

The Secretary

6 November 2015

Public Accounts Committee

Parliament House

Darwin, Northern Territory, 0801

Att. Mr Russell Keith

Reference – Inquiry into Funding of Rugby League Facilities in Darwin

Submission – Ian and Kathryn McNeill

The attached submission is made to the Committee in respect of the above Inquiry.

We make the submission to the Committee as concerned Territorians who are not residents directly affected by the Richardson Park proposal and who are not affiliated with any political party.

The main purpose of the submission is to record our concern at the process to date, in particular the lack of consultation and transparent consistent communication from Government in respect of the decision not to proceed with the proposed development of a showcase Rugby League facility at Warren Park in the Marrara Sports Complex.

We would be pleased to give evidence to the Committee in support of the submission and any related matters.

Yours sincerely,

Ian and Kathryn McNeill

PAC Inquiry into the Funding of Rugby League Facilities in Darwin – Submission from Ian and Kathryn McNeill

The purpose of the submission is to record our concern at the decision-making and administrative process to date – the lack of consultation with a range of stakeholders and the disjointed and sometimes confused communications from Government.

While we are concerned that the decision to “upgrade” Richardson Park appears short-sighted and not value-for-money in the long term, our overarching concern is that the Northern Territory Rugby League (NTRL) would be best served by the development of modern, suitable ‘showcase’ facilities at Warren Park in the Marrara Sports Complex together with the provision of administrative and financial support to maintain the facility and for future development of the Code, as contained in the NTRL Proposal, dated May 2012. This has been an established long-term goal of successive Territory Governments.

We also trust that the Committee, consistent with the Terms of Reference, will seek to provide transparency and clarity in the financial implications of the decision, including some of the following issues and statements:

- The amount of \$20 m for the Richardson Park “upgrade” is clearly a significant underestimate and does not include – new roadworks, re-alignment of existing roadworks, enhanced pedestrian access, traffic controls, e.g. lights on Dick Ward Drive/Douglas Street, sound mitigation barriers (Hon. D. Tollner, 25 October) public transport access, flood mitigation or a car park to cater for a 10,000 seat stadium.
- At the public meeting on 25 October Minister Tollner stated that Marrara was not an option as there was “no room” and that in any case the same (Richardson Park) scale development there would cost \$30m-\$40M.
- There should be published an independently audited costed model for the ongoing cost of running and maintenance costs of the completed

project. These costs were critical in the surrender of the Richardson Park lease by the NTRL (2012 Proposal).

- In the course of ruling out the Marrara option (104.9 FM, 26 October and 2 November) Chief Minister Giles indicated that a new stadium was estimated to cost \$7000 per seat and with associated infrastructure works would cost approximately \$120m.
- Also in the course of ruling out Marrara as an option (Channel 9 News, 4 November) Minister Higgins stated:

*there was no room at Marrara and there was a priority to construct a Regional Tennis Centre (cost not stated); and that

*South Darwin Rugby League controlled Warren Park which made it unavailable (this contrasts directly with the NTRL report of 'very favourable discussions' - 2012 Proposal).

It is respectfully requested that the Committee seek details and report on the above apparently inconsistent statements.

At the public meeting on 25 October, Minister Tollner was questioned as to the reason for the Government proceeding to tender for the Richardson Park project as a matter of urgency despite the issues raised in relation to the Ludmilla School and plans for the 'second playing field'. Minister Tollner indicated that it was necessary to complete the project by August 2016 to provide a venue for the Parramatta/Territory Eels to play an NRL sanctioned fixture at Richardson Park. With so many issues still on foot we would submit that this action could represent undue haste and possibly disadvantage the Rugby League community well into the future. (It is noted that this year a State of Origin fixture, attracting an audience of over 80,000 was successfully held at the MCG.) The TIO Stadium has all the facilities to similarly satisfy NRL/ARL specifications eg lighting etc.

The above matters represent our main issues of concern and we are willing to provide any further relevant information to the Committee in person, if requested.

As a matter of record we have compiled as Attachments – A Summary of Issues previously faced by the NTRL at Richardson Park (Attachment A) and

A Summary of Main Issues raised by local residents and other stakeholders during recent discussions about the Richardson Park proposal (Attachment B).

ATTACHMENT A – Extracts from The NTRL Proposal to relocate from Richardson Park to Marrara Sports Complex (May 2012)

*The playing surface is in poor condition. (It is understood that it was not possible to cultivate and maintain a suitable grass surface due to salt and sand intrusion)

*There is no fence surrounding the field of play.

*The car parking area is in poor condition and hazardous in the wet season.

*Most facilities within the venue require major upgrades and there are very high running and maintenance costs (water, sewerage, power).

*The venue is no longer a central location in Darwin.

*The venue is not well known to the general public. (However, the publicity generated since the Budget announcement should have made the venue better known – if not notorious)

It is also noted that after a detailed review of the various facilities throughout the Darwin area the unanimous choice for the new headquarters for the NTRL was Warren Park at Marrara and that 'very favourable discussions had been conducted with the South Darwin Sporting League'.

ATTACHMENT B – Selection of Issues of concern raised by local residents and other stakeholders relating to the proposed re-development.

*Lack of consultation by the Government with affected parties including local residents, the NTRL, other community groups and sporting bodies and associations including the Ludmilla School and the Darwin Turf Club.

*The impact on lifestyle of establishing a 10,000 seat stadium in an established closely populated suburb and staging entertainment, concerts and community events.

* Noise – the noise generated by the 1500 seat stadium was tolerated by local residents. The noise of the new facility appears not to have been addressed in any detail. Minister Tollner suggested that solid concrete ‘sound barriers’ might be considered to mitigate the sound. The cost was not detailed (25 October).

*Lighting – high intensity lighting which is up to HD Television standard will be required in a stadium located immediately adjacent to a populated suburb.

Traffic Flow and Access – Presently, traffic in the relevant Ludmilla suburban area, approximately bounded by Dick Ward Drive, Neemarluk Drive, Bagot Road, Wells Street and Douglas Streets is heavily regulated with some streets already restricted to one-way traffic flows. Planning for the management of access and parking management for 10,000 plus crowds has not been evident.

*Public Transport-Similarly, public transport and pedestrian access plans appear to have not yet been addressed in any detail.

None of these matters of concern would be issues for a Marrara location option.

*Open Space – Already at a premium in the Ludmilla area. The natural native park areas at the foot of Porter and Lovegrove Streets would most likely be put under pressure.

*Environmental Impact – The space for expansion is severely restricted. The Richardson Park facility is on reclaimed land in a mangrove tidal zone. The

NTRL 2012 Proposal also identified fish and/or plant species unique to the surrounding mangroves which may prevent further expansion and a likely need for an Environmental Impact Study.
