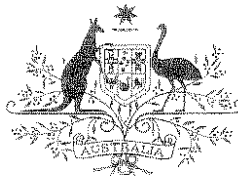


TONY WINDSOR B.Ec. MP
INDEPENDENT
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR NEW ENGLAND



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28th January 2005

Committee Secretary
Senate Finance & Public Administrative Committee
Department of Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir,

RE: Submission to Senate Inquiry into the Regional Partnerships Program and Sustainable Regions Program

Summary

I Antony Harold Curties Windsor residing at "Cintra", Werris Creek NSW and currently the Federal Member for the Electorate of New England do present a submission to the Australian Senate Finance and Public Administration Reference Committees Inquiry into the Regional Partnerships Program.

I believe that the submission concurs with the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry and relates directly to:

- (1) The administration of the Regional Partnerships program and the Sustainable Regions program, with particular reference to the process by which projects are proposed, considered and approved for funding, including:
 - (a) decisions to fund or not to fund particular projects;
 - (b) the recommendations of area consultative committees;
 - (c) the recommendations of departmental officers and recommendations from any other sources including from other agencies or other levels of government;
 - (d) the nature and extent of the respective roles of the administering department, minister and parliamentary secretary, other ministers and parliamentary secretaries, other senators or members and their advisers and staff in the process of selection of successful applications;
 - (e) the criteria used to take the decision to fund projects;
 - (f) the transparency and accountability of the process and outcomes;
 - (g) the mechanism for authorising the funding of projects;
 - (h) the constitutionality, legality and propriety of any practices whereby any members of either House of Parliament are excluded from committees, boards or other bodies involved in the consideration of proposed projects, or coerced or threatened in an effort to prevent them from freely communicating with their constituents; and
 - (i) whether the operation of the program is consistent with the Auditor-General's 'Better Practice Guide for the Administration of Grants', and is subject to sufficient independent audit.

- (2) With respect to the future administration of similar programs, any safeguards or guidelines which might be put in place to ensure proper accountability for the expenditure of public money, particularly the appropriate arrangements for independent audit of the funding of projects.
- (3) Any related matters.

My submission relates to 3 areas of interest within the Electorate of New England where the Commonwealth Government has been involved in the funding of projects.

Those projects are:

1. The National Equine and Livestock Centre (The Equine Centre) \$6M
2. The UNE Maths and Science Centre \$4.95M
3. The Grace Munro Aged Care Facility at Bundarra.

I stress however that all of these projects are very worthy recipients of Federal Government funding with many people working very hard over a very long period of time to achieve the result for their communities.

It is the politicisation of the process that I believe needs the investigation of the Senate Inquiry and I look forward to attending the hearings of the Committee and answering questions that the Committee may ask in clarification of my submission.

Thank you for the opportunity of making this submission.

Yours sincerely



Tony Windsor MP
Member for New England

Historical overview of events associated with the development of the National Equine and Livestock Centre

The value of the horse industry to Tamworth and District has long been recognised by many people and groups in Tamworth. The Tamworth Pastoral & Agricultural Society grasped the challenge and developed what became the Don Willis Indoor Arena at the Tamworth Showgrounds.

The facility however, as good as it was for its time, was fast becoming inadequate for the industry and the Tamworth P&A started to develop plans to upgrade the Indoor Arena to include raising the roof and putting a lot more seating and more comfortable corporate facilities in place as well as upgrading the stables both in quality and numbers as people with valuable horses needed better stables in which to house them for their events.

To progress the proposal for a bigger and better facility for Tamworth, a National Equine and Livestock Centre Working Group was formed and met on a number of occasions. The group comprised a number of Tamworth City Councillors, representatives of a number of horse industry groups, the Tamworth P&A and others with an interest and an ability to assist the project as well as the State and Federal Members then Tony Windsor and Stuart St Clair respectively.

At a meeting of the group on July 13 at 2.00pm (minutes attached) it was decided that the Working Group should pursue a 'green fields' location for the National Equine and Livestock Centre in Tamworth. They also agreed to have Tony Windsor convene a meeting of horse industry groups on August 7. The name was agreed to be registered by the Tamworth City Council. More detailed estimate of cost of the concept plans were needed to be done and also the formalising of an option on the land agreed to as a potential site for the Centre needed to be undertaken.

The following is an overview of what has taken place since that time with much of the happenings supported by stories in the Northern Daily Leader.

- 1 **August 7, 2000** – 45 Horse industry groups met at the Tamworth Community Centre convened and chaired by Tony Windsor MP – NSW State Member for Tamworth
- 2 At that meeting a working group was formed to press for the development of a National Equine and Livestock Centre in Tamworth
- 3 **Later in August 2000** At the first meeting of the new working group, Peter Botfield was nominated by the horse industry user groups and duly elected the Chairman of the working group to undertake the task of preparing the feasibility study
- 4 A submission was made to the New England North West Area Consultative Committee for the funding of the feasibility study to be done by an outside reputable firm.
- 5 **December 2000** – The submission for \$33,000 for the feasibility study was successful and was announced by Stuart St Clair MP National Party Member for New England and Patrick Maher Chair New England North West Area Consultative Committee.
- 6 Sinclair Knight Merz engaged as consultant to undertake feasibility study
- 7 **Early June 2001** – Sinclair Knight Merz Report finds proposal is viable
- 8 **June 14 2001** – Meeting of user groups at Tamworth Town Hall to present Report and take questions – emphasised the need for the community “to scrum” together and indicate support if they wanted to see the proposal become a reality.
- 9 **August 2001** – Tamworth City Council meeting told cost of Centre to be approx \$14million.

