

**Submission
No 13**

**INQUIRY INTO GRANTING OF CONTRACT NUMBER
OoS17/18-021 BY THE OFFICE OF SPORT**

Organisation: Waratah Showjumping Inc

Date Received: 27 August 2021



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www.waratahshowjumping.com.au

Submission to the NSW Government Parliamentary Enquiry into the awarding of contract OoS17/18-021.

Background

Waratah Showjumping was created by Edwena Mitchell in 2017 in response to the need for more quality Showjumping events to be held in the Greater Sydney Metro area. The venue of Sydney International Equestrian Centre (SIEC) was chosen for the quality of its facilities including stabling and its all-weather status.

Edwena Mitchell's background includes hosting 6 NSW Showjumping Championships from 2010 – 2016 (2010 & 2011 at Gundagai Showground, 2012 & 2013 at AELEC in Tamworth and 2015 & 2016 at SIEC) and the 2011 Australian Showjumping Championships at Dubbo Showground. Edwena Mitchell has served on Jumping NSW (the voluntary committee that runs the discipline of Showjumping in NSW) for some 15 years, ending in 2017.

However, the surfaces at SIEC at that stage were 17 years old (left from the 2000 Olympic Games) and showed it – they were (and are) tired and in need of replacement or major upgrading. Ring 1 of the 2017 event, for the top level of competition was held in the Olympic Arena, but due to its surface limitations, the maximum height the competition went to was 1.45-1.50m – a step and a ½ down from Olympic levels of jumps at 1.60m.

Waratah Showjumping was incorporated in 2020 and has a small committee comprising of:

President	Mrs Helen Chugg
Secretary/Treasurer & Public Officer	Mrs Edwena Mitchell
Vice President	Mrs Jennifer Wood
Committee Members	Ms Amber Fuller
	Mr Nathan Wood
	Ms Laura Harland
	Ms Amanda Madigan

Waratah Showjumping is affiliated with Equestrian NSW and Jumping NSW – as an affiliated member of both, this entitles Waratah Showjumping to certain member benefits, including discounted Club Insurance and access to officials and the necessary timing gear.

Waratah Showjumping has held a yearly event at SIEC in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The 2020 & 2021 events were cancelled due to covid. However from August 2020 to February 2021 two training events and three low-ish level competition events were held at SIEC – in the Hack Arena.

For all FEI (Federation Equestre Internationale) horse disciplines the welfare of the horse is paramount. For any Organising Committee (OC) of an event, the surface the horse competes



on is pretty much the most important organisational detail to be addressed and achieved. The FEI is the body governing the 4 Olympic horse sport disciplines – Showjumping, Dressage, Eventing and Paralympics) and at a World Equestrian Games level, includes Reining, Vaulting and Endurance Riding.

Surface Quality in 2017 at SIEC

At SIEC, for the type of elite sporting event that Waratah Showjumping aspired to, there was in early 2017 when planning for the event began, only 1 arena out of 3 possibles that could be considered for Ring 1, the Olympic Arena, due to the age of the venue. The surface of the Indoor Arena at that stage was diabolical. Totally unable to be used for top level Showjumping. The third choice, the Hacking Arena was also not suitable.

There were 3 main issues with the surface on the Olympic Arena, which was only marginally better than the Indoor surface, the difference being that the Olympic Arena could be watered:

- 1 The sand was “shifty” when the horses’ feet landed, leading to falls on corners, dangerous to both horse and rider
- 2 There was not enough of it to cushion the horses’ feet upon landing
- 3 The base underneath the sandy surface was also uneven

These three issues could lead (and according to some riders have led) to injuries to horses when jumping on that surface at mid to the highest level. There were slips and falls at Waratah 2017 due to the surface. Extra work was required by the SIEC staff (and therefore extra costs incurred by an OC) to keep the surface even barely acceptable during an event. Extra arena grades and over watering (water puddles on the arena whilst horses were jumping is not acceptable) were carried out to try to keep the surface from “shifting”.

