

Steadyhand

September 30, 2016

British Columbia Securities Commission
Alberta Securities Commission
Financial and Consumer Affairs Authority of Saskatchewan
The Manitoba Securities Commission
Ontario Securities Commission
Autorite des marches financiers
Financial and Consumer Services Commission (New Brunswick)
Nova Scotia Securities Commission

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RE: Canadian Securities Administrators Consultation Paper 33-404: Proposals to Enhance the Obligations of Advisers, Dealers, and Representatives Toward Their Clients

Steadyhand is pleased to have the opportunity to provide comments on the Canadian Securities Administrators' (CSA) Consultation Paper 33-404 – Proposals to Enhance the Obligations of Advisers, Dealers, and Representatives Toward Their Clients.

“I don't want to see the CSA take its foot off the gas, even if it means a proliferation of new regulations. With the pension challenges our country faces, improvements are needed now. This shouldn't be a smooth transition for the industry. It should be jolting, expensive and soul searching. The industry needs to be shaken up.”

This was my (Tom Bradley) concluding comment in an [Op-Ed piece](#) in the National Post in November, 2013.

That piece was one of many [blogs](#) and [newspaper articles](#) my partners and I have written to promote change. There is a huge disconnect in the wealth management industry - firm profits and advisers' compensation are terrific while client returns are poor. With investment firms pursuing asset growth at all costs, clients' interests are too often shunted aside.

Needless to say, we share the CSA's concerns about conflicts of interest, the expectations gap, information asymmetry and poor client outcomes. Something has to change.

In organizing this submission, we will first address some issues not specifically covered in the questions in 33-404 as well as make some general comments about the proposals. Then we'll answer a number of the questions, offering alternative solutions where appropriate.

An Integrated Approach

33-404 is an interesting document because it includes a huge game changer for the industry, best interest, and a series of specific rules. Because they're in the same document, we assume that the CSA views the best interest standard and rules as being integrated, as are the different rules categories (i.e. proficiency impacts suitability and Know-Your-Product).

We are in support of the best interest standard and therefore see opportunities to further integrate the two. As proposed, there are a number of the rules, particularly in the Know-Your-Product (KYP) and Suitability sections, that appear to have been written as if there will be no best interest standard in place.

33-404 demonstrates how important it is to take an integrated approach. For instance, if the CSA goes forward with best interest, and raises the bar on proficiency, we believe the KYP and Suitability sections could be streamlined significantly. As our answers to the questions will suggest, we see the rules (as proposed) in these sections as being unworkable.

One Size Fits All

At an MFDA Forum in September, we heard repeatedly from an OSC executive that 33-404 isn't a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. One of our biggest takeaways, however, is quite the opposite - all firms are being treated as if they have the same business models. For instance, there appears to be an assumption that all firms are doing in-depth financial planning. This is not the case, nor should it be.

At Steadyhand, we have clients of all shapes and sizes. Some rely on us for advice and specific recommendations, while others simply come to us to buy one of our funds. When appropriate, we provide investment advice to our clients, but it's not full-on financial planning. For clients who need a complete financial plan, we refer them to fee-for-service financial planners (independent, non-commission based).

Embedded in the one-size-fits-all approach is the assumption that the industry is fat and ridiculously profitable. In general, that is the case (the bank-owned firms report return on equity of over 40% in their wealth management divisions), but there are firms that are trying to change

the landscape and keep costs down. These firms may not have the revenue stream to deal with many of these reforms.

As OSC Chairperson, Maureen Jensen, acknowledged this week, the industry is going through tremendous change and many alternatives to the full-service advisory model are emerging. This change will be slower to take hold if all firms are required to comply with rules designed for the traditional forms of distribution. We encourage the CSA to assess the 33-404 proposals in light of Ms. Jensen's comments, "*With LaunchPad, we will work to tailor regulation and oversight to their unique business models, as long as investor protections are in place.*"

An Alternative That Works

Steadyhand Investment Funds is one alternative to the high-cost, high-margin brokerage model. We are an MFDA-registered, direct-to-client, low-fee investment manager that uses mutual funds to build portfolios for our clients. Our six funds cover a wide range of asset classes and strategies. There are no embedded commissions or trailer fees, and our minimum account size is \$10,000.

