

Public Accounts Committee
GPO Box 3721 Darwin NT 0801
Email: pac@nt.gov.au
Date: 4 November 2015

RE: Inquiry into the funding of Rugby League Facilities in Darwin

Dear Sir/Madam

Richardson Park Redevelopment: Why not Marrara, the obvious home for Rugby League?

I write to you to express my concern about the government's decision to spend \$20 million of public money on a redevelopment of Richardson Park. The key questions to which I seek answers are outlined below.

There is a clear case for this significant government spend to be investigated further before significant funds are spent on a facility not in the public interest.

1. Territorians will pay significantly more than \$20 million to redevelop and operate Richardson Park – why not Marrara?

The Giles Government would like us to believe that redeveloping Richardson Park is the only affordable option. But there are a lot of hidden costs not factored into the \$20 million, such as a solution for car parking, the trade off package for Ludmilla Primary School, any flood mitigation work, local road upgrades, costs relating to minimising impact on local residents and the operating costs in the long term (**which sent NTRL bust in the first place**).

Since the release of the tender, addendums show costly items are being removed from the scope of works indicating the government is seeking to stage the development to keep initial cost low and their argument credible.

2. Where are the cost estimates for a new stadium for Rugby League at Marrara?

If it is true that Territorians are supportive of the Government spending big on creating a new facility, they need to make sure the investment is put in the **right place, with the backing of stakeholders and the community**. All stakeholders have indicated the right location for the investment is the dedicated sporting hub at Marrara, not Richardson Park.

There is **no evidence** of a genuine feasibility study having been carried out at the natural home of sports in Darwin – why not Marrara?

Government has not produced any **facts or figures** for parliament or the community other than wildly inconsistent and out-dated guesstimates. This is exactly why parliament passed the motion to refer the investment **to the Public Accounts Committee for investigation**. Government should present the community with a solid business case for the decision or go back home and do their homework.

3. None of the stakeholders support a \$20 million investment at Richardson Park

Government **did not consult any stakeholders** prior to announcing the \$20 million investment into Richardson Park. We now know that all stakeholders involved believe that Richardson Park is in the **wrong location and past its use by date**. Everyone, even Government, agrees on the fact that the preferred place for a venue is the sporting precinct at Marrara.

This project is another example of the Giles Government going ahead without any **proper public consultation**. It makes no sense to rush the redevelopment through without any real support from its stakeholders. Government needs to start listening and work with stakeholders towards an outcome that will bring **real benefits to the sporting community and Territorians**.

4. NTRL has asked Government for years to support a move from Richardson Park – why now the sudden change of plan?

There are many advantages for both Government and clubs to invest in **concentrated sports infrastructure rather than isolated facilities**. Existing infrastructure for large scale events (with proven traffic management plans), efficiencies in managing the high maintenance facility, appropriate buffer zones from residential areas to name a few.

There are two public consultations underway, the Sports and Active Recreation Master Plan and the Darwin Inner Suburbs Area Plan which includes Ludmilla, which both should inform this investment decision. The message from Government couldn't be clearer - there is no interest in what Territorians or sporting clubs have to say.

Redeveloping Richardson Park is **not the right answer** to give NTRL the opportunity to grow their sport in the long term. However it seems that government feels it is the only way to face-save and deliver on a promise made **behind closed doors**.

5. \$20 million to host two Parramatta Eels games – that's an expensive ticket (at tax payer's expense) for Giles and Tollner, both long-term fans of the Eels!

There are only two more national competition games left under the four year contract with Parramatta Eels. The four year sponsorship cost Territorians \$4million – to have **kept the Arafura Games** in Darwin would have cost \$3.5m. Surely the benefits of grass roots, cross code sporting events outweigh a few games a year for spectators in the Territory? We **deserve more vision and transparency** in the way public funds are spent.

6. Why the hurry? Votes and junkets of course!

The reason why Government chose to invest in Richardson Park over Marrara is simply because it is their only chance to have something built before the next election in August 2016, **not because it is the best option for the future of NTRL or the other football codes**, or in the interest of the wider community. Richardson Park will be redeveloped solely as a **shiny show-pony for the Giles Government** in the lead up to next year's election.

Tollner announced that the main reason for pushing ahead with the plans is to accommodate a Parramatta Eels game here in August 2016. This will prove to be a **mistake in the long term** for Territorians, but our current government is scratching around for sweeteners before the next election.

7. Environmental impact statement

It doesn't exist! Nor does a traffic impact study, despite the obvious car parking issue. How can it be that the Giles government is pressing ahead without basic housekeeping having been done?

It is clear **Government realises they got it wrong** and is pushing ahead to avoid losing face. However, governments never lose face if they **make the right decision in the interest of the community**. Territorians expect our representatives to **spend their money wisely** and in this case, there is no evidence that there is support across the community.

Government needs to be called to account and **put the brakes on the Richardson Park plan**, sit down with the stakeholders to work how the money can be best spent instead of ploughing ahead and leaving the community to miss out on such a great opportunity.

Government is currently **not acting in the interest of the community**; they are just desperately trying to save face and deliver on a **bad promise** nobody asked for.

I respectfully ask that you do all in your power to call the Giles government to account for this decision. At the very least, the premise for the investment must be reviewed and a halt put on the current tender for the ill-considered project.