

**Submission  
No 3**

## **INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND A GLOBAL SYDNEY**

**Organisation:** Royal Agricultural Society of NSW

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## Royal Agricultural Society of NSW

11 May 2017

The Director,  
Standing Committee on State Development  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney  
NSW 2000

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**Reference:** Regional development and a global Sydney

Dear Sir/Madam

The Royal Agricultural Society of NSW (RAS) is delighted to have the opportunity to provide this submission to the Standing Committee on State Development and welcomes further dialogue with the Committee as required.

### Background

The RAS is a truly iconic Australian organisation and has been an influential force in the direction and development of Australian agriculture through competitions, education and events since its foundation in 1822. In 2022 we celebrate our bicentenary and enter our **3<sup>rd</sup> century** of continued operation.

Sydney Showground is at the heart of Sydney Olympic Park (SOP) and is operated by the RAS on a long term 99 + 99 year lease from the Sydney Olympic Park Authority (SOPA).

In its role as an exponent for excellence in agriculture, the RAS organises, supports, champions and underpins events and competitions, acts as a guardian for the state's agricultural heritage, celebrates NSW's achievements in agriculture and works to promote the viability of rural and regional communities by ensuring that NSW remains a thriving and innovative agricultural producer.

Home to the RAS and the Sydney Royal Easter Show (SRES), Sydney Showground provides a year-round exhibition and events venue that hosts a diverse range of activity, sporting events, corporate functions, conferences and concerts. It is a complementary venue to the new International Convention Centre at Darling Harbour catering to the domestic event market and is Western Sydney's number 1 event venue. Sydney Showground is also home to the AFL's Greater Western Sydney Giants and cricket's Sydney Thunder both playing out of the Sydney Showground Stadium otherwise known as Spotless Stadium, Western Sydney's premier sporting oval.

SOP attracts over 10 million annual visitors including 1.7 million to Sydney Showground. As identified by John O'Neill on behalf of the NSW Government in 2007, the NSW event industry cannot optimise its significant opportunity to drive events and attendance and in turn the significant economic multipliers that exist by focussing purely on the new International Convention Centre (ICC) at Darling Harbour, as good as that venue might be. Ironically, due to the ICC's impending success it is anticipated that many domestic event opportunities will be lost either interstate or overseas if Sydney does not have an alternate venue of quality in Western Sydney such as at the NSW Government owned Sydney Showground. Should Sydney Showground be upgraded to the levels of sophistication, amenity and versatility demanded

by the wide ranging stakeholders to whom the site provides opportunity, it will become a natural second home to Sydney and NSW's largest domestic events, enabling a cascade of smaller more appropriate events to our smaller regional venues.

The RAS vision for the future of Sydney Showground at SOP is supported by SOPA, in fact the RAS has entered into an MOU with SOPA to complete the INSW Gateway Business Assurance process for NSW Government projects and has successfully navigated Gate 0. The Gate 1 Preliminary Business case report (Gate 1) is currently being prepared. It is anticipated that the vision, if delivered will:

- secure and expand the existing \$615million annual total economic contribution (value added) generated by events at Sydney Showground
- secure and expand the \$207million total direct spending generated by out-of-state visitors attending events at Sydney Showground annually
- secure and expand the annual direct spending of \$186 million at the annual SRES
- create \$500million economic contribution uplift
- add 100 additional full time jobs on average per annum to the existing 4,670 full time equivalent jobs supported by events at Sydney Showground
- add 183,000 additional bed nights from interstate and overseas visitors.
- Provides an ideal opportunity to invest in the cultural event sector, particularly theatre and the arts for which Western Sydney has an overwhelming demand but a critical under supply.

In addition, the vision:

- meets the State's two-facility strategy for Exhibitions and Events (John O'Neill report) underpinning investment in the ICC by minimising interstate and overseas event leakage while stimulating Western Sydney Employment (JobsNSW)
- will complement Destination NSW's Western Sydney Visitor Economy Strategy
- supports Government investment in infrastructure investment in the SOP precinct (WestConnex, ANZ Stadium, WestMetro/Light Rail)
- aligns with the NSW Department of Primary Industry Strategic Plan which seeks to create at least 150,000 jobs by 2019 including 30,000 in regional NSW

There are currently 195 annual regional agricultural shows in NSW employing thousands and creating millions of dollars' worth of economic impact. Many exhibitors and competitors at the annual SRES must qualify through one or more of these regional shows.

