



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

12th Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Inquiry into Funding of Rugby League Facilities in Darwin

Public Forum Transcript

5.00 pm, Wednesday, 11 November 2015

Litchfield Room, Parliament House

Members: Mrs Robyn Lambley, MLA, Chair, Member for Araluen
Ms Natasha Fyles, MLA, Member for Nightcliff
Ms Nicole Manison, MLA, Member for Wanguri
Mr Gerry Wood, MLA, Member for Nelson

Witnesses: Brad and Cherill Hopkins
Michael Hawkes
Inge van Sprang
Jude Scott
Ron Grolep
Margaret Clinch
Jennie Renfree
Rollo Manning
Robyn MacGillivray
Ian McNeill
Karen O'Dwyer

Madam CHAIR: I welcome everyone here this evening to the inquiry into Richardson Park by the Public Accounts Committee. It is great of you to come along at such short notice; I think most of you were only advised of this yesterday. We decided it was important for local residents affected by the upgrade to Richardson Park to have an opportunity to talk to us. We will have a fairly informal approach to this afternoon; we want to listen to what you have to say. We can give a little feedback from what we have heard and have been able to glean from the documentation provided to the committee today.

I ask that you be mindful of the fact this is a formal proceedings as a public hearing; it is being webcast through the Assembly's website. A transcript will be made for use of the committee and may be put on the committee's website. That is not to deter you from being frank and open, if that is what you want to be. I am not sure how many people are listening to the webcast or will read the transcript. It is mainly for our records so we can reflect on it during our deliberations.

We have a microphone up the back and we ask you to use that so we can hear each other clearly, and when you speak into it please state your name for the record.

I am sure you are familiar with the members of our committee, the member for Nightcliff, Natasha Fyles; the member for Wanguri, Nicole Manison; the member for Nelson, Gerry Wood; the Secretariat for the Public Accounts Committee is headed up by Russell Keith from the Legislative Assembly; and my name is Robyn Lambley and I am the member for Araluen.

If anyone would like to kick off, it is an open forum. As I said, we would like to hear what your concerns are about this decision. The inquiry is specifically looking at the original plans for rugby league which we now are fairly confident were aimed at removing rugby league to Marrara, and then a decision was made by the government to upgrade Richardson Park and centralise rugby league there.

We are looking at that decision and what due diligence occurred before the decision was made. I guess from your perspective you would probably like to tell us how it affects you, your life and your property and in any other way. We would like to hear what you have to say.

Would anyone like to kick off?

A Witness: Can you ask questions?

Madam CHAIR: Would you like us to ask questions? Is that a better way to do it.

Ms FYLES: When did people first hear about the redevelopment proposals for Richardson Park?

Madam CHAIR: Go for it, do not be shy.

Ms FYLES: If you could state your full name each time you could speak. This is being recorded by Hansard and it helps them identify people.

Ms HOPKINS: Cherill Hopkins. I first heard about it in July. It must have been in the newspaper. I made contact with the Minister for Sport and Rec to ask questions about how big it is, how many people, what sort of studies would be done, whether there would be an environmental study, whether there be a noise study, and was assured at that time that those studies would take place. In fact, they were not moving very quickly at that moment and they would put a committee together to consult with people and look at the whole process and the funding and if it was a profitable suggestion. They would talk to all the sporting groups to find out if it was profitable. They would do that and put a committee together before they took anything further so I need not worry at that stage.

The next I knew – even when I was in contact with the office – was a letterbox drop on 16 September to say it had gone out to tender.

Ms FYLES: Was that the Department of Sport and Recreation or the Minister for Sport and Recreation's office?

Ms HOPKINS: The Minister for Sport and Rec – and talking to his adviser. When I called I got an adviser.

Ms FYLES: Okay, thank you. Is that everyone's similar time line?

Mr HAWKES: No, I have a different one. Maybe I was not as informed but ...

Madam CHAIR: Please state your name first.

Mr HAWKES: My name is Michael Hawkes from Wells Street, Ludmilla. No, I have a different one. Perhaps I was not as informed, but I was watching the ABC news about 17 September. It came on the news and then I also recognised there were a number of people in the street at the same time talking about it soon after the news. Lots of neighbours were

getting together and more people were coming out into the street to find out about it and talking about it and asking each other what was going on.

It was middle to late September when a number of neighbours found out about it.

Ms MANISON: What are your feelings about the government's decision to redevelop Richardson Park? You are here and you have some views on it. What views would you like to share with the committee?

Mr HOPKINS: Brad Hopkins, Hudson Fysh Avenue. In short we are surprised, disappointed and annoyed.

I guess the real frustration comes from – despite what we think is a logical argument, being there are better options than Richardson Park – we have said right from the start NTRL deserves a good site, there is no doubt about that. However, what has been proposed is a significant increase in impact on our residential area from 1500 up to 10 700 – the noise, the traffic, the parking, the lights on 45 m towers. How do we mitigate against that?

We have tried on a number of occasions to meet with the government and we have met with both Mr Tollner and Mr Higgins recently, and he attended our public meeting at Parap the week before that. However, it is clear to us that the government will go ahead and bulldoze this through anyway without what we feel is looking rationally and objectively at the facts.

I had something prepared and I would like to go through some of it. We are curious why the government is rushing this through. We received contradictory advice from Mr Higgins and Mr Tollner at our meeting. At that meeting there were five residents, four of whom are here now. Mr Higgins said there was no real rush for this, whereas Mr Tollner – I queried him – he made a statement at the Sunday meeting at Parap that he wanted to watch the Eels game at Richardson Park. I said to him that did not go across well with the crowd, there were about 60 of us there, and that sure he must be joking. His answer was, 'No, I am serious.'