We've essentially been CRM2 compliant for 9½ years (I say essentially because we've been reporting returns and fees, both in dollar and percentage terms, since we started in 2007). We've tracked our clients time-weighted rates of returns (TWRR) and money-weighted rates of returns (MWRR) and our analysis shows that the two numbers are virtually identical for the firm overall. In other words, there's been no slippage between how our funds have done and how our clients have done.

Needless to say, we believe there are a number of alternative models that can deliver the results the CSA is looking for.

Investing is perverse

As we've worked through the proposals, there's also an underlying assumption that investing is rational and predictable. That is not the case. Markets go up and down when least expected. What looks like a ridiculous strategy today may prove to be brilliant a few years from now. As noted above, many of the regulations in the KYP and Suitability sections have an expectation of precision that is just not realistic.

The late Bob Hager, co-founder of Phillips, Hager & North Investment Management, used to say, "*The best trades I made were the ones when my hand was shaking as I handed the ticket to our trader.*" In other words, he was going against the grain and doing something that could be viewed at the time, and in hindsight if it didn't work out, as being irresponsible.

To be successful, investors need to have a contrarian streak in them. They must be willing to rebalance away from stocks when markets are euphoric and buy when they're in the dumper. Unfortunately, the wealth management industry does a poor job of promoting this kind of investor behavior. Indeed, its sales and marketing practices are pro-cyclical in nature, such that caution is promoted at the bottom of the market and aggression favoured at the top.

We believe 33-404 as proposed will promote even more pro-cyclical behavior. Compliance departments will be reluctant to let advisors diversify their clients' portfolios by adding an underperforming, out-of-favour strategy or fund, as it will be hard to justify based on past performance.

We believe prescriptive, and precise, rules can be implemented in areas where the facts are well known and quantifiable. A client's age, occupation, debt level and time frame fit this description. But being prescriptive around investment strategies and products is another matter. There should be no expectation of precision when it comes to expected rate of return, the best asset class or product category, the best product in a category, or a strategy's impact on taxes.

Burden on the Client

We started this response by saying that 33-404, "... *shouldn't be a smooth transition for the industry. It should be jolting, expensive and soul searching.*" If it has to be more burdensome for investment firms, so be it. We need change.

But we would ask that the CSA also consider 33-404's impact on the client. Canadian investors have limited bandwidth for retirement planning and investing. The reality is, they spend more time thinking about their cell phone plans than their investment plans. This is discouraging and needs to change, but the point is, if dealers are forced to use more of their limited time with clients ticking off compliance boxes, there will be less time and energy available for long-term investing. If a firm has four touches a year with a client (meetings, phone calls, emails), how much of that time should be taken up ticking boxes?

Canadians have been grossly underinvested over this last cycle. If we make it harder for them to invest – signing off annually on KYC information; needing to provide tax information; and being inundated with documents – they may continue to go to the bank and buy GICs, or perhaps to a discount broker or insurance agent who doesn't put the same demands on them.

Clearly, we want the wealth management industry to clean up its act, and in the process see the bad players shaken out, but we can't lose sight of the ultimate goal – better client returns on an increased pool of long-term assets (Note: We mean clients' money-weighted returns – security

and product returns combined with investor behavior). As the new rules are refined, we would encourage the CSA to think about what the client is required to do and whether the rules promote better investment results.

Coordination

33-404 represents a significant change to how some firms will do business. In rolling out these changes, we strongly encourage the provincial securities commissions to proceed in a coordinated manner by working closely and cooperatively with each other, and with the SROs.

As a small firm, we already feel the brunt of having our operating procedures viewed through two regulatory lenses. We are regulated and audited by the BCSC and MFDA. For the most part, their requirements don't contradict or duplicate each other, so while having to endure two audits every cycle is no fun, the scrutiny and feedback has made us a better firm. But as proposed, 33-404 will change that. There are open differences between the provinces, specifically on best interest, and many of the regulations laid out run counter to, or overlap with, many of the SRO's existing rules.

Tom Bradley, President
Steadyhand Investment Funds Inc.

Conflicts of Interest

1). Is this general approach to regulating how registrants should respond to conflicts optimal? If not, what alternative approach would you recommend?

We believe that putting conflicts of interest front and center is very important.