The SRES is Australia's largest annual ticketed event, attended in 2017 by over 920,000 visitors celebrating the vital role that agriculture plays in the health and wealth of our State and applauds the highest achievers in agricultural excellence. Non-stop competitions, a thrilling entertainment program featuring international stars and innovative ideas are the highlights of this 14-day event that generates an annual economic contribution (total value added) of approximately \$247million. Continuation of these regional shows and investment in them and the pinnacle venue for the SRES at Sydney Showground is a vital necessity of Government if the significant social and economic dividend created by the RAS is to be enjoyed in the medium to long term.

### Regional Development Inhibitor

The single most potent handbrake to regional development, particularly in relation to trade, employment, tourism and innovation is, in the opinion of the RAS, transport infrastructure. Central Sydney benefits from well-connected places and an easy ability for participants to move from place to place. Understandably regional NSW being a much larger geographical area is a more challenging area to traverse. Of particular concern are the significant population growth areas which by default represent the most significant opportunities for economic and jobs growth in NSW. Western and South Western Sydney are anticipated to grow by approximately 1 million new residents over the next 20 years as

already identified by the Greater Sydney Commission (GSC) to add to the existing 2 million population in these areas. Connecting these areas both to themselves and to the significant likely employment centres of Western Sydney Airport, Parramatta and Westmead with both public and private vehicular solutions is fundamental to an optimised outcome.

From a tourism perspective, the ability to visit the multitude of attractions in Western, South Western and regional NSW is restricted by the need to use private transport and the majority of visitors do not have access to such an option. The result is a clearly poor outcome for all of NSW as the economic multipliers that could result are not captured. The RAS implores the Standing Committee on State Development to use all means possible to ensure that NSW future proofs its investments by making connections now and capturing future growth. By ensuring that such opportunities as Western Sydney Airport are connected by both private and public transport from the opening day we de-risk the embarrassing déjà vu position that we should all strive to avoid

### The RAS 'Vision' for Sydney Showground

The RAS has been developing its 'vision' for the Sydney Showground site over the last 18 months in response to several key challenges that the organisation is facing including sustained optimisation of the significant social and economic dividend we deliver for the State of NSW and also the opportunities created by the anticipated residential growth in the area and the vision of Government for the part that SOP can play in providing activation and highly desirable liveable spaces to support this growth. The RAS 'vision' includes new and upgraded exhibition, plenary, theatre & arts facilities, a permanent education development inclusive of a permanent Urban Farm, upgrades to Spotless Stadium and the relocation of the SRES Carnival to enable revitalisation of the 'Show' and to also enable the Parramatta Light Rail Stage 2 route should current route selection thinking be confirmed.

In discussion with SOPA, NSW State Treasury, Department for Trade, Tourism and Major Events and Sport, the Department of Primary Industries, Department of Planning, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Transport for NSW, City of Parramatta Council, Infrastructure NSW and the GSC, support has been provided for the plans, of which there are a number of key desired outcomes within the context of the RAS being the custodian of Government owned land at Sydney Showground and a significant contributor to international trade, employment, tourism and innovation throughout NSW and in particular, regional NSW:

- Reinvigoration of the SRES, the largest ticketed event in the southern hemisphere with annual economic impact to NSW of approximately \$250 million and a significant driver to sustainable agricultural practise throughout NSW;
- Ensuring ongoing self-sufficiency of the organisation and the continuing and growing annual dividend of \$11 million approx. back into agricultural programs, competitions, education & youth initiatives, and rural communities with a vision to grow this contribution with successful development of the site;
- Securing a second (western) venue for exhibitions and events to complement the new ICC at Darling Harbour and minimise interstate and overseas event leakage already evident;
- 300 key short term accommodation adjoining the exhibition and events centre to maximise opportunities for NSW's domestic event sector;
- Permanent activation of the 30 hectare site, through increased business and community events, optimising local opportunities;
- Demand for a further 182,000 annual bed nights in addition to the existing annual 950,000 created by Sydney Showground; and
- Improved liveability of the SOP precinct to support the aspiration for increased density and the significant opportunities SOP creates to support and expand the vital visitor economy.

Importantly, the RAS 'vision' seeks to ensure that Sydney Showground can play a vital role in supporting the growth of SOP and its role within the Greater Parramatta and Olympic Peninsula (GPOP), through providing flexible and more weatherproof spaces intended to enable community events on a permanent basis, activating and connecting the site with the broader SOP precinct, and provision of permanent facilities for local communities including schools, residents and workers.

These facilities will support the estimated generation of \$505m of economic benefit to the NSW economy and 182,900 additional out-of-state bed nights per annum, this is in addition to the significant economic contribution already made by the RAS. The plans also align with government objectives in regards to jobs, visitation and amenity in the GPOP and Western Sydney.

