

**Submission  
No 45**

## **INQUIRY INTO PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP ROSEHILL RACECOURSE**

**Name:** Mr Kieran Fitzgerald and Ms Jennifer Spithill

**Date Received:** 17 July 2024

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## **Submission to the Inquiry into the proposal to develop Rosehill Racecourse**

1. We are members of the Australian Turf Club who are concerned by the proposal to sell Rosehill Racecourse (herein “Rosehill”). We have no vested interests at stake, rather we are racing lovers who do not want to see this great racecourse disappear. We regard the proposal as deeply flawed and as one that has been shrouded in mystery from the beginning.
2. This submission addresses primarily term of reference 1(f) – *impacts on the racing industry in New South Wales* but also touches on 1(c) – *the role of the proposal in meeting housing targets* and 1(h) – *any other related matters*. Our concerns with the proposal are:
  - a. The plan is poorly thought out, with little detail still to be announced despite the proposal being announced to members on 6 December 2023.
  - b. The proposal ignores the importance of Rosehill to members and racing fans, with the racecourse being an important source of racing history and memories for many years now.
  - c. The basis for calculation of the alleged profits to be gained from selling the land have never been explained, with the anticipated figure increasing over time since the announcement.
  - d. There are serious doubts as to how much of the land is in fact suitable for housing, much of it being either former industrial land or a flood plain.
  - e. The forecast 25,000 people who will be living on the site is an exaggerated figure.
  - f. The proposal for a new training facility at Horsley Park has not been welcomed by trainers and will have adverse effects on their ability to retain staff given the location of the proposed facility.
  - g. The proposal for a new racecourse looks dubious and will likely never materialise.
  - h. The proposal to redevelop existing racetracks at Canterbury and Warwick Farm has not been explained, including what races these tracks are expected to host with the closure of Rosehill.
3. The proposed sale, contrary to the claims of its proponents, would be bad for racing in Sydney, and the apparent benefits with respect to housing appear to have been greatly exaggerated. Far from being a “win-win” situation, this appears to be more a case of “if it sounds too good to be true, it usually is”.
4. Members were first notified of this proposal in an email from Peter McGauran, ATC Chairman, on 6 December 2023. It is worth reproducing the email in full:

*A MESSAGE FROM ATC CHAIRMAN*

*Dear Kieran*

*I write today with the most significant opportunity in the history of Sydney racing.*

*The NSW Government has today agreed to commence negotiations with the Australian Turf Club on a proposal to develop Rosehill Gardens racecourse, creating 25,000 new homes around a new Sydney Metro West station.*

*It is a compelling, once in a life-time opportunity to transform our racing industry, completely securing its future.*

*An estimated \$5 billion in revenue will be returned to the ATC and the racing industry.*

*These funds will ensure all our racecourses and facilities, and Member and raceday experiences are the very best in the world – for many decades into the future.*

*Importantly, today's announcement is just a first step.*

*Members will be fully informed and consulted throughout this historic journey.*

*The proposal has the potential and scope to see:*

- *A new training Centre of Excellence at Horsley Park alongside the Sydney International Equestrian Centre to cater for current Rosehill Gardens stables and extra trainers*
- *Several sites across Sydney will be earmarked and investigated for a new, world-class racecourse*
- **Warwick Farm racecourse** *fully redeveloped as a state-of-the-art racing, training, Member and spectator facility:*
  - *New grandstand, conference and an entertainment precinct will be established generating recurrent funds*
  - *New Members only club, cafes and restaurants*
  - *New world class tracks*
  - *New stables on course*
- **Canterbury Park racecourse** *will be redeveloped with a new state of the art racing, stables, Member and grandstand facilities:*
  - *New grandstand, conference and an entertainment precinct will be established generating recurrent funds*
  - *New Members only club, cafe and restaurants*
  - *New track increasing the size and circumference of the course proper*
- **Royal Randwick racecourse** *to be improved further:*
  - *Complete upgrade of the Official Stand*
  - *New and additional stables and training infrastructure*

*It is envisaged Rosehill Gardens will continue to host racing and training for at least the next 4 to 5 years, until such time as the new facilities are ready for use.*

*This proposal will involve careful and extensive due diligence with a full business case developed by ATC and the NSW Government.*

*Along with these once in a generation improvements to our racing, training, stabling and spectator facilities, we are playing a major role within the community to help ease the housing crisis across Sydney.*

*ATC and the entire racing industry on every level stands to benefit as we fully secure the future of Sydney racing into the next century.*