2). Is the requirement to respond to conflicts “in a manner that prioritizes the interest of the client ahead of the interests of the firm and/or representative” clear enough to provide a meaningful code of conduct? If not, how could the requirement be clarified?

Yes.

3). Will this requirement present any particular challenges for specific registration categories or business models?

This will not provide any challenges for our firm, Steadyhand Investment Funds.

If a firm has difficulty “putting the client’s interest ahead of the firm”, we firmly believe they should consider changing their model. An approach that can’t put the clients’ interests first is flawed and unsustainable.

Know Your Client

It’s not covered in the questions, but we would like to address the requirement to update the KYC information annually and having it signed by the client.

- In our view, this is too often. Life circumstances don’t change that often.
- For some business models that don’t meet their clients regularly in person, it will be burdensome on the firm and the clients. For example, Steadyhand has two offices and almost 2,000 clients across five provinces. Some clients never meet us in person.
- We don’t believe updating paper documents annually is in keeping with how businesses operate today. If this requirement is to go forward, there needs to be some flexibility around how it’s implemented.
- If this is required, it’s imperative that every firm be included. Otherwise, we’ll see arbitrage across distribution models, as referred to in our general comments.

Alternative:

Provide KYC information on the account statements. The statement is the document that is most read by clients.

Below is an example of how we deal with KYC. Each quarter, clients see their information for each account on their statement.

Investment objective:	Growth & Income
Risk tolerance for holdings:	0% low, 40% med, 60% med-high
Time horizon:	Over 10 Years

We are required to use your investor profile information to assess the suitability of all transactions in your account. Please let us know if any of this information changes.

4). Do all registrants currently have the proficiency to understand their client's basic tax position?

We don't know where other registrants stand. At Steadyhand, we know enough about tax and the clients we're advising (which is only a portion of our client base) to know when their tax situation is not simple or 'basic'. In such cases, we recommend they see a tax professional.

Would requiring collection of this information raise any issues or challenges for registrants or clients?

Registrants – Yes.

- There is an expectation here that every dealer that provides investment advice is a full-service financial planner. That's not the case.
- Being required to collect information that doesn't apply to a distribution model is burdensome and puts the model at a disadvantage – i.e. firms like Steadyhand that keep costs down by limiting the scope of their advice are forced to do the same things as more expensive, full-service providers.

Clients – Yes.

- Clients may not want to divulge this tax information.

- Specifically, clients who are investing for the purpose of accessing a specific product or fund may be discouraged from going forward if they're required to divulge tax information (and potentially have to go home and dig it up).
- Most importantly, this requirement sets an expectation that dealers/advisors are knowledgeable about tax and are going to do something with this information.

5). *Should the CSA also codify the specific form of the document, or new account application form, that is used to collect the prescribed KYC content?*

Definitely not.

- Firms can come up with much more understandable and usable forms and interfaces. At Steadyhand, we have put considerable resources behind making things more understandable and easy to use.
- Increasingly, firms are using on-line interfaces to signup clients.

54). *To what extent should the KYC obligation require registrants to collect tax information about the client? For example, what role should basic tax strategies have in respect of the suitability analysis conducted by registrants in respect of their clients?*

In our view, putting tax questions into the KYC process is a minefield.

- Tax is complicated. There are hundreds of variables to consider, all of which interact in various ways. Simplifying it down to checking a few boxes is not appropriate or useful.
- This requirement assumes a level of financial advice that's not always applicable.

Alternative:

Use a warning label on forms and documents: *“For an understanding of how these investment decisions will impact your tax situation, you should see a tax professional.”*

Know Your Product – Firm

This is a part of 33-404 that could be significantly reduced if the best interest standard was implemented. We believe that would be a good thing because as we noted in the introduction, the KYP proposals dive into investing and investment management, territory that is unsuitable for prescriptive rules. Investments are like no other consumer good. Indeed, we remind our clients all the time that investing is whacko.

The only way to assess a product quantitatively is to look at past returns and volatility. At our firm, we look at long-term returns as a predictive factor, but we also put great emphasis on a series of other factors. Our framework for analyzing fund managers is called the 7 P's, which includes *People*, *Parent* (organization and structure), *Philosophy*, *Process*, *Price*, *Performance* (long-term) and *Passion*. The non-performance factors are all important, but difficult to quantify.