- 10 **Mid September 2001** – Peter Botfield (Chairman) and Paul Anderson (Tamworth City Council Director) visit Canberra for 2 days meeting with senior staff from John Anderson’s Office and Federal Tourism Minister Jackie Kelly senior staff – introduced by Senator Sandy Macdonald.
- 11 **November 2001** – Tony Windsor wins Federal seat of New England ousting sitting National Party member Stuart St Clair.
- 12 **Early December 2001** – NSW State Government announced \$3.35million in funding for the Centre conditional upon matching funds being obtained from the Federal Government.
- 13 **Mid January 2002** – Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson ‘non-committal’ about matching the NSW State Government funding saying the Government would ‘evaluate’ the proposal saying “I’d certainly like to see it happen. I’m all for anything that will grow the region but I’ve got to say we’ll have a close look at the proper submission in due course. And it will have to be evaluated in due course, to be frank, against all of the other priorities being put forward by regional communities. And we have to go through proper processes of Federal Government, I think people understand that.” Northern Daily Leader – Tamworth 15th Jan 2002
- 14 **End of January 2002** – “Misunderstanding” of lodgement of formal submission despite ‘formal’ meetings organised by Senator Macdonald with Minister Jackie Kelly’s senior staff and John Anderson’s senior staff and Peter Botfield and Paul Anderson leaving ‘formal’ submissions in September 2001 in Canberra so another formal submission was lodged on January 24 2002. The Northern Daily Leader reported on 10th February ‘A National Party spokesman said last week that although plans and other material had indeed been supplied to the appropriate Federal Government Departments, they did not constitute a formal submission. Senator Macdonald (a member of the working group for his knowledge of the Federal Government’s funding mechanisms) said the problem had been compounded by the fact that some people apparently did not know that applications for federal funding usually had to be made via such channels as the Regional Assistance Program or the Natural Heritage Trust’. Senator Macdonald went on to say that ‘he was right behind the concept and believed it was such a good one that the Federal Government would back it, although he could not promise when that would be.’
- Mr Windsor responded to the Northern Daily Leader on February 11 with a comment that “If the committee should have made the submission to the Budget Policy Division, the Committee should have been informed by the two National Party representatives on it. Why didn’t they? They were there to help get through the maze to the Federal Government funding as I was to obtain State Government funding. Any other explanation is an excuse for their ineptitude.”
- 15 **February 13 Northern Daily Leader** – Patrick Maher – Chairman of the Area Consultative Committee (and a high ranking National Party official) stated that continuing attacks on politicians and political parties was not helping Tamworth’s attempt to gain Federal Government funding for an equine and livestock centre saying experiences of the NENWACC ‘would indicate that continuing attacks on politicians and political parties has no place in the overall process and is not likely to enhance the progress of the submission which is now in the hands of the Federal Government’. Mr Maher used the example of the funding process for \$4.1million for the Australasian Pacific Aeronautical College in Tamworth. The only difference was that Tony Windsor was not involved in the around the table process as he was not the Federal Member at the time.

- 16 **February 22 2002 Northern Daily Leader** - John Anderson 'claiming political grandstanding was 'not the way to go', announced he was appointing Professor John Chudleigh – formerly of Orange Agriculture College and chairman of the Independent Assessment Panel for the Regional Solutions Program to conduct an investigation. This was announced after a meeting in Gunnedah with Mr Anderson, Peter Botfield, Senator Sandy Macdonald, John Cull MP National Party Member for Tamworth (briefly), James Treloar – Tamworth Mayor and Paul Anderson Tamworth City Council Director Environment and Planning Services. **(This was the meeting that Patrick Maher informed Peter Botfield that if Tony Windsor was with the group, he would not be turned away but no discussion would take place)**
- 17 **February 25 2002 Northern Daily Leader** - Tony Windsor welcomed the appointment of Professor Chudleigh saying "It's already been investigated by the NSW Treasury and found to be financially viable, so I can't imagine Professor Chudleigh will come up with an opposite view." Mr Windsor also said that he found it was somewhat bemusing that funding for the business plan had been provided by the Federal Government, yet it was now seeking another (Professor Chudleigh's) opinion.
- 18 **February 28 2002 Northern Daily Leader** – A quote from Labor Party State Member for Cessnock, Kerry Hickey in an urgency motion in the New South Wales Parliament encapsulated the feeling of many in the community when he said that following the defeat of the previous member for New England, Stuart St Clair, the Federal Government was set on delivering a policy of revenge on the region. It may be said in the future that the downfall of Stuart St Clair meant the downfall of the Tamworth Equine Centre.
- 19 **March 3 2002 Northern Daily Leader** – NSW Labor Upper House Member Tony Kelly said "Once again the question must be asked if New England is going to suffer because they elected an Independent Federal MP".
- 20 **March 13 2002 Northern Daily Leader** – Comments from Tamworth Mayor Clr James Treloar believing chances of funding are 'much much better than 50-50' saying that the Sinclair Knight Merz feasibility study was overwhelmingly positive including the statement in the report "provided that sufficient grant funding was provided, the Centre would return a profit in its first full year of operation and provide a long term rate of return of more than 10%"
- 21 **April 16, 2002 Northern Daily Leader** – Professor Chudleigh visits Tamworth – basically optimistic saying that if the figures stacked up then he believed it would get a green light. **However the ultimate decision would be up to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Regional Services, John Anderson.**
- 22 **May 12 2002 Northern Daily Leader** - Professor Chudleigh said his report may not be a straight recommendation ... the Minister will be presented with a number of options.
- 23 **May 30 2002 Northern Daily Leader** – **Funding knocked back.** Professor Chudleigh's report said the centre was not commercially viable and posed a significant risk for all involved. "the lack of commercial viability of the proposed centre (ie without significant subsidised support from all tiers of government) should be a major concern to all involved." The report also said the working group should reconsider the project's scale and consider revamping the existing management of the showground.

