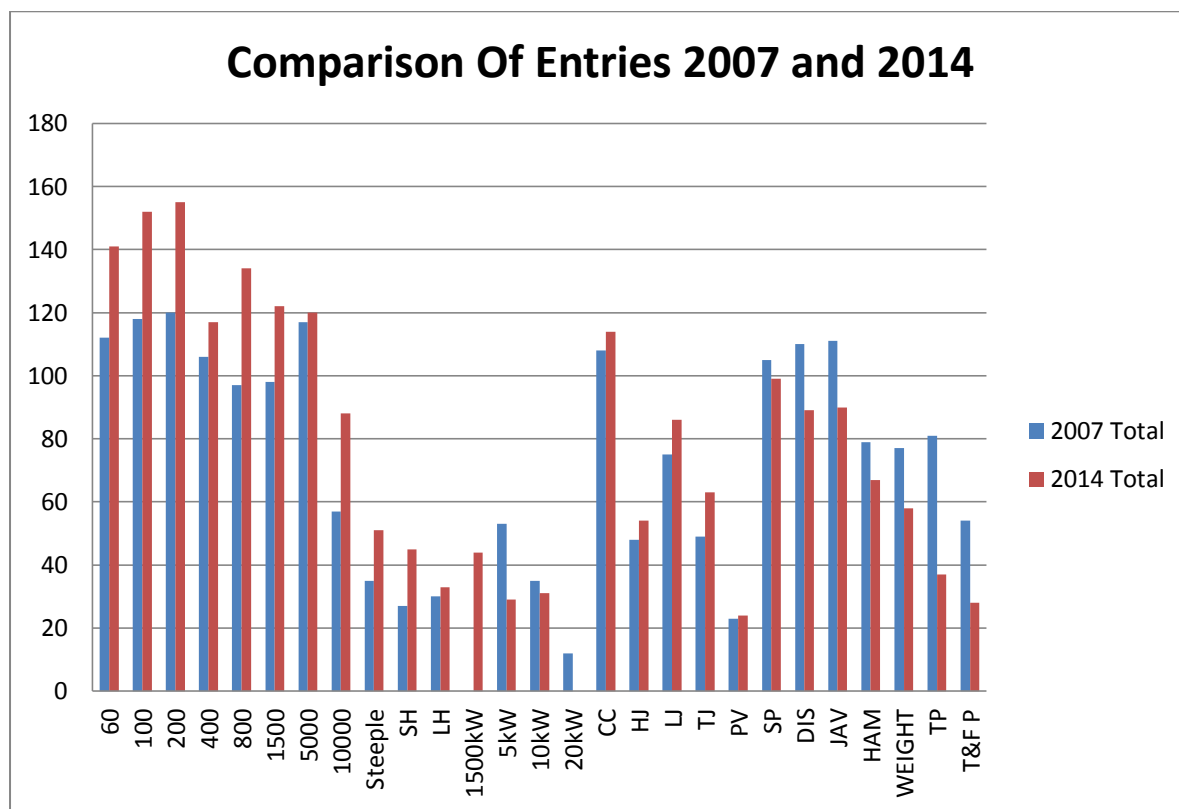
Before comparing these two championships, having regard for the trends from Tasmania through NSW and SA to WA shown above, we should expect to see approximately a natural 18% increase in numbers. The overall increase from Tasmania to Canberra was 47% but Queensland, Victoria and Canberra have traditionally been stronger than the other states. For Tasmania in 2014 we should expect at least an 18% increase in numbers. The other factor to consider for the Tasmanian numbers is the backlash against the fragmentation of the championship and the drop in numbers of throwers and pentathletes. Throwers were down between 20 and 30% and pentathletes were down between 50 and 60%. While some other athletes compete as throwers they are generally a reasonably distinct group so the numbers do reflect a real drop in attendance. Had throwers (and to a lesser extent pentathletes) been there in normal numbers then we should have expected perhaps at least another 30 entrants.



In 2007, Hobart attracted 431 entrants. In 2014 there were 533 - an increase of 23.7%. This is above what should have been expected in natural growth since 2007 and if the extra 30 throwers had

attended then growth would have been around 30%. This would seem to indicate a positive response to a non-Easter Championships.

The following two charts show the general growth in entrants between the 2 Championships, apart from the throws and pentathlons.