There are many ways to manage money and there's more on the way. We don't have an axe to grind here (we only use our six funds to build portfolios), but do believe the CSA will be challenged to craft a set of rules that are inclusive of a diverse set of strategies.

We should also note that we struggle to see how the CSA would audit many of the proposed KYP rules. As successful investors know, hindsight bias is a dangerous thing – i.e. after the fact, believing something was more predictable than it was.

To be clear, we're not arguing against better product knowledge. Rather, our strong view relates to the process. We see the benefits of detailed and prescriptive KYP as being tenuous and hard to measure, while the unintended consequences are numerous and have the potential to shape investor behavior in a negative way.

8). The intended outcome of the requirement for mixed/non-proprietary firms to engage in a market investigation and product comparison is to ensure the range of products offered by firms that present themselves as offering more than proprietary products is representative of a broad range of products suitable for their client base. Do you agree or disagree with this intended outcome?

Agree.

- Advisors/firms should (1) know what they're selling and (2) do the work to know that it's an appropriate product/security for the client.

9). Do you think that requiring mixed/nonproprietary firms to select the products they offer in the manner described will contribute to this outcome? If not, why not?

No, we do not believe this approach will improve client outcomes.

- Please see the general comments above regarding the pro-cyclical tendencies of the wealth management industry.
- It may increase the general product knowledge of firms and advisors, but it has the potential to shape advisor behavior, and ultimately client behavior, in ways that are not conducive to successful investing. Specifically, it will push them towards consensus

strategies, including performance chasing, which are generally detrimental to long-term returns.

10). Are there other policy approaches that might better achieve this outcome?

Alternative:

Level the playing field for all products by focusing on compensation.

- Compensation drives behavior. Specific KYP rules should not be layered on until the underlying compensation model is unbiased and devoid of conflicts.
- Eliminating commissions and special incentives doesn't guarantee appropriate product knowledge, but it takes the incentive away to do something for compensation purposes only – i.e. selling a new issue of a closed end fund or responding to a sales campaign for a complex structured product, in-house fund or IPO.

Increase proficiency levels for professionals advising clients.

- As noted in our general comments at the beginning of this submission, the rules in 33-404 are integrated. The CSA will get better outcomes in the KYP area if investment professionals are better trained.

11). Will this requirement raise challenges for firms in general or for specific registration categories or business models? If so, please describe the challenges.

Yes - It would make it more challenging to effectively manage client portfolios.

- As noted above, being prescriptive on KYP will drive behaviors towards pro-cyclical behavior.
- Specifically, it will push advisors and ultimately clients towards consensus strategies, including performance chasing, which are generally detrimental to long-term returns.
- It will be more difficult for an advisor to pursue a contrarian strategy. For example, a fastidious compliance officer could make it difficult for an advisor to recommend a beaten up stock or fund, or increase exposure to a commodity near the bottom.
- As the old adage says, “*One person's garbage is another person's treasure.*”

12). Will this requirement cause any unintended consequences? For example, could this requirement result in firms offering fewer products? Could it result in firms offering more products?

There could be many negative, unintended consequences.

- Our primary concern is that the KYP rules have a pro-cyclical bias. They will encourage advisors to do what's 'acceptable' and/or popular at the time. Generally, following the herd does not lead to good investment results.

14). Should proprietary firms be required to engage in a market investigation and product comparison process or to offer non-proprietary products?

No and no.

- It defeats the purpose – proprietary firms are investment management firms (for the most part) that bring a distinct philosophy to the table. They're offering their clients a chance to participate in a specific approach to investing.
- If a proprietary firm can't meet all of the client's needs, it has to say so and define how their products fit into a diversified portfolio.

59). Would additional guidance with respect to conducting a "fair and unbiased market investigation" be helpful or appreciated? If so, please provide any substantive suggestions you have in this regard.

See the above answers. This is not an area where the CSA has any expertise, or should be expected to.

60). Would labels other than "proprietary product list" and "mixed/non-proprietary product list" be more effective? If so, please provide suggestions.

Proprietary is industry jargon, so alternative labels would be beneficial.

Alternative:

Where possible, make sure the company name is in the name of a proprietary product. For instance, call the product the Bank of Montreal Dividend Fund or Sun Life Bond Fund.