- 24 **May 30 Northern Daily Leader Editorial** – Chudleigh Report disembowels city’s equine future. Commercial reality? Pure politics? Too high a risk? It asks. It continues – “People such as Brien Cobcroft believe that the decision is nothing but political, payback if you like, because this electorate chose to put an Independent member into Federal Parliament and not a National Party candidate.” The Sinclair Knight Merz feasibility study findings were that that it would be viable in its operations and it did point out that the question of being able to service loans required to complete Stage 1 even with \$5million from the State and Federal Governments would be difficult. With \$8million it would be feasible.
- 25 **July 28 2002 NDL** – Long road for equine centre – admissions of ‘some friction’ between show society and some civic leaders but also the need to work together
- 26 **August 26 2002** – Tamworth Regional Council commits \$5,000 to complete an independent report on the Tamworth Showground as a suitable site.
- 27 **January 22 2003** – Tamworth P&A puts its own plans forward for an Equine Centre at the showgrounds without advising the Tamworth City Council or the Equine Centre Working Group
- 28 **January 22 2003 NDL** – “Although he would not elaborate, Mr Botfield said he believed that “the only thing that has stopped this (centre getting the required funding) was politics”.
- 29 **February 21 2003 NDL** – Tamworth City Council report on suitability of P&A site rejects proposal and supports need for a new green field site.
- 30 **February 27 2003 NDL** – Call for united approach and co-operation by Tony Windsor
- 31 **March 11 2003 NDL** – 4 key user groups commit \$1million to Equine Centre and ruling out the Showground as a site. Tony Windsor asked to approach the NSW Premier Bob Carr to help construct a financial package.
- 32 **March 21 2003 NDL** – New England North West ACC Chairman Kevin Humphries states that if the project was debated through the media, without clear commitment or purpose, it does not serve any purpose except increase the frustration level of stakeholders and the community and keeps it on a merry go round. Mr Humphries added – it was important to stay with the facts on any project development and he did not believe it was helpful for Tony Windsor to constantly quoting million dollar support from various groups because it was misleading and confusing. Mr Humphries said like any well co-ordinated project he was sure the Minister would look on it favourably but ‘the rabbit out of the hat approach wouldn’t work.
- 33 **September 17 2003 NDL** – Revised plan developed by 4 major user groups met with enthusiasm
- 34 **October 31 2003 NDL** - NSW State Government funding pledged with no strings attached – not tied to Federal matching funds. Federal Government could still come to the party because a vacant seat remained at the table.
- 35 **October 31 2003 NDL** - Feds may come to the party. Area Consultative Committee to receive a copy of the revised proposal and will pass on to Federal Govt for reassessment. After Bob Carr cut requirement of matching Federal funds the story says ‘However since then, there have been ripples that the Nationals are unlikely to sit back and watch the construction of a national equine centre in a regional centre without contributing in some form.

- 36 **April 20 2004 NDL** - NSW Premier Bob Carr visits Tamworth – confirms untied State Government funding for Equine Centre of \$3.35m and announces board
- 37 **June 6 2004 NDL** – Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson visits Tamworth to attend the National Cutting Horse Association of Australia annual Futurity event meeting with horse industry people stressing that Politics would not be involved in any decision that might be made
- 38 **July 2 2004 NDL** – Tamworth Regional Council appoints Bevan Coote to prepare another application to the Federal Government for \$4million at a cost of \$30,000 saying ‘However, because the equine centre has been so politically controversial for the past few years, the equine centre board has signalled that it wants the election over before any federal funding is sought. We don’t want to blow the proposal out of the water by being seen to be – correctly or incorrectly – politically involved with any of the major politicians or political parties,’ a prominent member of the equine industry said yesterday. That’s been half the trouble, it’s unfortunately been politicised in the past but the head of the centre Board – Greg McGuire – is bending over backwards to avoid this.
- 39 **September 20 2004 NDL** – Speculation of the announcement of Federal funding for the equine centre. A media alert issued by Senator Sandy Macdonald stated simply that a major announcement would be made regarding regional partnerships funding for a Tamworth project. It was stated that Mr Anderson said the North West Area Consultative Committee had received a submission from a development in the New England which required funding prior to the election being called. At that time the Equine & Livestock Centre board Chairman Greg Maguire confirmed 2 seats had been reserved for the Tamworth P&A. He then reportedly met with the P&A to discuss the project.
- 40 **September 21 2004 NDL** - \$6million funding for equine centre announced by Deputy PM John Anderson with Senator Sandy Macdonald, National Party Candidate for New England Trevor Khan, Greg Maguire and Tamworth Mayor James Treloar. Mr Anderson said yesterday’s funding announcement had been in the pipeline for some time – and said it was significant that the proposal put to the area consultative committee was prior to the election.
- 41 **September 21 2004 NDL** – Mr Treloar said there was ‘no political strings attached, no electoral or political advantage for anyone’ in funding although he paid tribute to the federal Nationals leader John Anderson for his contribution. The \$6million is coming from the Federal Government’s Regional Partnerships Program and even if the Labor Party won next month’s federal election, the money would still be there,” Mr Treloar said. The announcement about the funding had been made possible before the October 9 election because the application, plans and financial details had been submitted by the AELC about a month ago. This meant the Government could allocate the \$6million and not be tainted by accusations of pork barrelling.
- 42 **November 23 2004 NDL** – Federal funding for the Australian National Equine Centre was guaranteed despite the furore over the Tony Windsor bribery allegations according to Nationals Senator Sandy Macdonald. Senator Macdonald did admit however that any further inquiries into the matter would only slow progress on the project. There would be delays potentially for the equine centre development to go ahead and this would certainly not be good for Tamworth. Tamworth Mayor James Treloar has also confirmed that the project would go ahead as planned, with tenders for an architect for the centre recently being advertised by council. Funding for the centre was not attached to anything. It was done through the due process as part of the Regional Partnerships Program and it will be continuing as planned,” Clr Treloar said.