I am concerned that parochial, personal benefit type of decision is perhaps being made at the behest of objective government. We expect government to be open, accountable and transparent in its actions, and it is very clear that is doubtful in this situation. We know the government announced there would be changes to zoning and boundaries before it commenced the planning. We know this was not initially a major project, but was latterly made a major project. If you look at the categories for major projects it does not fit the criteria. The general guideline is \$50m or so, strategic impact and is quite complex. In its present state, the way it has been purported, it is not a strategic or major project.

We suspect the major project label was given so it could go outside the normal DCA approval process and be handled by the Chief Minister's office.

Ms FYLES: We had the Department of Infrastructure in, and we questioned around that. He told us the DCA process would take place, so there is a contradiction there.

Mr HOPKINS: 'Would' is different to 'have been done before going to tender'.

Ms FYLES: I think he indicated that it will take place, but we can review that.

Mr HOPKINS: The issue there is with the announcement that the school would lose significant parts as well as small parts. They are two different zones. The Richardson Park zone is not the same as the school. Also, the changes to the boundary - our understanding of the act is you need to apply for that before making changes. The announcement was tacit approval, whether it was actual is another issue.

I asked Mr Higgins and Mr Tollner what they would do if the PAC had found this not to be an appropriate development. They both lit up at that; they made it very clear they would ignore the findings of PAC. I, along with all here today, find that unconscionable; that is not what good government is about.

We feel quite powerless; the democratic process is not being followed and the government is railroading this through, possibly for personal benefit. If you look objectively at what this is about, it is a strategic project. It fits that category and it will cost more than \$20m. This is a long-term project of 25 to 50 years, so it is strategic in its nature. One of the reasons they cite using Richardson Park is because it is the historic home of rugby. I do not know the size of Darwin 55 years ago, but I am sure Richardson Park was on the edge of it. Nightcliff was not invented. We had not built out that way.

Now the growth corridor is not in this area, it is Berrimah Farm, the other side of Palmerston, Coolalinga and even Noonamah. That is now, what will it be like in 10, 15 or 20 years in the life of this project? If we expend huge amounts of public money in developing a strategic sporting complex, surely there are better sites than Richardson Park?

We have made the case quite clearly – many people have – that most of the players do not come from the inner Darwin area. They are not going to be in the future. The road, the parking and all those issues associated with that are expensive to upgrade and must be included as part of this cost. I must say that every time we ask for some specifics or

arguments, we are told the Marrara costs are excessive. We have four different costs for Marrara ranging from \$30m to over \$110m.

Okay. Please get your facts together and have a logical argument and consider all implications in Marrara. That has not been the case against Marrara presented to us. We know that in 2012, NTRL said it would like to move to Marrara, but that has not been the case. It has been cited by Mr Higgins that that report was discredited because the government had not seen it.

Again, in answering this does not make logical sense. Overall, we feel quite powerless. We have done our best. We have tried to reason with government on this and we have got nowhere. My fear is despite what recommendations you may find, we will have a belligerent attitude where they will ignore you.

What we are asking then, on the public record, that there could be formal noting of our disquiet with this. We are not happy with the decision. We do not want the impact on our lives. Sure, we want a decent home for NT rugby league. We want a long-term vision for it in Darwin. Whether it be at Marrara or further and beyond the Berrimah Line, it does not matter at this stage, but we are asking that the tender is stopped and there be full consultation because the consultation that has happened – and the government's definition of consultation is interesting. Apparently the school knew months ago. That does not seem to be the case. Ask the Turf Club if it was consulted and they were not. Ask the residents if we were consulted. No, we were not.

Consultation is a two-way exchange of information and listening to ideas. That has not occurred yet. Apparently it will happen but the tenders close next week. We are waiting for the consultation. We want adequate consultation. We want the long-term options to be fully looked at appropriated and then we want a decent decision.

If it turns out it is Richardson Park, so be it, but our feeling is it is not and at the moment we feel railroaded.

Ms HOPKINS: Cherill Hopkins. As a resident you are wondering what laws are there to protect you. The DCA, before any boundaries are changed, need to be contacted and you need to put that through the DCA to have those things – I am not an expert, but my understanding is you need to have that approved by DCA before you start work.

Even this afternoon walking down to Richardson Park, they have started to clear some mangroves and started to extend the car park. I feel they are going ahead with the build before it is even approved.

Madam CHAIR: Cherill, this afternoon we asked the CE of the Department of Infrastructure about that and he said that plant and equipment and the work they are undertaking has nothing to do with the redevelopment of Richardson Park. What did he say?

Mr WOOD: Drainage.

Ms HOPKINS: It is not anywhere near a drainage area – the work they were doing this afternoon. They had a stockpile of dirt there which is understandable, and they have taken that from the drain area. That stockpile of dirt has now been levelled and the mangrove area has been pushed back in the car park. It is on our Facebook site. If you want to see a video of it, it is there for everyone to see.

Mr HOPKINS: There are marking pegs in the car park and they have been there for some months.

Ms HOPKINS: It looks like they have started work. I would like to know where the laws are to protect the residents of that area. It has not gone through the DCA process. It has been labelled as a major project so they do not have to go through that process.

I am also concerned that they are not following the NT Planning Scheme and the requirements associated with that as far car parking. If you have 10 000-plus people you need 2500 minimum car parks which are purpose built car parks. It is not just bussing people back and forth. It does not make sense to me.

The towers – if you are looking at height restriction in a residential area it is 8.5 m from ground level. We are right next door to what will be 45 m towers of lights. I do not feel that is in the best interests of the residential area.