Waratah Showjumping was at the point of either discontinuing or finding an alternate venue out of NSW had the SIEC Indoor arena not be replaced.

Why is a quality surface needed?

To prevent injury to the horses and to provide a surface that encourages horses to jump safely and develop their potential to the maximum.

A 600+kg horse landing on one leg over a 1.60 high jump creates enormous pressure on hooves, ligaments, joints and bones. A surface that provides safety and mitigates the percussion impact on horses’ legs is absolutely required for competitions at the highest level. Showjumping and Dressage have the highest requirements for surface quality of all the disciplines due to the intensity and force behind a 600+kg horse competing at the highest



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level. The Otto Ebb & Flow surface at the Indoor Arena at SIEC fulfills this. There is absolutely no need to replace this surface. Money would be much better spent on replacing the Olympic Arena surface – as it is, it is only usable for training and much lower height competitions.

It should be noted that at the top level in Showjumping, Eventing and Dressage, the value of top level horses could be anywhere from \$100 000 to \$1 000 000. Such horses are generally un-insured due to the prohibitive cost of insurance.

The popularity and standing of Waratah Showjumping since 2018 and the move to the Indoor Arena have grown immensely in just a few short years. As evidenced by the sponsorship levels achieved – and the entries that flow in. The event in 2020 (and 2021) was shaping up to be approximately 10 – 20% bigger in budget than 2019.

Indoor Surface Upgrade

The Indoor Arena at SIEC was upgraded with the Internationally acclaimed Otto Ebb & Flow surface – this is the surface that was used for the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games; the 2010 World Equestrian Games; Longines Champions Tour Rome 2016. In Europe and the USA it is widely used at equestrian venues, both private and competition.

This surface came from Wallaby Hill – a property owned by Alex Townsend and used as a competition venue for top level Eventing, at that stage a Board Member of E NSW. The surface was unsuitable where it was located as an outdoor arena at Wallaby Hill – however it was perfectly suitable for the Indoor Arena at SIEC.

When the 2018 Waratah Showjumping event was being planned – the competition was moved from the Olympic arena at SIEC to the Indoor – as this new surface was deemed to be, after trials by our top Showjumping riders, the best in Australia. It proved to be correct and after a great event in August 2018 – a World Cup Qualifier was planned for 2019. Not rider made any complaint about the surface, all feedback was positive.

A World Cup Qualifier has minimum course requirements of 2 vertical jumps at 1.55m in height and 2 oxer jumps at a minimum width of 1.8m. A WC Qualifier also requires Course Designers of a minimum level of FEI 3, with other FEI requirements such as Stewarding, stabling and prize money. These requirements were met by Waratah Showjumping.

At the event the weekend prior to the 2019 Waratah WC (The Riders' Series 17 & 18 August 2019) there were some initial usage & maintenance issues with the ideal water level and grading requirements for the Indoor and outdoor warm up arenas (the outdoor warm up arena also has an Otto Ebb & Flow surface – the importance of having the same surface for warm



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up and competition arenas cannot be overstated). This was due to the inexperience with the surface by SIEC staff. These were resolved by the quick and excellent attention by BSM Sport. BSM Sport provided personnel and equipment (at their own expense) to address and fix these two issues and instruct the SIEC staff in maintenance practices to prevent subsequent problems. BSM Sport travelled to SIEC on Tuesday 20 August and completely re-graded (pushing back the entire surface to ensure an even and safe surface) the warm up arena in preparation for the Waratah WC. Waratah WC was on Saturday 24 August 2019.

The 2019 event was a great success, with 24 entries in the WC from NSW, Victoria and Queensland. The Indoor surface was universally praised by riders, coaches and all officials.