- 43 **November 25 2004 NDL** – Kevin Humphries – Chair of the New England North West Area Consultative Committee released the details of its involvement in the processes and gave reasons for its recommendations to the government to support the project. It was not until the current chair of the Australian Livestock Centre, Greg Maguire, at the request of Tony Windsor, did the project develop into a viable and realistic funding opportunity.” Mr Humphries said.
- 44 **December 2 2004 NDL** – Clr James Treloar says .. with a Senate Inquiry going ahead into the Government’s Regional Partnerships Program of which the National Equine and Livestock Centre was a beneficiary – Clr Treloar said he felt there was no doubt at all that establishment of the centre would be held up. Clr Treloar is concerned at the possibility no Federal Government money being allocated while the inquiry is held and with a reporting deadline in August, that could mean months of stalling. He said there had never been any political interference in the project and Mr Windsor had voluntarily stepped down from his role, allowing businessman Greg Maguire to take over as Chairman. The Council even invested another \$40,000 to ensure the Board was in a position for the RP funding and advised in August that it had been favourably reviewed by the New England North West Area Consultative Committee,” Clr Treloar said.

**MINUTES OF THE NATIONAL EQUINE AND LIVESTOCK CENTRE
WORKING GROUP
MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 13 JULY 2000 AT 2.00 PM**

Present:

Cr Warren Woodley, Acting Mayor; Mr Neil Follington; Mr Brian Cobcroft; Cr Paul Durant; Mr Rob Belcher; Ms Rebel Thompson; Mr Greg Backhouse; Mr Bob MacPherson; Ms Niki Deitz; Mr Baillieu Myer; Mrs Sarah Baile Myer; Mr Mathew Kelley

Apologies were accepted from:

Tony Windsor MP; Stuart St Claire MP; Cr Peter Botfield and representatives of the Quarter Horse Association

ITEM 1 - LOCATION OF NATIONAL EQUINE AND LIVESTOCK CENTRE

Neil Follington and Mathew Kelley presented a concept plan for a National Equine and Livestock Centre which was used for the purposes of determining whether such a facility could be located at the existing Showground. It was considered that the existing Showground was not of a size sufficient to cater for a facility of the type shown in the concept plans and a "green fields" site would be more appropriate.

The Working Group determined that it should pursue a "green fields" location for a National Equine and Livestock Centre in Tamworth.

The representatives from the P & A Association indicated that they were not in a position to present a formal determination on this issue until they had discussed the matter with their Committee.

ITEM 2 - NEXT MEETING

It was agreed by the Working Group that the next meeting was to be held on 7 August 2000, and an invitation through Tony Windsor was to be extended to all known groups in both the equine and livestock industries to have a representative attend that meeting.

The Working Group agreed that Mr Tony Windsor MP should be asked to Chair this next meeting, and that Mr Neil Follington would make the presentation to the meeting of the concept proposal.

ITEM 3 - NATIONAL EQUINE AND LIVESTOCK CENTRE - REGISTRATION OF NAME

It was agreed that the name of the Centre should be registered as a business name at the earliest opportunity, and Tamworth City Council indicated it would undertake this task.

ITEM 4 - FUTURE ACTIONS

Neil Follington and Mathew Kelley were requested to prepare a more detailed estimate of cost of the concept plans and to formalise an option on the land agreed to as a potential site for the Centre.

* * * * *



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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MEMBER FOR TAMWORTH



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24 July 2000

«Title» «FirstName» «LastName»
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Dear «Dear»

I am writing to invite representatives of your organisation to attend a meeting to discuss the proposed development of a National Equine and Livestock Facility in Tamworth.

The meeting to present and discuss the proposal will be held on Monday, 7 August, 2000 at 1.00 pm at the Tamworth Community Centre, Darling Street, Tamworth.

As a result of feedback from the Equine and Livestock Industry of Australia, it has become apparent to the Tamworth business community and various government representatives that a facility of international standards needs to be constructed to facilitate the increasing demands for an up-scale multi-functional venue.

There have been two meetings conducted involving Local, State and Federal Government representatives, local business people and industry representatives. Preliminary concept plans were prepared and presented and it was determined that a "green fields" location for this project in Tamworth should be pursued.

The proposed complex could have a whole range of equine and cattle facilities which could grow out of discussions at the meeting.

We would urge you to please ensure you have a representative at this meeting as the feedback received will have an effect on the future development.

I would be grateful if you could RSVP by Friday, 4 August to my office on (02) 6766 1422 and please don't hesitate to contact me should you have any questions.

Yours sincerely

Tony Windsor MP
Member for Tamworth

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\$30,000 for equine centre study

Tuesday, 12 December 2000

THE Federal Government has provided \$33,000 for a feasibility study into the proposed Tamworth Equine and Livestock Centre, which could attract events worth millions of dollars to the city.

Unlike the original study, based on using the showground as the site for the facility, the new study to be undertaken by Australian Strategic Planning will look at a site off the Sydney Rd.

Tamworth Pastoral and Agricultural Association executive Rebel Thomson said the committee would meet and decide on terms of reference for the feasibility study, which would include a marketing strategy, funding sources and financial requirements, and consultation with stakeholders and user groups like the National Cutting Horse Association and the Australian Quarter Horse Association.

The study, expected to take about three months, should also come up with a figure of what an Equine and Livestock Centre would cost to build.

Ms Thomson said there were plans to include a Horseman's Hall of Fame as a tourism arm of the proposal.

"Things have to be properly researched before they can be acted upon," she said.

"The idea for a national equine centre has been on the cards for about seven years in Tamworth. We have been waiting on advice that this funding had been granted to get this study under way."

New England MP Stuart St Clair and New England North West Area Consultative Committee chairman Patrick Maher made the announcement that Tamworth City Council had received the funding for the study yesterday.

Mr St Clair said he hoped the project would move forward quickly with more community, private and government support.