Mr WOOD: It highlights it is all back the front. The towers were raised today and the response was they would be LED lights and would not have as great an effect. I do not know if that is correct or not, but you would think the initial process would be community consultation and discuss the ideas in general and look at an environmental impact statement of some sort. I do not know if it needs to be a full EIS, but you can have a slightly lower form of that.

My concern is the same as yours, being that the tenders have been; that the tenders have been let yet there has been no planning application because it is an OR zone which is 'organised recreation' where Richardson Park is. That is a zone that Sport and Rec view as a commercial type zone and requires consent - or it has discretion under the planning

columns -and for their school site which is a CP zone, community purposes. This also requires consent. So you would have thought some of these things would be first of all looked at before you sent companies out to start to spend money on plans for a development that if democracy or processes were open and fair – they would wait for those decisions to be made first. Obviously, the planning process gives you some ability to talk about those issues. Yet, you would feel you were behind the eight ball already because the tenders are out. I would say the tenders are out so we can watch the Parramatta Eels in the month of the next election. That is how it is.

I have a lot of sympathy and our job is not to say whether Richardson Park is the ideal site or not, but we want to know was due process taken and has the community been given a fair chance to air their views so those views could be taken into consideration and not brushed aside.

Ms HOPKINS: There has been no community consultation. There is an advisory group which is to advise the government - that group is made up of I think a rugby league rep, an architect, a local businessperson and a government person. We do not know who those people are. We have not been advised. When we asked, we were told what their position was. There is no resident in that advisory group and in a draft question and answer statement that we were given it said that was the group they would listen to, consult with and acknowledge what the residents wanted. There is not one representative from the residents group on that advisory group.

Mr WOOD: Has anyone here spoken to the Darwin Council because there will be effects to the council – roads, for instance, but they also represent the community. Have they been making any noises about this at all?

Ms HOPKINS: They were advised of our initial concern via email; that was to the councilors and the mayor but we have not had a one-on-one contract or meeting with them.

Mr WOOD: They should play a role for sure. That is why they are the local council. That is only my opinion after being on a council once.

Ms van SPRANG: Well, there will be no doubt be costs associated to the operations. I live in Bremner Street in Ludmilla. It is a fair point to say that the government is not consulting local residents, but also seem to be ignoring the local council in this picture. The way it is going and the plan is steaming ahead will mean that the council will incur quite a bit of cost with, for example, enforcing car parking issues in the local area if there is a plan to make sure that local residents can still use their own roads and streets while there is a big event on. I am sure the council will be asked to enforce the car parking there.

The litter that always occurred after larger events held in the past is quite prominent. Much of it disappears into the mangroves, washed into the Ludmilla Creek system. It is a concern to me and I am sure the local Landcare group is very concerned about that too. Council will have to clean that up, I presume all the roads and any pathways the public will use to get to the facility. There will be cans, beer bottles, takeaway food wrappers, you name it. It will be scattered around the place and it will be the council's job to clean it up after each event. So they have an interest in this facility as such. I am surprised they have not even been contacted.

Ms SCOTT: Hello. Jude Scott. I am an officer at City of Darwin. I cannot say with any certainty that there has been no approach made by the government to the council about any of these matters. I can say with certainty that there has been no call for any report to be prepared by officers on the matter.

Mr WOOD: I was asking whether any councillors – and I am not knocking any particular people – have there been any people taking an interest, from the council perspective, in what is happening?

Ms SCOTT: Well, Mick Palmer has just been elected to council, which is an interesting twist.

Whilst I have the microphone, I want to raise another issue which is central to the purpose of the PAC, which is this matter of due process. We have heard about the general feeling of the Richardson Park development and if there is a wish from the Northern Territory community and demand for a new facility to be built for rugby league then that is fantastic. However, as part of the due process would that not include a thorough examination of all the different site options available?

As Brad mentioned, we have had a variation of numbers thrown out as to how much it would cost to do this at Marrara. I believe the minister stated there were issues with land ownership at rugby park or Warren Park. We need to think more broadly about different locations for this type of facility through the Top End of the Northern Territory. I am thinking about Freds Pass and its current six ovals, its bus interchange directly across the road – Tiger Brennan Drive and the Stuart Highway, so you have the main arterial roads so there are no issues with transport, car parking and there is even the convenient INPEX car park just over the road.

Of course as Brad also mentioned, the demographic centre of Darwin has shifted considerably in the last 50-odd years. I am sure it is much more suitable to be located further away from the city. However, I note that both Dave Tollner and Adam Giles are

definitely on that side of town so it would be more convenient for the Eels game next year for them to go to Richardson Park.

The other point I wondered had been raised was the 1000 lux lighting. I do not know if any consultation had happened with the RAAF because I imagine that kind of lighting would have quite an impact on aeroplanes. As the area is in the direct flight path it might be a potential issue.

There are so many factors that suggest Richardson Park is not the ideal site. It beggars belief that there is no evidence of other locations having been properly explored.

Mr GROLEP: Ron Grolep and I live in Wickham Street, Ludmilla. Richardson Park is currently in the surge zone. That is something else which illustrates that spending millions of community money – taxpayers' money – into a facility that can be non-existent when the next cyclone hits.

Mr HAWKES: Michael Hawkes. I would like to continue on from what Jude said. I find it amazing that an investigation or a study has not been done into an appropriate location for this venue. When we spoke to ministers Tollner and Higgins several weeks ago they were not able to give us a reasonable answer as to why they had chosen Richardson Park, which we thought was astounding in that it was likely to be cheaper there because the facility is already there.

There was no response as to how well other locations had been investigated, only that Warren Park's South Darwin rugby league has freehold title and has proved difficult to negotiate with in obtaining the land. They too had looked at Warren Park to put the new stadium there, but it is taking too long to negotiate with them so they decided to go back to Richardson Park.