### The Sydney Showground Site and its future contribution to NSW

- The RAS has been in discussion with the NSW Government for the past eighteen months regarding plans to improve the Sydney Showground site to ensure the RAS can maintain and replace its facilities as required as a responsible long term custodian of government owned land and to respond to the proposed increases in site density and activation at SOP as it seeks to become a Lifestyle Super Precinct.
- The RAS is thrilled with the NSW vision for the GPOP and seeks to activate Sydney Showground through its proposed 'vision' to help support the significant anticipated residential growth and to ensure SOP can become a true 'great place', Western Sydney's Darling Harbour.
- It is noted that GPOP is intended to be the heart of the 'developing central city' that the RAS sees Sydney Showground as potentially the heart of a developing SOP.
- The RAS seeks to be a collaborator with the Government to ensure the best outcomes can be achieved for all stakeholders from the upgrade of Sydney Showground to underpin the vision for GPOP and support the ambition to make SOP a Lifestyle Super Precinct.
- The upgrade of Sydney Showground will help minimise event leakage interstate and overseas and complement the ICC at Darling Harbour, providing appropriate major domestic event facilities while driving hotel requirements through its increased activation and visitation. This proposal is consistent with the 2007 Government vision for a 2 precinct policy as advocated by John O'Neill AO. **It should be noted that the RAS has already lost business recently that was unable to secure space at the ICC and as such relocated interstate at a significant opportunity cost to NSW.**
- Residential and activation growth at SOP enables Parramatta City to focus on its core requirements of commercial, administration, education and research and in so doing creating much needed smart jobs.
- Development of Sydney Showground at SOP supports NSW Government ambition as a destination for increased housing and the GSC 5-10% target for affordable housing. In particular student and key worker housing, supporting the growth of the Westmead Innovation District and the growth of education in the Parramatta CBD, particularly with the connections that would be made by Parramatta Light Rail (PLR) and/or Metro West.
- The RAS is delighted with the aspiration by the GSC on behalf of Government to 'Create Great Places' in West Central Sydney and the ambition to take advantage of the SOP event activity and the RAS looks forward to working with the Government to help optimise this opportunity to include much needed arts and cultural facilities.

### The Importance of Transport

- The significant increase in residential, commercial and retail development intended to densify the GPOP, Western and South West Sydney will significantly increase year-round congestion if appropriate transport links are not forthcoming and will in real terms be at a significant economic cost to NSW should that unfortunate position transpire. NSW Government is already making huge investment in both private and public transport solutions in Greater Sydney but more needs to be done. This intent is supported by the RAS, however, in absence of major improvements in transport links such as Stage 2 of PLR, West Metro and solutions to satisfy the massive opportunities to be created by the Western Sydney Airport, densification will occur at the expense of further congestion and optimisation of the opportunities will be significantly compromised. In addition, lack of expediently delivered transport through Sydney Olympic Park may impact the deliverability and success of Government's ambition for this region.

- Certainty is also needed regarding the future of the West Metro connecting Central to Westmead via Olympic Park and on to the Western Sydney Airport from the day of its opening in the mid-2020's.
- Failure to deliver the additional transport infrastructure aforementioned, particularly to the Western Sydney Airport connecting it back to the CBD through Parramatta and SOP but importantly connecting it North/South to the likes of Campbelltown and Liverpool will lead to sub-optimised investment in the entire region with a significant impact on trade and tourism in particular but also on the opportunities for research and innovation around the Westmead health & Education Precinct.

### The Importance of Health and Education

- Sydney Olympic Park provides a significant educational opportunity. Located in Central Sydney and with direct links via future PLR to both Parramatta CBD and Westmead, SOP is an ideal location for a university campus, student accommodation and key worker housing. This is particularly important given densification and rising land values of both Parramatta CBD and Westmead. It is our recommendation that the Committee should seek to maximise opportunities to endorse education at SOP and the RAS would be pleased to collaborate on relevant programs.
- SOP already plays host to numerous professional sporting codes and teams and has 2 million people annually watching sport but of even greater significance, 2.4 million people actively participating in sport every year, a significant contributor to the future health of this region but with massive opportunity for expansion.

### GPOP and Sydney Olympic Park as a Destination

- With the impending delivery of the proposed new Western Sydney Airport, SOP has the opportunity to become Western Sydney's equivalent of Darling Harbour; a true Western Sydney Destination optimising trade and tourism opportunities particularly in relation to the important visitor economy as championed by Destination NSW. However, this ambition requires whole of Government support, it cannot be delivered without the matters above being integrated and requires collaborative methods to support densification and subsequent activation. **It should be the collective ambition of all stakeholders to ensure trips made into Western Sydney Airport domestically and internationally aim to increase activity in Western Sydney.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission to the Committee, should you require anything further please do not hesitate to contact

Yours faithfully

Brock Gilmour  
Chief Executive