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"This significant project funding will assist in progressing the equine centre through the employment of a project officer to develop capital investment strategies, business plans and projected revenue streams for the centre," Mr Maher said.

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Sites set on equine centre

Tuesday, 19 December 2000

THE development of a proposed Australian Equine and Livestock Complex took a major step forward yesterday with the narrowing of possible sites and the confirmation of a masterplan.

Working Group chairperson

Peter Botfield said the group hoped to make a major announcement during the Tamworth Country Music festival in regard to the site and details of benefactors' contributions to the development.

"At this stage the group has a strong group of people interested in the industry, not all locals, who would be willing to put support behind the initial funds which would allow the complex to move forward," Mr Botfield said.

Mr Botfield said the benefactors' contributions at this stage were in the vicinity of \$4 million while the centre's overall cost would be in the vicinity of \$10 million.

He said at a meeting held yesterday afternoon the group narrowed the complex's site to two locations, one preferred and the other as a secondary choice.

This will allow negotiations with the landholders to begin while the confirmation of the masterplan's terms of reference meant the group could tender for a consultant.

The group held the meeting to discuss the proposed site, confirm the terms of reference for the masterplan and to discuss the interest from benefactors.

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Australian Equine and Livestock Complex Working Group chairperson Peter Botfield at one of the complex's two preferred sites.



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Have your say - General - Editorial Opinion

Equine centre should be top priority

Thursday, 28 December 2000



The loss of the Australian Quarter Horse Association's national championships is an unfortunate outcome for Tamworth and highlights the growing competition across New South Wales to host major events.

The decision by the board of the association also drives home the urgent need for Tamworth to establish its national equine centre which has been on the drawing board for some time.

The horse industry represents big business and over the years Tamworth has benefited considerably from a host of different events.

The Australian Quarter Horse Association's national championships, held over some 10 days, are worth more than \$1 million each year to the Tamworth economy. The event has been held in the city for the past 15 years, but there has been an increasing frustration over a lack of adequate facilities for horses and their owners.

Those supporting the move to the Royal Agricultural Society's showground complex at Homebush have cited inadequate stable accommodation and camping facilities as part of the reason for a change in venue.

There are other issues and some of them have nothing to do with Tamworth and its facilities.

Tamworth has shown that it is a popular destination for many horse industry organisations, but unfortunately its facilities have not been able to keep up with the demands being placed upon them.

The problem is not one of vision or desire, but one of money. Tamworth City Council, Parry Shire Council, the Tamworth P and A Association and the city's business community are in agreement about the need to urgently press ahead with the national equine centre proposal.

The major stumbling block is the millions of dollars which are required to build the complex.

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The longer it takes the increased likelihood there is of Tamworth losing more events – an outcome it can ill-afford.

Adding to Tamworth's woes is the fact that many horse industry organisations are on the lookout for the best facilities and best enticements to accommodate their events.

The establishment of the national equine centre needs to be Tamworth's top priority. It is also essential that the facility is the best in Australia because Tamworth is in an ideal position to become the horse events capital and with that title will come millions of dollars of additional revenue.

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**Horse hopes centre on late
January**

By Rhonda Turner

Wednesday, 3 January 2001

LATE January could be a crucial time for Tamworth's equine super centre with a funding announcement expected to be made after the Country Music Festival.

The news should be particularly welcomed by the local horse sports industry which suffered a major blow late last year with the Australian Quarter Horse Association's decision to move its national championships to Sydney.

Australian Equine and Livestock Centre working group chairman Peter Botfield said funding was the group's biggest issue but anticipated investment from prominent people and businesses is expected to ease the burden.

The group is one month into a three-month feasibility study on the proposed facility courtesy of a \$33,000 grant from the Federal Government's regional assistance program.

Mr Botfield said unlike the original study — based on using the showground site for the facility — the current study was looking at a site near the New England Highway just south of Tamworth.

"It is difficult to further develop that site (the showground) so we are looking for somewhere which will give us the ability to move forward over the next 50 to 100 years."

Mr Botfield said terms of reference had been decided with a consultant (who will develop business and marketing plans for the centre) to be appointed within the next two weeks.

"From that we should be able to go forward and be more specific when looking at the plans and site selection," he said.

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New home for indoor arena

Wednesday, 21 February 2001

THE indoor pavilion used to stage major horse events at Tamworth Showground will be relocated to the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre as a warm-up arena when the proposal becomes a reality.

In plans revealed yesterday, if the AELC project goes ahead the Don Willis Indoor Arena will become a warm-up area and minor show facility alongside the main arena which can comfortably house an indoor polo field.

Already endorsed by several horse industry user groups, the AELC will cater to the full gamut of horse pursuits including thoroughbred and blood stock sales according to its designers.

Architect Greg Hill said in designing the complex facilities such as Sydney's old showground and Homebush Bay as well as the shortcomings of Tamworth's previous facilities were considered.

"The main forecourt is large enough to handle a number of people while the foyer is 25 percent the size of the main arena catering for ticket sales, food and drinks and a franchise and sales area.

Mr Hill said the main 100 metre by 40 metre dirt floor arena housed media and corporate sponsorship boxes while spectators would be seated in air conditioned comfort.

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Sport - Local - Cutting

**Case for new equine centre
easy to prove**

By Vinnie Todd
Thursday, 31 May 2001

TAMWORTH indoor is a hive of activity – room only for an arena full of cutting horses, a pavilion full of retailers, a blacksmiths' marquee full of the best farriers in the country, and from 10am today, a sale ring full of bargain-buy horseflesh.

The 2001 National Cutting Horse Association's Commonwealth Bank Futurity, which boasts a prize purse of \$300,000, has filled the showground complex to capacity – proof that Tamworth is in dire need of a new equine centre.

Sid Myer, one of the 12 Australian team members in the annual USA v Australia Non-Pro Challenge (run in conjunction with the Futurity) summed it up yesterday, saying "a new equine centre is a must-have for both the sport, and for Tamworth".