Before anything else happens, I think an investigation or study should be done regarding the best location for this venue.

Mr WOOD: We have not been given any evidence showing that freehold land was a major problem, just that it was an issue. It was not raised by the department as the reason Richardson Park was picked. It has been noted, of course, but they obviously did not think it was a problem, otherwise they would not have looked into putting a \$110m stadium there. That was the original intention of government before it was brought down to \$42.5m then \$20m.

Mr HAWKES: They made us aware that the size of the land there is the same as four fields. They have two fields there currently, and the carpark there is the size of two fields. So there is a huge amount of land there, but we were told it was proven difficult to negotiate that area of land.

Mr WOOD: Were people aware the original plan for Richardson Park was one field? We had trouble finding this out, but there was \$20m in the budget, and the plan the minister put in his press release was for one field. Now it is two fields.

Mr HAWKES: For the same price.

Mr WOOD: That is what we are interested in.

Ms HOPKINS: It was \$20m for one field and 6000 permanent seats, and when we queried what the cost difference was – it was still \$20m but now they had two fields and 10 700 seats - we were told the cost difference was that it would be only 3000 permanent seats. The difference in 6000 to 3000 permanent seats was to fund the extra temporary seating and a second oval.

Mr HAWKES: We were also given the cost of building a stadium at any other location would be between 6000 to 7000 per seat, which apparently includes the cost of the changing rooms and all of those sorts of things. So with these sorts of figures we were figuring it was somewhere between 35 and 45 to possibly have it at Marrara. But we are also aware they conceded it was going to cost above the \$20m they stated. They conceded between \$8m to \$10m extra works that were going to be needed. The number of traffic lights that might be implemented in different locations I am sure all residents of Darwin would not want.

Ms FYLES: Just to let you know we asked about cost figures. We had the Department of Infrastructure earlier and we had 5000 seats for \$25m at Marrara and a 12 000 seat facility was going to be the \$45m but that was a fully enclosed stadium which I do not think anyone is proposing. I think the cost arguments are very variable and not comparing apples with apples, which we are quite aware of now and understand.

Mr HAWKES: I add that we were told about lux lighting and how direct it was going to be. The only issue with that is some of the examples we were given of other locations, for instance, Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane where they have this lighting, the lighting is actually under the roof. When they turn the lights on, the nearby residents are not affected by them. The lighting shoots up into the sky. You can see it from quite some distance but obviously there are some ...

Ms FYLES: Did they give you any examples in Darwin?

Mr HAWKES: No.

Ms FYLES: Because you have lights, Gerry.

Ms HOPKINS: What they were saying was the lux of the lights for a normal game is about 350 lux. It was 14 000 – no 1400 – for when you are using high definition TV filming. So there was a substantial difference in the amount of lighting needed.

Mr HOPKINS: Just on the costs; I know for a fact since I worked there the new Defence facility at Robertson Barracks, which is a far more complex and bigger facility, cost \$110m. So these figures of a stadium which is a relatively simple structure by comparison to what we built there. We were told \$70m plus whatever and it went up to 110. This just seems to me to be quite inflated. I have not gone through any of the books to work out what the real costs are but we have to be careful. As one of you said, it has to compare green apples with green apples since the high costs seems to the benefit of the argument that if we do not do it at Marrara versus an objective assessment.

Ms CLINCH: Margaret Clinch. I am not a resident but I have been associated with them on this project. I have a copy of the rugby league report from 2012 about their proposal to move to Marrara. We are talking about costs at the moment. They estimated it would take about four years to build the new place they desired for their use, and the total cost of that was \$16m. This is 2012, and we know prices go up a little, but not as much now as they used to. They also included a figure to allowing for the use of the present site until the one was finished at Marrara.

First they cited they would need \$225 000 to upgrade the playing field and \$50 000 for five years to deal with the necessary upgrades to tide them through. That is about the same as the \$20 000 figure. I emphasise they had huge costs in maintaining the Richardson Park site in the span of years.

This report I have in my hand is authorised by every top notch official in NT rugby league at the time, including John Mitchell, who is the manager, or was. I am not sure if he still is. They used, as the reasons to move: the playing surface is in poor condition; the car parking area is in poor condition and hazardous in the Wet Season – I have heard that from other people ending up in culverts and so on in the dark; most facilities within the venue require major upgrades; there are very high running and maintenance costs, water, sewerage and power for one club; the venue is no longer central in Darwin; the venue is not well-known by the general public. That was in 2012.

That deals with the cost side of it, but I want to emphasise the problem with Richardson Park as it is. I have a map with me, which shows the position of Richardson Park. It is overlapping the Ludmilla catchment. The reason they had so much trouble with the playing field is they have saltwater encroachment underneath. They made huge efforts to solve that; they looked at certain types of grass instead of using the standard grass. They contacted Perth and got grass from there, because it is sandier, and that still did not work because most of the time they had to rake the sand off the field. So, there is a continuing problem.

If a new stadium is to be built there it will take some time to get the playing field up to standard. It will take a huge amount of money to do that in the first place. Added to that, there are parking and access problems with the roads for that size of crowds. There is a fear among many residents that a new road will be cut down from the top of the area just to get to Richardson Park. If that was added to the cost, it would be a great deal more. Maybe it would not be in the \$20m area, but people like us would still be paying for it.

The advantage of Marrara is it already has many sporting grounds, groundsmen capacity and transport benefits. If there was a large event there, perhaps several clubs should share in providing facilities. It seems to be going backwards, since the government has a policy of gathering the sports at Marrara and suddenly deciding to go back to Richardson Park.