The public holiday on the Monday for some states did not appear to be a factor. Comparing the two championships for those states with a holiday on the Monday there were 23 more people than in 2007 and for those states without the holiday there were 74 more entrants.

One possible factor was the now lack of a direct flight to Hobart from Adelaide but SA numbers were only down by 1 so this was not of significance.

SURVEY RESULTS

The 2012 Survey

In 2012 AMA conducted a survey and while not a perfect survey it did provide some useful data with over 500 responses.

- 63.5% indicated they would attend a 2.5 day championship away from Easter (only 17.2 said they wouldn't).
- 53.5% indicated that they would prefer a non-Easter championship.
- 51.7% supported removing the throws pentathlon. 21.3% opposed this.
- 44.4% supported removing the T&F pentathlon. 27% opposed this.
- Other events considered for removal included – cross country, 10km road walk, 60m, 1500m walk, 10000m and the 4x400m relay. All of these were either neutral or in favour of being retained.

The 2014 Survey

Despite criticism of the previous survey not reaching sufficient people, the 2014 survey could be regarded as even more disappointing in that only 236 responses were received. This is particularly hard to accept in that over 500 surveys were distributed in athlete packs at the Hobart championships and it would have been very easy to hand them in at the time.

Steve Mcgugan from the NT indicated that he was responding for most of the NT in saying they did not mind when the Nationals were held.

Responses by State

ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	Total
10	52	2	14	88	18	31	20	235

Response to program type

4 day program similar to the past	4 day program – pentathlons on 1 st or last day	3 day program without pentathlons
64.5%	21.8%	13.7%

It would appear that the overwhelming support is for the 4 day championships.

Preference by State

	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	Total
Easter	62.5%	58.8%		62.5%	14.9%	22.2%	65.5%	72.7%	43.6%
Non-Easter	37.5%	41.2%		37.5%	85.1%	77.8%	34.5%	27.3%	56.4%

Only SA and Tasmania showed a clear preference for a non-Easter Championships, but the total showed a similar non-Easter preference to the 2012 survey.

Preference by Age Group

	M30-59	M60+	Total Men	W30-59	W60+	Total Women	Total 30-59	Total 60+
Easter	42.1%	42.7%	42.4%	36.7%	43.8%	40.2%	39.6%	43.1%
Non-Easter	57.9%	57.3%	57.6%	63.3%	56.2%	59.8%	60.4%	56.9%

While we might have expected the younger members to prefer non-Easter there was little difference between the younger and older groups. Only the younger women showed a stronger preference for non-Easter perhaps reflecting a desire to spend that time with Children at home.

Preference by Event Type

	Distance	Mid/Distance	Multi-Eventers	Sprinters	Throwers	Walkers
Easter	28.0%	62.8%	47.8%	32.3%	57.6%	18.8%
Non-Easter	72.0%	37.2%	52.2%	67.7%	42.4%	81.2%

Only Middle Distance/Distance and throwers preferred Easter with a strong preference for non-Easter amongst the distance runners and walkers.

Preference by those who did and did not attend Hobart

	Attended Hobart	Did Not Attend Hobart
Easter	42.6%	47.8%
Non-Easter	57.4%	52.2%

As expected more people who attended Hobart preferred a non-Easters Championship, but not much in front of a similar preference by those who did not attend.

CONCLUSION

Considering the very vocal outpouring over the trial change for this last Championships, our membership has shown a very apathetic attitude to the subject. The 500 or so responses to the 2012 survey was disappointing in relation to our 3000 plus membership but the 236 responses to the 2014 survey can only be described as pitiful. However in both surveys of those that were interested enough to respond, 56.4% were in favour of a non-Easter championships.

RECOMMENDATION

Apart from the apparent preference for a non-Easter Championship as a result of the 2 surveys, I am aware of 3 situations that would argue against an Easter Championships.

- A late Easter would make a Tasmanian championship potentially very unpleasant (weather wise!).
- The Northern Territory could not hold the championship at Easter – June/July is appropriate.
- South Australia has great difficulty in getting officials at Easter.

While the numbers attending Tasmania 2014 and the results of the two surveys indicate that a non-Easter championship would be supported, the recent survey does not have sufficient responses to clearly represent the total membership. Perhaps what it is saying is that the bulk of our membership really doesn't care when the Championships are held. My recommendation is that it should be left to the LOC to decide the timing of the Championships within a time window set down by Council.

George H White
AMA Competition Director