Myer, from the Yulgilbar Quarter Horse Stud in Merricks (Vic), recently set up Argyle on Tamworth's Wallamore Road.

"It's primarily used to access and spell our own Yulgilbar horses, but we let it out to other trainers, or for schools and shows."

As well as contesting his second USA v Australian Challenge, Myer will saddle up horses in the non-pro futurity and derby and the open non-pro.

The challenge is run over two rounds and a final between the two 12-strong teams.

Australia wheeled their rivals in round one on Wednesday evening while round two was being determined last night.

"Each Australian has an American partner, and the resident rider provides two horses – one for his partner.

"We take it in turns to ride each horse in the rounds, then in the final, we flip a coin," he

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Nori shows support

By Donna Hurley

Sunday, 3 June 2001

By Donna Hurley

THE NSW TOURISM Minister Sandra Nori has called for a study of a proposed multi-million-dollar equine and livestock centre's tourism potential in a bid to provide its developers with a stronger case.

Speaking at the National Cutting Horse Association's Futurity in Tamworth yesterday, Ms Nori said the study was a show of her support regarding the city's bid to establish an Australian equine and livestock complex.

"I've been acquainted with the plans for the relocation and redevelopment of this facility (the Tamworth Showground's Indoor Arena).

"I've offered to get my people in Tourism NSW in charge of international and regional marketing to look at doing an analysis and an assessment in terms of the centre's potential.

"To see if such a facility were built, whether it would drive not just more than, but sufficient additional tourism to justify the expenditure.

"I'm happy to provide assistance along those lines, so then they'll at least have that information...it would be helpful to the proposal's planners.

"It will provide some reality for their argument," Ms Nori said before officially opening the Futurity.

The reality of inadequate facilities was not lost on the NCHA's general manager, Noel Woods, yesterday who said the Futurity had outgrown the venue.

He said the NCHA had to install 110 additional portable stalls and additional gas showers sourced from Dubbo to cater for more than 950 horses and riders over the week-long event.

"There aren't enough stables or hot showers. We had to erect extra portable stables and



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showers... it's still not enough.

"There's even more people here this year but hopefully we'll have a new equine centre available to us next year, it's a must, we can't fit the people in here," he said.

Mr Woods said while the venue would be a subject discussed at the NCHA's wash up meeting after the event, "at this stage" they had not considered relocating the Futurity.

He said the event's high profile was exemplified on Saturday night when Queenslander Todd Graham and One More Spin were awarded the equal highest cutting score on record on the worldwide circuit before a crowd of 3000 people.

"It's never been heard of in Australia and something we may never see again, you've only got to look at the arena and see there's no room for this event to expand.

"I hope the minister realises how big an event the Futurity is and how great an event it is for Tamworth as a tourist attraction," he said.

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Equine centre 'viable'

By Donna Hurley

Tuesday, 5 June 2001

A STUDY of an Australian equine and livestock complex for Tamworth has revealed it to be a viable proposal which could be up and running by the end of next year according to Working Group chair Peter Botfield.

Mr Botfield said Sinclair Knight and Mertz consultant David Cook had completed a study of the marketing and business plan's feasibility with his report "quite positive".

"The main concern we had was for the numbers to stack up for the ongoing ability to run the centre.

"We've got to know whether it can sustain itself over the long term and the main point is that it will be viable but we will need to raise considerable funds to build the centre," he said.

Mr Botfield said once the report was released to the wider community after the group met with user groups at the Town Hall at 2pm on June 14 the group would concentrate on raising the \$12.5 million for the first stage.

He said they would be looking at a variety of sources including all levels of government and the community with user groups figuring "very strongly" to finance the first stage including the indoor arena, horse stalls and carpark.

They were also looking for the current support of user groups to develop a calendar of events to ensure the centre had sufficient income and sufficient industry support.

He said 130 calendar days of use were already earmarked.

Mr Botfield said the working group would know its funding position within six months while the building was planned to be completed by the end of 2002.

Mr Botfield said he welcomed the NSW Minister for Tourism Sandra Nori's offer to undertake a study of the centre's tourism potential.



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Equine centre funding needed

By Donna Hurley

Thursday, 14 June 2001

THE support – or lack of – from user groups for an equine centre predicted to generate more than \$8 million in tourist dollars for Tamworth will determine whether or not the project will go ahead.

The necessity for horse and livestock industry user groups to pledge support in a bid to secure funding for the

\$13.7 million Australian Equine and Livestock Centre (AELC) facility was highlighted and then driven home at a meeting of stakeholders in Tamworth yesterday.

The point was made by Member for Tamworth Tony Windsor, Tamworth mayor Warren Woodley, working group chairman Peter Botfield and vice-chairman Neil Follington after several user groups and industry representatives questioned the affordability and suitability of the centre for locals.

Sinclair, Knight and Merz consultant Darron Cook elaborated on the AELC's feasibility study, indicating the centre would return a profit after its first full year of use, provide a long-term return rate of over 10 per cent and by the third year have 237 days of use per year.

He said it was predicted after the third year it would generate \$8.5 million in tourist expenditure with out-of-town, interstate and overseas visitors comprising 74 per cent of visitors.

Mr Cook said the next steps to advance the case were to gain support from potential users, have their support in writing and attract private sector and public sector investment.

Mr Windsor said it was crucial the community, represented at the meeting by about 50 stakeholders including the Tamworth Pastoral



Horse industry mecca: Sinclair, Knight and Merz consultant Darron Cook giving the facts and figures for the proposed Australian Equine and Livestock Centre to about 50 stakeholders yesterday.



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and Agricultural Association, "scrummed together" and indicated support if they wanted to see the proposal become a reality.

"The only constraint we have in going to State and Federal governments and private enterprise for funding is the support of user groups. If user groups back this we've got it. If they don't it's as simple as that, we don't have a goer," he said.