The ambulance and safety conditions there must be better. There is exchange of information between the various sports. All in all, it looks ridiculous to resurrect an old site which had problems in the first place. I, for one, am not happy to spend the rest of this year seeing money spent because of one football match coming.

I have also heard today that the TIO Stadium – I know it is Australian Rules – is being repainted. I am not against football because when I was young I attended football regularly. This is all out of proportion and we have a lot of other things that should be a priority over attempting to revitalise this football stadium which should not have been there in the first place. Thank you.

Madam CHAIR: Thanks, Margaret.

Mr WOOD: We had better tell this whole story about the AFL painting ...

Madam CHAIR: Yes, yes.

Mr WOOD: They were here today. Their sponsor is Haynes ...

Madam CHAIR: Haynes.

Mr WOOD: ... paints. They are getting it done for nothing, I gather.

Madam CHAIR: The paint is being donated.

Mr WOOD: Yes, the paint is being donated. One of their arguments is that is how these sporting groups have to operate ...

Madam CHAIR: Through sponsorship.

Mr WOOD: If I had a choice of where I would like to advertise my sport, a sporting facility on McMillans Road is a lot better to advertise than in the back end of the mangroves. Again, one of those things I query about the long-term location is whether it is a good place if you are trying to promote a sport. South Darwin is still there but it is not a great venue as it is. It is only just a club venue at the moment, not a central venue for rugby league. But that is other people's decision.

Madam CHAIR: We were also advised by the Department of Infrastructure today that the \$20m does not include changes to the road, parking, their consultations and studies they are doing into – what do they call it? – traffic and engineering studies. It also does not include sound or lighting barriers.

We were also advised today and it is on the public record so I can tell you that the estimated cost is now \$22m. We were assured that there has been no progress on this project because it is out to tender. I am a bit confused as to what is going on. According to Treasury and the Department of Infrastructure, who we interviewed today, work has not commenced at all.

Ms FYLES: These are departmental officials and, like yourself, realise they are giving evidence. We will do a site visit to clarify that.

Madam CHAIR: We will look into it.

Mr HAWKES: There are definitely surveyor markings everywhere.

Ms FYLES: That would be quite concerning. Not only do you have this going on, but ...

Madam CHAIR: Treasury and Infrastructure both confirm there has been no consultation done with community members or stakeholders.

Mr HOPKINS: It would be really interesting to confirm what the true scope of works is for the drainage remediation. Mr Tollner made the reasons for the drainage works quite clear to us - the flooding up Ludmilla Creek. I know from the Defence side it has always been an issue off the RAAF Base, but it is coincidental it is happening now. It has been an issue for 40 or so years. We are assured ongoing recurrent maintenance will continue, but it will be interesting to confirm what drainage work is required rather than what we have seen.

As casual observers, clearly the warm up training field which is shown in at least one of the options now has an area of compacted soil at about 1 m taller than what it was. As we saw today the car park area, which to my casual observation is not part of the drainage – the mangroves are being levelled and the stockpile of dirt, which we observed did not appear to be from the mangroves because it had rocks in it – mangroves generally do not have rocks and the soil is grey and this was tan coloured coffee rock – has been dumped on the site and is being spread.

I am not sure what the truth is, but with marker posts with pink tags on them all up the car park as a centre line I was suspicious that work has started.

Ms MANISON: There were questions about drainage and flooding issues around the Richardson Park site posed to the Department of Infrastructure earlier today. They stated they felt the site was not constrained by flooding issues – the exact site for the Richardson Park redevelopment; however the areas around it did have issues and they were being looked at by a separate project and a totally separate bucket of money and it was not part of this project and the \$22m expenditure.

Mr HOPKINS: Margaret made that point. Is there a hidden cost? There is probably \$10m of works with the road upgrades. My reliable source has told me that traffic lights are \$300 000 a set. I do not know if Dave McHugh said that today.

Madam CHAIR: They were not willing to provide any estimation of those costs.

Mr HOPKINS: There would be at least three sets of traffic lights, so that is \$1m. The road upgrade 2.38 km from Totem Road to Douglas Street, if you use the same cost structure as Tiger Brennan Drive – which, similarly, is over mangrove areas – I guess it is

somewhere around \$6m worth of work. Then you need the upgrade to Douglas Street. When cars are parked on either side it is one way traffic only. Then you need the upgrade to Richardson Drive. We were then told there would be a new road entrance for the school to ameliorate a range of things, as well as providing access, but the costs for that have not been done.

Mr Tollner told us there would be sound barriers akin to freeways down south. My vision is of a six-metre concrete wall, like on the Tullamarine Freeway, right across the road from the residents on Ludmilla Terrace. First, it is expensive and, second, it is not aesthetically appropriate for the site.

Ms FYLES: We asked today about the sound and light barriers and we were informed there would be no ...

Mr HOPKINS: There have been no costs for that. There is a range of planning issues that go with that, but from a costing point of view, clearly there are significantly higher costs. If they are well identified it brings it well above the \$20m threshold. Then it possibly is a major project, but you can realistically compare that cost to the cost of Marrara. The advantage of a collective site is these costs can be amortized amongst other facilities; we do not need to replicate road or parking facilities. There could be a central pub there as well.

A fellow at work today, Paul, said to me, 'I went to a match at Richardson Park years ago, but I have never been back because it is too hard to get to.' That will not be solved in the short-term, especially with the option presented. When you have 10 700 people watching the Eels next year, at least I can walk there, but the rest of them will have to drive and park. It will be traffic chaos.

