

The Hon Mark Banasiak MLC
Chair, Portfolio Committee No 4
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

10 May 2024

Re: Budget Estimates 2023-24 hearing – Evidence of Witness Appearing Before Committee

Dear Chair

Thank you for your letter dated 26 April 2024 regarding correspondence from the Hon Mark Latham MLC dated 22 April 2024 about evidence given during the Budget Estimates 2023-24 hearing on 20 February 2024 for the Small Business, Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sport portfolios.

Opening comments

At the outset, I would like to reassure the Committee that I take seriously the expectation that witnesses provide accurate and complete evidence when participating in parliamentary inquiries. I attended to give evidence before the Committee on 20 February 2024. Prior to doing so, I spent significant time, care and attention in preparing for the hearing.

Consistently with the guidelines issued under Premier’s Memorandum 2017-01, I attended the Committee hearing to provide information of a factual nature on matters within my knowledge and areas of responsibility. As a public official, I do not express opinions on government policies or alternative policies or make judgments of a political nature.

As requested by you, I have reviewed the transcript of my evidence given to the Committee on 20 February 2024 as it relates to the Sydney International Equestrian Centre (SIEC) and a potential racehorse training facility, and the document referred to by Mr Latham.

Additional information

I provide the following additional information for the assistance of the Committee.

The document referred to by Mr Latham appears to be a copy of a document which forms part of a return to the Cabinet Office for delivery to the Clerk of the Parliaments in response to the resolution of the Legislative Council under Standing Order 52. That resolution was made on 13 March 2024 in relation to racecourse housing development proposals.

The document referred to in Mr Latham’s correspondence and produced for the Order for Papers is an email exchange dated 25 January 2024 between employees of Greater Sydney Parklands and the Office of Sport. The email provides a summary of key outcomes and actions arising from a meeting held on the same day. Points from this email to which Mr Latham has referred are:

OoS noted that Investment NSW will be attending the SIEC on 2 February 2024, to review and understand how to accommodate the above proposal, including the extent of required parking areas for cars / horse trailers RV vehicles, including accommodation on site.

OoS noted that the above proposal may require additional land to support this new centre of excellence at SIEC, for further discussion with GSP.

I note that at the Committee hearing, Mr Latham's line of questioning related to (amongst other matters) whether a proposed racehorse training facility arising from a proposal by the Australian Turf Club's (ATC) to sell Rosehill Racecourse would fit at the SIEC.

I confirm the following information in relation to the ATC proposal:

- As at the dates of the email exchange on 25 January 2024, the site visit on 2 February 2024, and the Committee hearing on 20 February 2024, no formal documentation had been submitted by the ATC for review by the Office of Sport.
- On 17 and 23 November 2023 representatives from the ATC attended the SIEC. At these meetings the Office of Sport provided a tour of the site and the SIEC facilities. As at November 2023, the ATC proposal was not known to the Office of Sport.
- On 7 December 2023 the NSW Government announced that discussions had commenced with the ATC on a proposal to relocate Rosehill Racecourse and build new homes, surrounded by greenspace and a new Sydney Metro West station. In the media release accompanying the announcement the following reference is made to the SIEC, namely, *'Under the ATC's proposal: A centre of excellence horse training facility at Horsley Park to accommodate the relocation of 300 to 400 horses from Rosehill Gardens stables.'*
- On 25 January 2024 a meeting was held between employees of Greater Sydney Parklands and the Office of Sport (the meeting referred to in the email produced in the Order for Papers). This meeting was attended by managerial and operational staff of the SIEC, and non-executive staff from the Office of Sport. The SIEC staff advised that ahead of more details or plans of the proposal being provided, the staff accessed publicly available information, such as Google Maps, to consider the potential requirements, opportunities, and constraints for the SIECs.
- On 2 February 2024, representatives from the ATC and Investment NSW attended the SIEC to tour the site and to discuss the proposal and the stakeholder engagement process. At this meeting the ATC referenced its draft concepts and indicated their aspirations however no documentation was submitted to the Office of Sport for review.

In the absence of a final scope and accompanying plans submitted by the ATC to the Office of Sport for consideration at the time I gave evidence before the Committee I considered that it would be misleading and premature for me to provide a definitive answer to questions from the Committee as to whether the proposed racehorse training facility would fit on the SIEC site. I remain of that view.

I note that in my evidence, as referenced in the transcript on page 13, I informed the Committee as follows:

'The actual planning of that facility and the spatial requirements of that facility are not yet defined. I know that the ATC has been doing stakeholder consultation based on their own desires for the area. But in terms of the Office of Sport providing a specific and formal response to that, we have not yet been asked to do so.

We have met with them (ATC) and also with the Cabinet Office, in line with the unsolicited proposal process. But for the Office of Sport, we will be providing advice once we are formally asked to do so.

I don't have the specific dimension or the plans of what the ATC want to put on that site."

The evidence given at the Committee hearing held on 20 February 2024 is consistent with my position that I could not accurately determine whether or not the proposed racehorse training facility would fit on the SIEC site until such time as a formal proposal was reviewed, as referenced in the transcript on pages 13 and 14, specifically:

'I think it's too early to tell at this stage.

Yes, too early to tell.

Mr Latham, we will consider the proposal that is put to us through the unsolicited proposal process. I am not prepared to speculate today about what can and can't fit."

Conclusion

I thank you for the opportunity to comment on the concerns raised and trust that the additional information I have provided above is of assistance to you and provides assurance to the Committee as to the accuracy of the evidence given before it. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Karen Jones
Chief Executive