61). *Is the expectation that firms complete a market investigation, product comparison or product list optimization in a manner that is “most likely to meet the investment needs and objectives of its clients based on its client profiles” reasonable? If not, please explain your concern.*

We have difficulty seeing how being prescriptive on KYP will deliver the results the CSA is looking for without negatively impacting client returns., Perhaps it's the investor in us, but we see two likely outcomes from proceeding this way.

After 10 years it will prove out that:

1. Any and all strategies were justifiable to compliance departments and regulators such that there were no reprimands or fines levied.
2. Dealers behaved in such a way as to avoid being questioned on product approvals – i.e. limiting themselves to mainstream products from mainstream firms and avoiding anything that had a little hair on it.

Neither outcome, or a combination of the two, is a good result.

As successful investors know, hindsight bias is a dangerous thing – i.e. after the fact believing something was more predictable than it was at the time.

Suitability

Again, we have some comments in this section that don't appear to be captured by the questions.

33-404 suggests that, “*Registrants must perform a suitability analysis of the portfolio of securities in the client's account at the firm [when there is an] occurrence of a significant market event affecting capital markets to which the client is exposed ...*” We agree that a re-assessment may be appropriate at such times, but in our view, it shouldn't be automatic. All the preparation we go through with our clients, including the KYC, KPY and suitability process, is done so they can get through market extremes without changing their long-term plan and guidelines.

We are firm believers that market disruptions are the worst time to make strategic changes (long term). Indeed, at Steadyhand our advice and extensive communications are aimed at preparing clients for such situations and we've had great success in doing so, as evidenced by our clients' money-weighted rates of return.

Our responses below reflect our belief that suitability assessments need to be done at the portfolio level, not with each individual security.

16). *Do you agree with the requirement to consider other basic financial strategies? (i.e. paying down debt)*

Yes and No.

Yes - When determining the client's long-term strategy and setting up risk parameters, other strategies should be part of the discussion and decision. They belong at this stage of the process.

No - Once a plan in place and the KYC information is completed, it's time to move on and talk investments. That's our primary role and area of expertise. These elements should not come into play on individual transactions, whether it be a stock, bond, ETF or mutual fund. Indeed, one of the best tools to help a client be disciplined is a PAC – Pre-authorized Contribution. Each transaction is executed automatically in the context of an overall plan. It's a beautiful thing.

17). *Will there be challenges in complying with the requirement to ensure that a purchase, sale, hold or exchange of a product is the “most likely” to achieve the client’s investment needs and objectives?*

Yes.

- The CSA is being unrealistic about the world in which we operate. Markets are totally unpredictable and in no way allow for precision. They're also perverse – what looks like a ridiculous decision can turn out to be brilliant.

18). *Should there be more specific requirements around what makes an investment “suitable”?*

Definitely not, for a number of reasons.

- I've been working on this for 33 years and have consulted with many eminent investors, but I haven't discovered any definitive ways to categorize a security. Let alone designate it as suitable. As we've said, suitability at the individual security or fund level is all in the eye of the beholder.
- And it's all about price. Howard Marks of Oaktree Capital expressed it best when he said, *“No asset can be considered a good idea (or a bad idea) without reference to its price.”*
- In our view, any analysis of suitability belongs at the portfolio level. A volatile gold stock may be a perfectly suitable investment for an elderly lady if it's part of a broadly diversified portfolio.

20). *Will the requirement to perform a suitability analysis at least once every 12 months raise challenges for specific registrant categories or business models? For example, a client may only have a transactional relationship with a firm.*

Yes - It will grind the industry to a halt. And importantly, it takes precious time away from more important service and advise discussions.

21) *Should clients receive a copy of the representative's analysis regarding the client's target rate of return and his or her investment needs and objectives?*

No. See comments above.

22). *Will the requirement to perform a suitability review for a recommendation not to purchase, sell, hold or exchange a security be problematic for registrants?*

Yes. See comments above.

62). *What, if any, unintended consequences could result from setting an expectation in the context of the suitability obligation that registrants must identify products both that are suitable and that are the most likely to achieve the investment needs and objectives of the client? If unintended consequences exist, do the benefits of this proposal outweigh such consequences?*

Any new rules have to reflect the business we're in – investing money. We believe the proposals laid out in this section are unrealistic and imply a degree of precision that is not attainable in the investment world. Markets are totally perverse and unpredictable. Indeed, to make this point with our clients, we use the word “whacko” to describe Mr. Market. Good news sends the market tumbling. Bad news gets it going. Stocks go up on an interest rate cut one day, and go down on the same information the next day. What looks like a ridiculous decision may be the right one, and may turn out to be brilliant.