Those costs need to be managed. As Margaret said, the costs of ongoing maintenance, traffic management for major events – the recurrent maintenance of the old place was about \$250 000 a year and they could not afford to run it. Government has said it is kicking up the costs – that is what governments do – but if it is double the size, and increased in complexity and security requirements, surely the costs will be \$500 000 to \$1m a year that we are picking up. Again, with the water Margaret mentioned, it is not only high salt but high sulphur as well. There is a range of operating costs to be identified so the whole-of-life costs can be put to someone to make a decision. They are not evident now, and we are pretty certain they have not been adequately considered.

Mr WOOD: They are doing a traffic management study. What makes me laugh is when I wonder if they have done a community impact study, or an environment impact study. But 'We have done a traffic management study because if we get that sorted then that is halfway there'.

Mr HOPKINS: I would ask the Minmarama community there what the effect will be for them when the major events such as the races and the rugby is on, because they would be on the same day, I am guessing on a Saturday or whatever. There are 38 major events for the Turf Club each year. The traffic chaos at peak times will be quite untenable.

Ms FYLES: We were unable to ascertain ongoing costs from the departments we spoke to today, but we are questioning the Department of Sport and Recreation tomorrow. We obviously have concern about expenditure.

Ms RENFREE: I am Jenni Renfree, a resident of Namarluk Drive. I am here to present a petition on behalf of Ludmilla Creek Landcare and I would like to table it. Unfortunately, due to the nature of Landcare most of the people were not around last week to have a meeting and discuss it. I now have this in e-mail form and I will table it, then e-mail it to you later:

The Ludmilla Creek Landcare group has been managing both sides of Ludmilla Creek since 1995. Ludmilla Landcare is an effective and committed group of volunteers who work on the environmental management, enhancement and protection of the creek.

Since 1995 it has undertaken some major works along the creek with regular working bees and plantings that attract on average 30 to 50 people. There are many more users of the walking tracks that have been established through the bush on both sides of the creek.

Ludmilla Creek Landcare is very concerned about the impact of the proposed redevelopment on the site and the impact of up to an extra 10 000 people in the Ludmilla Creek area. Specifically these include issues of access, traffic, parking, litter and damage to the creek catchment area which is of major concern.

Obviously, many of these issues have been discussed already this evening.

The land in question around Richardson Park forms an integral component of the various interlinked corridors of green which remain in the Darwin urban environment.

There is a very high level of risk that the proposed development will impact severely on the native bush, wetlands and mangroves within the Ludmilla Creek and Ludmilla Bay catchment. There may be extended impacts on the overall health of the Darwin Harbour.

It appears that the government process has occurred without proper consideration of the impacts outside the specific Richardson Park site development ...

Madam CHAIR: Excuse me. Could you hold the microphone a bit close, thank you.

Ms RENFREE: Yes.

For example, Richardson Drive also includes the Ludmilla Creek Landcare managed bush block backing on to Ludmilla Terrace. The lack of any other nearby space means that the need to expand parking for up to 10 000 spectators may occur into this area impacting on the natural environment. This area has been replanted twice in the last 10 years due to cyclone damage, and the walking tracks are extensively used by the community on both sides of the creek.

The options provided in the proposal also do not adequately address the impact on the catchment area of major traffic access, flow and control issues which would occur as a result of the development. Gerry, you mentioned they are about to do a traffic study so maybe that will happen.

These impacts can be clearly envisaged with roads needing to be widened along Richardson Drive, Douglas Street and the suggested road across the Ludmilla language school oval to Namarluk Drive. All these possibilities will significantly impact on the Ludmilla Creek catchment area, with engineering also not factored into the current proposal.

Similarly there has been no consideration of the impact of run off into Ludmilla Creek of significantly increased watering regimes and fertilising, or how to deal with the issue of saltwater intrusion on the playing surface. Margaret mentioned previous long-term issues there. There is need for an assessment or environmental study of this run off impact into the creek and Darwin Harbour, and any proposed mitigation requirements.

In addition to any damage to the environment that may occur during the construction phase, the use of high intensity lighting may also impact on the native animals and birds that reside in the Ludmilla Creek catchment area.

Finally, the nature of this area has always been residential with areas of remnant bushland, one of few such areas available to the community across inner Darwin. A broader vision for Darwin should logically see adequate planned development to match

the growth needs of the community. It, however, should also realise the value to the community and the unique circumstance and opportunity of such land in a capital city context.

Other Australian capital cities are now implementing expensive programs to reclaim or re-engineer green open space, both in formal and informal environments. The current proposal at Richardson Park does not take into account the impact on Ludmilla Creek and the potential loss to the community of this unique inner city natural resource.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our views on this development. That is from Chris Capper, secretary of Ludmilla Landcare group.

Mr MANNING: Roland Manning, and I have been involved with rugby for a long time; it feels like a hundred years, but not quite. You should really go back to the beginning and ask yourselves whether there will be a rugby league and union, or just one rugby style. There is a great deal of evidence coming forward that will gather momentum and the time will come where that decision has to be made.

The conflict between rugby league and union is a strong one, but it can only be helped by people trying to facilitate a change to combine the two, as it was in 1908. Back then, a number of players in Australia decided they would not continue to play without being compensated for injury. They turned professional and with a bunch of people in England they created the game called rugby league. It is a very small game within the context. If you compare rugby league and what it represents to rugby union, there is no comparison because union is so much bigger.

The Rugby World Cup has just finished. That was record-breaking everywhere, in attendance and what have you. If you think about how much to spend on Richardson Park – why do we need Richardson Park at all? Who is pushing it? Try to get an answer to that question before you worry too much about \$20m and upsetting all who live around it.

Mr WOOD: We tried to ask.

Mr MANNING: You tried, did you Gerry?

Mr WOOD: We tried today, but we did not get anywhere.