*Rosehill Gardens will forever own the legacy of future-proofing Sydney racing for decades to come.*

*Should you have any questions you may email our Head of Membership and Corporate Affairs,*

*Yours sincerely*

*Peter McGauran*  
**ATC Chairman**

5. At the time of writing, no further detail of any importance about the proposal has been released to members. Members Forums began being held by the Club in early 2024, with one forum being held at Randwick and one at Rosehill. These events were widely reported in the media, almost entirely in negative terms. Following these two forums, the Club emailed members on 23 February 2024 to announce that the remaining upcoming forums were being “deferred until a later date”:

*Dear Members,*

*The upcoming Forums on Rosehill Gardens, which were planned to be held at Royal Randwick on Tuesday 27 February and at Rosehill Gardens on Wednesday 28 February will be deferred until a later date.*

*A number of questions were raised in the earlier forums that we wish to address, to ensure you have all the details you need, and it will take some time to collate this information.*

*Should you have any questions in the meantime, please contact me at any time.*

*Regards,*

Steve McMahon

**ATC Head of Membership & Corporate Affairs**

6. There has been no further communication from the Club regarding any rescheduled dates, nor any provision of the information that was said to have required collating. Members have never been informed of the questions raised in the earlier forums.
7. The apparent benefits of the sale, as listed in the initial email from the Club to members, have never been explained in detail. Our concerns are outlined as follows.

**The basis of the sale figure and projected population figures are dubious**

8. How the \$5 billion figure was calculated has never been explained. However, since the announcement, the figure has continued to rise, with some reports stating the sale will net \$8 billion, and others up to \$10 billion.<sup>1</sup> Industry publication *The Thoroughbred Report* cites a property developer who estimates the pre-development value of the land at about \$1 billion.<sup>2</sup>
9. If the figure of anywhere between \$5 and \$10 billion is contingent on the land being developed, then the lack of detail provided becomes even more staggering. It has been reported that the land surrounding the racecourse is either contaminated or potentially so.<sup>3</sup> It has also been reported that swathes of the racecourse are at risk during a major flooding event.<sup>4</sup> At a time when Australia is being hit by more and more serious natural disasters, the risk of flood needs to be a serious consideration in assessing the proposal to turn the land into a residential area.
10. The importance of this point regarding the true value of the land, and therefore the sale price, cannot be overstated: the entire rationale for the sale is that it will net great profits for the ATC and the industry, that will then be invested into the industry and “future-proof” racing in New South Wales. Yet, there is scarce evidence that the profits will amount to what has been asserted since the proposal was first announced.
11. Further, how the much-touted figure of 25,000 residents for the site was reached has never been explained but would appear to be an unlikely outcome. The land is about 90 hectares, or 0.9km in size. The densely populated Green Square neighbourhood in Sydney is 284 hectares (2.84sq km) in size and, when finished, is to contain 12,000 dwellings.<sup>5</sup> If Rosehill is to be developed at a similar density (leaving aside any questions regarding how

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<sup>1</sup> \$8 billion: <https://www.smh.com.au/sport/when-rosehill-gardens-is-killed-off-for-billions-who-gets-all-the-money-20231207-p5epq0.html>; \$10 billion: <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/10bn-bonanza-rosehill-sale-on-track-as-atc-lodges-its-plans/news-story/3b7f8627663049e7acdb4d44a8732d5a>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ttrausnz.com.au/edition/2024-02-15/your-designs-have-been-whipped-up-overnight-waller-and-waterhouse-deliver-passionate-criticism-against-rosehill-sale>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/the-potential-danger-that-lurks-around-the-site-for-25-000-new-homes-in-sydney-20231215-p5ersn.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/these-maps-showed-the-risk-of-flooding-at-rosehill-mini-city-20240424-p5fm6o.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://profile.id.com.au/sydney/about?WebID=340>

appropriate that would be for the area), then that would mean about 3800 dwellings. This would neither accommodate 25,000 people nor result in a sale value of \$5 billion or more.

### **New and upgraded facilities**

#### *Horsley Park training centre*

12. Part of the proposal is a new training facility at Horsley Park. The proposal has hardly been welcomed by trainers. Trainer Richard Freedman has said that whether he and other stables re-located to Horsley Park would depend on the position of Sydney's leading trainer, Chris Waller.<sup>6</sup> Waller himself has been highly critical of the proposed sale of Rosehill.<sup>7</sup> He has even suggested increasing his presence in Melbourne if the sale proceeds. This would be damaging to the industry in NSW, a far cry from "future-proofing Sydney racing" as the proposal is designed to do.
13. Horsley Park, amusingly referred to by Gai Waterhouse as "the hottest place in the world",<sup>8</sup> is not conveniently located and may make it difficult for trainers to retain staff. This is regarded as a key part of the ATC's plans yet has been met with a decidedly flat response from the industry.