Mr Windsor described the centre as "too good an opportunity to miss" and "a state-of-the-art facility that's obviously going to attract outside investment other than trying to do something in the grounds of the showground".

He said the "numbers look quite promising, better than I thought they would," and urged user groups to indicate their support, at least in principle.

"It's pointless going ahead with anything user groups don't endorse," he said.

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Equine centre to cost \$14m

Wednesday, 22 August 2001

TAMWORTH City Council believes the city's proposed equine centre will cost about \$14 million.

This was disclosed at the monthly meeting on Tuesday of council's environment and planning services department.

The department's director Paul Anderson said the projected funding contributions were:

- Working group and community, \$5 million (36 per cent of the total cost).
- Federal and State governments, \$4 million each (28 per cent each).
- Local government (\$1 million or 8 per cent).

The working group and community funds would be raised via loans and equity purchased through the National Australia Bank and the Local Government Superannuation Scheme.

Much of the local government funding, which would not only include the Tamworth City Council, would be "in kind" donations of time, resources and other contributions which would reduce the reliance upon loans and grants.

It had been suggested that the State and Federal governments would look favourably upon the proposal where there was local community support.

The proposed development was anticipated to generate some 600 full and part-time jobs in tourism, hospitality industry, construction, equine and rural industries, along with the venue manager and staff.

"At this stage, no firm actual costs have been identified as being accountable to council, but it has, via involvement in the process, committed some resources to the project," Mr Anderson said.

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A nose ahead in centre bid

By Gary Ruddick

Friday, 21 September 2001

ALTHOUGH several NSW and interstate cities are seeking to build the nation's first world-class equine centre, Tamworth is still regarded as being in the box seat.

This was claimed yesterday by Paul Anderson, the city council's Environment and Planning Services director.

Mr Anderson and Peter Botfield, chairman of the Equine Centre Working Group, returned on Thursday night from a two-day trip to Canberra to meet key politicians and political staffers to ascertain multi-million dollar funding sources.

Rockhampton in Queensland and NSW cities Goulburn and Albury were three cities apparently very keen to build a facility similar to the one envisaged for Tamworth.

"But we believe we're still the frontrunners," Mr Anderson said.

This was because the Tamworth group represented an extremely capable mix of business, legal, financial and other appropriate skills, but of equal importance was that most of the horse performance and breed societies were backing Tamworth's bid.

All up, the equine group is looking for about \$14 million, and depending on when the funding package is put together, it's hoped the earthworks can begin towards the end of this financial year or early in the 2002-2003 financial year.

Mr Anderson said he and Mr Botfield were greatly encouraged by the reception they received from senior staff in Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson's office.

Tamworth-based National Party Senator Sandy Macdonald had introduced them to Federal Tourism Minister Jackie Kelly and her senior staff and those discussions had been particularly fruitful.



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The working group is looking for Canberra to contribute -- one way or another -- 25 per cent of the expected \$14 million total funding and is hoping the State Government can match that.

The local funding is expected to come from business people, local councils in the north-west and via various commercial arrangements such as bank loans.

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Sport - Local - General Sport**Dressage performer on national stage**

Sunday, 25 November 2001

DRESSAGE

DRESSAGE'S Susie Duddy and her horse Donna Carrera are currently on their way home from performing at one of the biggest equine exhibitions in the southern hemisphere, the Asia Pacific Equitana at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre.

Over the course of last week, Duddy and Donna Carrera were part of Dutch rider Anky Van Grunsven's series of demonstrations at the Equitana.

Van Grunsven was an individual gold medallist for the Dutch team at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

During her last visit to Australia in 1998, Van Grunsven judged the Dressage With the Stars in which Duddy and Donna Carrera featured.

At that spectacular, Duddy was presented with the Bates Special Award by Van Grunsven, the award being for the rider showing their horses to the best of its ability.

Along with being presented with the Bates Special Award, Duddy's horse Donna Carrera was awarded the Australian Young Dressage Horse Five-Year-Old champion. She also won the six-year-old champion horse with Christopher at the same event.

So when the opportunity came to be part of Van Grunsven's demonstrations, Duddy, an EFA Level 1 (general) instructor and C (advanced) level dressage judge, seized the chance.

"We had to apply but Anky had seen us perform at the Dressage With the Stars when she judged it," Duddy said.

Duddy was the only NSW rider in Van Grunsven's masters group at the Equitana. The other six members were Victorians.

"It was really interesting," Duddy said of the

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huge equine showcase.

"It's a great set-up at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre with a lot of very different demonstrations and over 400 trade stands," she said.

On her return to Tamworth, Duddy will continue preparation of her horses for the Tamworth Dressage Club's official/unofficial competition, which features the annual President's Cup, at the showground this weekend.

And while she isn't working on perfecting her horses for the various dressage competitions, Duddy is giving lessons at the family property Killain on the outskirts of Tamworth.

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Equine centre 'international opportunity'

Monday, 3 December 2001

TAMWORTH mayor James Treloar is optimistic the Federal Government will rise to the State Government's challenge to provide matching \$3.35 million funding for the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre.

"I'm optimistic, I think both sides of government need a push now and then and if one pushes the other it's great," Mr Treloar said yesterday.

Mr Treloar said while the State Government funding depended on Federal Government funding, he believed both tiers recognised the proposal for its potential to develop the equine industry beyond the region.

"I think (the Federal Government) understand because its not just a state and or regional opportunity, its an international opportunity," Mr Treloar said.

"We're now well recognised in the equine industry right across Australia. I would suggest there is a lot of support and a lot of reasons for it to be a federal initiative as well," he said.

Mr Treloar said the State Government's support strengthened the lobby groups' position at the next level.

"We really only very briefly put a submission to the Federal Government but obviously now with this support it strengthens the position to go further and put forward a very strong case on reasons and opportunities in terms of Federal Government support," he said.