Mr MANNING: Okay.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you for that; we read your submission and it was very interesting.

Mr HAWKES: I am interested to know if today you have spoken to some of the sporting clubs, and are you allowed to tell us some of the things that were said?

Madam CHAIR: It is all on the public record, so yes, we can.

Ms FYLES: We spoke with some people from AFLNT, who provided us with evidence they pay the NT government to be located at TIO Stadium, so that was interesting. They welcomed investment in a field. They have an expansion of the game called AFL 9s, but the information they gave us did not indicate the location as being imperative, just the facility.

Touch Football, which is linked with NRL, particularly with juniors, provided us with evidence that they were not consulted in the lead-up to the decision. They found out in June that they may be involved in shifting. They did not feel the need. They use six fields currently at the racecourse. There are some tenure issues there but they are workable so they did not feel they needed the facility. That was who we spoke to today, then tomorrow we will speak with the minister for Sport, the department of Sport, the Department of Education, rugby league and the Chief Minister's executive in the Department of Chief Minister. But minister Tollner and the Chief Minister have not been able to provide us with the time to come to the hearings.

Mr WOOD: The important thing from listening to the AFL and Touch Football was that those sporting groups were part of the reasoning behind having this facility, but they did not know about it until after the announcement there would be \$20m spent on it. So the process looks awfully backwards.

It will be interesting, because we are not talking to football – soccer. I do not know whether they will put in a submission, but it will be interesting to see if the same thing happened to them.

Mr HAWKES: I noticed that the union is not on the list.

Mr WOOD: We asked today. There has been talk about whether there should have been a broader discussion about future facilities. The rugby union was looked at. We have a business case couple of pages here that were given today, but it mentions the NTRU and their facilities. I was listening to Rollo. If it is only for one rugby league match a year with the Eels, the rugby union field has been used by the rugby league people for their finals. Rugby

union has pretty terrible facilities, you only have to look at their offices which are only old demountables.

Putting lighting there will not make much difference to anyone. You get plenty of light that comes out of Marrara and you at least have the barrier across the road.

Why would anyone not look at the option of doing up that facility so if the Eels come we could use that facility and at the same time rugby union would have an improved site as well?

The idea of sharing facilities, especially when you are talking about rectangular fields, is something that should be looked at. The problem you have with an Aussie Rules ground is fair enough – it is difficult to put a rectangular field on an Aussie Rules ground when people on the other side cannot see what is happening.

I support the idea that we have a first-class stadium, but should we look at all the options, and one could be the sharing of facilities, but they have not.

Ms HOPKINS: We were told at a meeting with Higgins and Tollner that union and league did not want to share because they do not get along so they were not willing to ...

Mr WOOD: When you give them public money to operate they might not have much choice.

Ms HOPKINS: That is what we said about \$20m.

Madam CHAIR: We only have a few minutes left so if you would like to make your comments.

Ms CLINCH: I want to add something which is very relevant. We recall there was an announcement in July then it went quiet. On that occasion John Mitchell, the manager of rugby league, was asked whether it was a good idea to have Richardson Park redeveloped. He was obviously polite but said, 'We are at Warren now'. He was not enthused at all. That was his first reaction.

I do not know quite how to say this, but I hope there will not be any influence from people who speak to the PAC who think they may perhaps gain by the redevelopment of Richardson Park for different reasons to the basic ones. This is difficult to say, but there seems to be a

bit of hidden language going on and I just thought about that initial statement by rugby league. If there are changes of mind I think they should seriously be looked at.

I remember initially there was a lot of talk about rectangular fields being concentrated at Richardson Park, but after all hockey is at Marrara, soccer is at Marrara so their rectangular fields – line marking is a little more difficult, but if rugby league can be played on a rugby union ground I think the answer is to build up one stadium and have them share and use that for special events.

Minister Tollner was very unsure on Sunday when talking to us whether he was talking about an events stadium or a sport related events stadium. We should really think about that too because they are two different things. If we are thinking about cost, we need to think about the viability of an events stadium and how many events you would have per year. Do we want to spend all this money on parking, new roads and lighting, and upset the community, if it is not viable and we are simply pouring more money in to keep the stadium sustained?

Ms MacGILLIVRAY: I am from Gilbert Street in Ludmilla. Mine is a personal story about the type of community around there, as well as the architecture. It is a very old part of Darwin. I am working with COOLmob and I see many houses that are not energy efficient. In this particular area there are houses that are so old but very energy efficient and very modern in a way. Many of us cannot just shut our louvres to noise, and many of us do not have curtains. Many of us live in the dead end streets that connect to that place. When there are large amounts of people there our dead end streets get filled up with traffic, but we are very polite and deal with the noise from the race course. But if it were to be enlarged it would be very unpleasant to live there.

I do not want to be greedy about property prices. We have lived in that place since 1995 and we are relatively newcomers. But some people have been here for a long time though, so this idea of putting huge lights, lots of traffic and noise in a quiet, lovely place to live is wrong.

Ms HOPKINS: To add to that, with the noise from 1500 we would have to close our louvres to get to sleep or get our children to sleep. Because it is at the bottom of the hill, the noise comes up the hill.

The second point is the cost. When NTRL was there it mentioned costs being \$5000 a week to operate Richardson Park and it left with a debt of \$1m according to Tollner. I do not think it is viable to have sports there.

Another point is when a business has been closed for more than 12 months they are meant to apply to the DCA to reopen and reuse it as a business. Again, that has not happened. As much as you can go to the DCA concurrently as you go to tender, you cannot start changing zones and fence lines or start work. I believe they have breached the *Planning Act* and to avoid the consequences of that they made it a major project. I feel they are very underhanded in the way they are approaching this whole ...