#### *New racecourse*

14. The initial email to members about the proposed sale of our beloved racecourse stated: "*Several sites across Sydney will be earmarked and investigated for a new, world-class racecourse*". This was later referred to by ATC Chairman Peter McGauran as an "ambition".<sup>9</sup> It seems unlikely any new racecourse will ever get built. The sole proposal that has made its way into the public realm is a proposal to build a racetrack at the Sydney Olympic Park brick pit, which is home to endangered frogs and thus unlikely to receive approval for such a development.<sup>10</sup>
15. If Canterbury and Warwick Farm racecourses are to be extensively redeveloped (more on this below), then the need for a new racetrack seems to evaporate. Anyone can see that it makes little sense to sell Rosehill, and then use the money to buy land and build another racetrack somewhere else in Sydney.

#### *Redevelopment of Canterbury and Warwick Farm*

16. Any visitor to Canterbury and/or Warwick Farm would agree that these racecourses need upgrading. However, more detail is needed about what is proposed:
  - a. Is it proposed that Saturday racing returns to either or both tracks?

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.anzbloodstocknews.com/new-racecourse-in-sydney-no-concrete-plan-as-trainers-slam-rosehill-scheme/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.racing.com/news/2024-02-28/news-trainers-wallers-opposition-to-rosehill-sale>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/sport/horse-racing/nsw-racing/the-saddest-decision-gai-waterhouse-slams-call-to-sell-of-rosehill-racecourse/news-story/ebd5dbb80273bb3a035494d87f85174e>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.anzbloodstocknews.com/new-racecourse-in-sydney-no-concrete-plan-as-trainers-slam-rosehill-scheme/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/radical-plan-to-move-rosehill-racecourse-to-homebush-and-the-frog-that-may-kill-it-20240314-p5fcfn.html>

- b. Is the Club concerned about a fall in wagering turnover if these tracks resume hosting Saturday races, with consequences for industry profits?
  - c. Is it proposed that Group One races such as the Chipping Norton return to Warwick Farm?
  - d. Is it proposed that Group One races such as the Canterbury Guineas return to Canterbury?
17. Any redevelopment of these racecourses would be welcome. However, neither (particularly Warwick Farm) is well serviced by public transport: a problem with Rosehill ever since the Carlingford line was decommissioned. That has resulted in smaller crowds on feature days at Rosehill, and it can be expected that this will continue to be an issue if Canterbury and Warwick Farm resume hosting Saturday races.
18. This also raises the question of what happens to Rosehill's feature races, most importantly, the Golden Slipper. The world's richest race for two-year-olds is a key event on the racing calendar, being considered part of Australian racing's grand slam. The day boasts 5 Group One races and is intimately associated with Rosehill Gardens. There has been no word on where the race is proposed to be held, but it will never be the same if it is not at Rosehill.

#### **The importance of Rosehill in the community**

19. Finally, continuing with the above point regarding the importance of the Golden Slipper, the proposal ignores the rich and storied history of Rosehill Gardens racecourse. Horse racing has played an important role in Australian history and culture for centuries, with Rosehill Gardens having been used as a racetrack since 1885. In that time, countless thousands of people have lined the track to see the champions of the turf battle it out. Attending the races at Rosehill is an important part of many people's lives, even if they only go once or twice a year. It is in the heart of Sydney, conveniently located for many people.
20. The first time we attended the Golden Slipper, in 2012, we met a pensioner named John from Dubbo who travels by bus to the Slipper every year. It is his favourite race day and he had been attending for decades. He regaled us with his many stories about the great day. There are countless stories like John's associated with Rosehill.
21. The land on which Rosehill sits may be worth billions, but the memories from the racecourse are priceless. Those memories should not be sacrificed for a plan that will never materialise, as it would damage racing in New South Wales for good, rather than future-proof the industry as the sale's proponents claim. Our great Rosehill Gardens racecourse must never be sold.
22. We would be happy to give evidence regarding the above at any hearings of the committee.

Kieran Fitzgerald  
Jennifer Spithill

17 July 2024