2019 Waratah Showjumping WC Event

- The 2019 Waratah Showjumping WC was held over 4 days and with 3 arenas in action.
- It can be considered an elite Showjumping event.
- There were some 250 horses that travelled to SIEC each day over the 4 days from local riders.
- 220 horses stabled for the event.
- There were 330+ riders registered at the event.
- The event had a total budget of over \$280 000.
- The SIEC bill was over \$70 000.
- The prize money distributed was nearly \$60 000.
- \$85 000 in sponsorship was achieved, from 69 sponsors, many with small contributions of \$550.
- Heights started in Ring 3 at 60cm.
- The event was live streamed – and there were 1295 watchers for the WC – greatly exceeding expectations.

Plans were of course afoot for 2020 and 2021 – alas the Covid 19 Pandemic.

E NSW Office

Equestrian Australia (EA) is the National Federation governing the 4 Olympic disciplines as the FEI covers (listed above). It also includes Vaulting and Interschools – with the Interschool section a fast growing and popular part of both EA and Equestrian NSW. EA is governed by a federated state based system. Equestrian NSW has its office in a former residential house on the SIEC site.

As SIEC is the central and premier equestrian venue in NSW (despite the limitations the quality of the other arenas imposes on Showjumping) it is more than appropriate (and



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convenient) that the ENSW office is located there. I am informed that ENSW has maintained the house and renovated the 30 year old house to ensure its longevity and usefulness.

The fact that a peppercorn rent is paid – benefits directly every ENSW member. Our NSW fees are cheaper than all other states - \$275 for a riding member vs \$365 in Victoria for example. The ENSW office has the smallest number of staff:member ratio and is generally held to be the most efficient in Australia, and therefore the most cost effective for its members.

There is a very low staff turnover, which is as good an indication as any that the office is functional and with high morale. The staff are very well respected by members – and Waratah Showjumping is provided with help and assistance whenever it is required. Compliance checks pre-event for example, and ENSW distributed Covid 19 grants to all NSW equestrian clubs, Waratah Showjumping included.

The CEO, Mr Bruce Farrar is widely respected and liked throughout the entire equestrian community in NSW. Mr Farrar has spent countless hours in his own time attending equestrian events in NSW right from the beginning of his employment, all over the state. He is well known across all the disciplines in NSW.

He is generally held to be the “best” CEO out of the 7 in Australia, and has brought a level of professionalism and competence to the role that has not been evidenced before Mr Farrar. Mr Farrar has been responsible for the growth of membership in NSW and the relevance and functionality of ENSW.

Conflict of Interest in the Olympic Disciplines in Australia and NSW

Our sport is actually very small – there are approximately 22 900 riding members of EA; of which nearly exactly half are NSW members (11 000); approximately 1200 of whom are juniors. The majority of our members could be classed as amateur or hobby riders, members who ride for pleasure but their work or career are not in the equestrian field.

There will always be the potential for perceived conflicts in a small community where everyone knows everyone else. Within disciplines the communities are even smaller. Coach based cliques within disciplines; sponsorship deals (including sponsored riders) from feed companies and clothing companies; referral based discounts. These are all part of the professional sporting world. Equestrian is no different. Having said this, officials and office bearers, including stewards and judges in the sport are very mindful of their obligation to conduct themselves with integrity. Indeed they are bound by a very detailed Code of Conduct issued by EA which governs their conduct in relation to equestrian activities – copy attached.



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Conclusion

Usage of the Indoor Arena is spread over many disciplines, Showjumping, Dressage, Eventing, Show Horse, Vaulting, Paralympics and Interschools. Should the calendar or past bookings be checked at SIEC, there are not many weekends that the Indoor Arena (nor indeed the whole of the venue) is not used.

Based on my own opinion as an Event Director with some 11 years of experience, organising my own shows, and the 10 years plus of experience in an official Stewarding capacity at some of Australia's most prestigious events, including nearly all the Australian Showjumping Championships in the last 15 years at various locations in Australia, the Otto Ebb & Flow surface at the Indoor Arena is first class, and has always been so. I believe there is not one user that would not hold the Indoor Arena at SIEC to be the best Indoor surface in Australia.

Submission presented on behalf of Waratah Showjumping Inc by

Edwena Mitchell
Event Director