Madam CHAIR: Cherill, we were advised today that it absolutely has to go through DCA and obtain building approval. That was from Infrastructure.

Ms HOPKINS: We will look out for that.

Madam CHAIR: I asked them about the fact they have this time frame for completion in August next year. They said it would be tight because it has to go through all the planning processes.

Ms HOPKINS: The other thing I would like to point out is that the NT Planning Commission looks at open space in suburbs of being at least a minimum of 10% - the ideal open space. Ludmilla has an open space of 2.68. When we go to one park we have in our area we compete with other families for space in that park.

Also, minister Higgins would tell you himself that when he met with NTRL in regard to staying at Richardson Park or moving to Marrara, even with \$20m on the table and a new facility he had a 50:50 split of half wanting to stay at Richardson Park and half wanting to go to Marrara. With the 50:50 split and \$20m I do not understand why those people who have the most to gain were not interested in staying at Richardson Park. Who is pushing to stay there?

Mr McNEILL: Madam Chair, I put in a written submission together with my wife. We are not local residents; however, we have family living in Lovegrove Street, which relates to the declaration of interest by the member for Wanguri.

In the submission we indicated that our concerns relates to firstly issues that have been addressed at length and with some accuracy by Brad Hopkins and the various residents of which you have heard from today. There are just a few things I wanted to add by way of emphasis.

One of our overarching concerns was that the whole proposal for the 'upgrade' of Richardson Park is short-sighted and not value for money. That has been well demonstrated

by evidence taken earlier today. The \$20m does not nearly reflect the ultimate likely cost to be incurred in respect of the various roadworks, traffic controls, earthworks, public transport access, parking, traffic lights and related matters that have not been addressed in the government & issues statements published to date.

We also submit that there should be published an independently audited and costed model for the ongoing cost of the running and maintenance of the facility. That very issue drove NT Rugby League at Richardson Park to near bankruptcy and caused them to leave the facility. There is no evidence that anything will change under the proposed arrangements. There were various conflicting versions of costs given by variously Minister Tollner at the meeting on 25 October, Chief Minister Giles twice on successive Mondays (26 October and 2 November 2015 on 104.9fm) immediately afterwards, where one said it would cost \$30m to \$40m to build at Warren Park and the other said it would cost \$120m to put the same facility in place at Warren Park.

There were further statements by Minister Higgins saying there was no room at Warren Park, in contrast to plenty of space at Richardson Park, and in any case they needed the space that was there for a regional tennis centre (Channel 9 News, 4 November 2015). I have not seen that mentioned in dispatches – certainly not the same length and breadth as Richardson Park since the budget.

There were two things in relation to the local environment which we wanted to put on the record. Open public space is already at a premium in the Ludmilla area. The proposed development would put at risk native park areas, for example at the foot of Porter and Lovegrove Streets, which is likely to be directly affected by the proposed development.

In the 2012 report and proposal of the NTRL mentions environmental impact issues which have not been addressed to date by any of the witnesses from the government or others. It also mentions space for expansion being severely restricted. The Richardson Park facility is on reclaimed land in a mangrove tidal zone. The 2012 proposal also identified fish and/or plant species unique to the surrounding mangrove area, which may prevent further expansion and highlight the need for an environmental impact study, which I have not seen mentioned in any of the media releases or statements by the various Ministers.

I wish the committee well in its endeavours, and I thank you for the opportunity to make a submission and come to this forum.

Ms SCOTT: It seems extraordinary that government on the one hand is bulldozing ahead with this project when there are other consultations for the development of plans in place, such as the sports master plan. There is also the inner suburbs plan and the mid-suburbs

plan. All of these things are being discussed, but to plough on with this huge piece of new infrastructure that crosses those different areas seems extraordinary.

Ms O'DWYER: I am a resident of Hudson Fysh Avenue. I am very concerned about living in a time of urban infill, where we are filling up corner blocks and places like that without any idea of where to have recreation areas. If it was just an oval where we could go to kick a football that would be wonderful, but it seems it will be a space not reserved for people in that area. We will have an expanding number of people in the area. The school at the moment might not have huge numbers but if you add some units on a couple of corner blocks here and there, it will get much bigger and we will need all that open space.

I would like to make an observation. We are saying it is Richardson Park and how wonderful it is with its history. Recently it was called Harvey Norman Park because the money talked. Richardson Park became nothing. When I have been asking people about my petition about Richardson Park, they will say, 'What is Richardson Park?' because it is only Richardson Park when it is convenient for it to be that, otherwise it does not even have the importance of its history. That is lost in the translation. That is my only observation, so thank you.

Madam CHAIR: Thanks, Karen.

Mr WOOD: One area that has never been discussed is Berrimah Farm. I know they will put thousands of people at Berrimah Farm. It never came up for discussion. I know one of the rugby league clubs asked to go there. Again, when we are talking about alternative options, why has that not been looked at? If they will put I do not know how many thousands of people on Berrimah Farm, there is possibility there. We seem to be stuck with one option and that is it.

Madam CHAIR: Okay. I thank you all for coming along this evening. Your comments have been duly noted. Thank you for your submissions. For your information we will be sending out an e-mail asking for you to confirm that we can put your submissions on the website for public perusal. Russell will be sending out e-mails tomorrow to make sure that is okay. If you have a problem with that, just let him know and we will not put your submission on the website.

Thank you very much. Tomorrow is another big day. We will be talking with the Minister for Sport and Recreation, which should be illuminating. Hopefully we can ask him some of the questions you have put forward.

Also for your information we will be tabling a progress report in parliament next week so stay tuned.

Witnesses: Thank you.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you.

The committee concluded