This is not an exact science. The only way to do quantitative analysis is by using past performance. Therefore, being too prescriptive on product suitability will likely result in performance chasing. In other words, no compliance department is going to let an advisor use a fund or ETF unless it has a good record. An out-of-favour value fund or resource fund will be tough to justify.

Relationship Disclosure

We're not sure where this is captured in the questions, but our biggest concern in this category relates to firms that present themselves as being independent and open-architecture (i.e. give their clients access to most 3rd party products), and yet they offer proprietary products. There are firms in this category that openly talk to shareholders about increasing profit margins by migrating clients from 3rd party to proprietary products. The initiatives and incentives behind this migration have a high potential of creating conflicts of interest.

As a 'proprietary only' shop (as this document categorizes Steadyhand), we have an axe to grind here, but we don't see our kind of firm posing a significant problem in this regard. We say that because there is no pretense of independence or open architecture – we are an investment manager that implements our investment philosophy using our own funds.

23). Do you agree with the disclosure for firms registered in restricted categories of registration? Why or why not?

We don't know what the answer is here, but we would encourage the CSA to not label different models such that some sound superior to others. There is an implication in 33-404 that open architecture is the best, or maybe even necessary.

We don't believe that is necessarily the case. Indeed, it could be argued that firms with narrow product lines are better – they know their products better; have a defined philosophy and discipline; allow for less performance chasing; and as a result, get better client outcomes.

To put a finer point on it, let me tell you a story about our firm. In designing our fund line-up in 2006, I believed that we had to have a minimum of 10 funds, covering a wide range of asset classes. My co-founder, Neil Jensen, who comes from the technology field, pushed back for the sake of simplicity. We ended up with 5 funds that cover a wide range of asset classes. In the subsequent 9 years, we've had no performance chasing to speak of and our MWRR are first quartile.

If the CSA decides to categorize firms on this basis, we would hope it won't position one model as being superior to another.

24). Do you agree with the proposed disclosure required for firms that offer only proprietary products? Why or why not?

There is a tone in the proposals that suggests these firms are inferior. They aren't doing all they can do for the client. As noted in our general comments in this section, however, we take exception to this positioning.

26). Should there be similar disclosure for investment dealers or portfolio managers?

Yes. Lines are blurring. There are discretionary portfolio managers at IIROC firms who are competing against counselling firms

Proficiency

28) To what extent should the CSA explicitly heighten the proficiency requirements set out under Canadian securities legislation?

This is not an area where we have any expertise, but we do believe the CSA could streamline many of the rules in 33-404 if required that investment professionals had better training.

30). Will more strictly regulating titles raise any issues or challenges for registrants or clients?

We are in favour of the CSA regulating titles more closely.

As we referenced in our response to question 23, however, we would only ask that the CSA don't position proprietary firms as being inferior to open architecture firms. Calling an advisor at a proprietary firm a 'mutual fund salesperson' and an advisor at a mixed firm an 'investment advisor' in our view is grossly unfair.

Best Interest Standard

We support some form of best interest standard. We run a non-discretionary, MFDA-registered business that is not required to meet this standard, but we would welcome it. We don't see how best interest would change how we operate our business.

We support it because it's the right thing to do.

We support it because clients expect it.

We find it difficult to see how it will have any operational impact on firms/business models that are already putting the clients first, whether they be discretionary or not.

We do believe, however, that the CSA has to get its act together on this and work in harmony. Multi-province firms like ours cannot be expected to operate under multiple regimes in this regard. And while we don't pretend to understand all the nuances, this is a perfect time to sort out and coordinate the rules firms and advisors are being held to either the best interest standard or fiduciary responsibility. As we've said earlier in this submission, we support the CSA in taking this big step, but it has to be done with clarity and consistency.

36). Please indicate whether a regulatory best interest standard would be required or beneficial, over and above the proposed targeted reforms, to address the identified regulatory concerns.

We believe that if a best interest standard is implemented, there are a number of rules under 33-404 that are no longer necessary. We have made that point throughout this submission.