Mr Treloar said Tamworth City Council and the equine steering group would lobby "as hard as we can" once the Federal Parliament resumed next year.

Equine centre committee chair Peter Botfield was also optimistic of federal support.

"I'm sure now that they've seen the State Government is willing to support the facility

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they will come on board as well," he said.

Mr Botfield said it was "extremely important" to have federal support as the State Government funding depended upon it.

"We need to work hard with them. They've already had presentations and information, all we have to do is follow that through," Mr Botfield said.

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Federal Govt should come to party: Windsor

Monday, 3 December 2001

INDEPENDENT Member for New England Tony Windsor has called on the Federal Government to match the NSW Government's multi-million dollar commitment to the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre.

Mr Windsor said yesterday he would pursue the funding issue with the Federal Government and Senator Sandy Macdonald who was a member of the committee that put the AELC business plan together.

Mr Windsor particularly thanked Premier Bob Carr for his consideration of the business plan presented at a meeting headed up by Mayor James Treloar and equine centre committee chair Peter Botfield on October 9. The NSW Government had rewarded the hard work and support of the equine industry, he said.

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Deputy PM coy on equine centre funding plans

Tuesday, 15 January 2002

HOPES the Federal Government will come to the party with funding for a multi-million dollar equine centre in Tamworth did not sound promising yesterday.

Last month State Regional Development Minister Harry Woods promised a contribution of \$3.35 million to the proposed \$13.7 million Australian Equine and Livestock Centre – but only if the Federal Government matched the funding.

However, Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson was noncommittal on the issue when in Tamworth yesterday, saying only the Government would "evaluate" the proposal.

"I'd certainly like to see it happen," he said.

"I'm all for anything that will grow the region but I've got to say we'll have to have a close look at the proper submission in due course.

"And it will have to be evaluated in due course, to be frank, against all of the other priorities being put forward by regional communities.

"And we have to go through proper processes of Federal Government, I think people understand that," he said.

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Still horsing about

By Gary Ruddick

Sunday, 10 February 2002

THE fate of Tamworth's ambition to establish the \$14 million Australian Equine and Livestock Centre will not be known until May 14 when the Federal Budget is brought down.

This is the belief of National Party Senator Sandy Macdonald who said he was confident the funding would happen although it would not be as easily obtained as some people believed.

Senator Macdonald's comments followed a reported misunderstanding last week between the Coalition Government and the equine centre board.

The board believed it had put in a formal submission for Federal Government funding last year, but this conflicted with a claim by a spokesman for the National Party in Canberra that no formal submission had in fact been lodged.

However, an investigation by The Leader revealed that no formal submission had been lodged until Thursday, January 24 this year, and this was confirmed by Senator Macdonald's office.

The National Party spokesman said last week that although plans and other material had indeed been supplied to the appropriate Federal Government departments, they did not constitute a formal submission.

Senator Macdonald said the problem had been compounded by the fact that some people apparently did not know that applications for federal funding usually had to be made via such channels as the Regional Assistance Program or the National Heritage Trust.

However, because funds in those channels were



We need money: Australian Equine and Livestock Centre board chairman Peter Bofield hopes a decision on funding will be made soon but admits everyone is "working hard" to make the proposal a reality. Photo: Geoff O'Neill



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limited, it had been deemed more prudent to seek the necessary funding via a "pre-Budget (2002/2003) submission", which would give it a "whole-of-Government" approach.

There was more likelihood that the funding would be sourced that way than via the Regional Assistance or similar programs.

Federal Treasurer Peter Costello went on record on December 6 that submissions for funding for projects like the equine centre should be lodged as soon as possible.

Senator Macdonald said he was "right behind the concept" and believed it was such a good one that the Federal Government would back it, although he could not promise when that would be.

He warned, however, that pre-election commitments would have to take priority in the Budget and pointed out that the Coalition Government had already provided upwards of \$10 million for Tamworth's Regional Entertainment Centre (TREC) and the Australasian-Pacific Aeronautical College.

Senator Macdonald said there could be no question about the local Coalition Government MPs desire to see the equine centre established.

"We prevailed upon the Area Consultative Committee headed by Patrick Maher for funding and \$33,000 was kindly provided to fund a study into the feasibility of the concept," he said.

Equine centre board chairman Peter Botfield said he believed everyone involved was working harmoniously to see the facility "get up and running".

"I think too, that the Federal Government will recognise that it is not just something for Tamworth... the centre will be beneficial to the entire New England and north-west."

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**Nats lashed by Windsor
over funds**

Monday, 11 February 2002

FEDERAL Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor claims he is "dismayed" over comments made by National Party Senator Sandy Macdonald about the circumstances surrounding the slowness of an answer from the Federal Government on the funding of the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre proposed for Tamworth.

"It appears that even though Senator Macdonald and the former Member for New England, Stuart St Clair, were both on the steering committee for the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre, they did not give the committee the correct advice on how to obtain Federal Government funding," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor was commenting on the belief of the committee that it had made application to the Federal Government via the appropriate then Minister for Sport and Tourism, the Hon Jackie Kelly.

"The committee, represented by its chairman Peter Botfield and Tamworth City Council senior staffer Paul Anderson attended a meeting set up by Senator Mac-donald with one of Minister Kelly's senior advisers at which they discussed the project and left a copy of the report and a request for Federal Government funding of the project."

"Further, John Anderson, Minister for Transport and Regional Services as well as Deputy Prime Minister, has been given three copies of the submission.

"To now have a spokesman for the National Party in Canberra claim that no formal submission had in fact been lodged is just an excuse to delay proceedings," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor, the convenor of the original meeting for the user groups and a member of the committee, claimed Senator Macdonald should have been fully aware of the requirements and guided the committee to do it right the first time.



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"For Senator Macdonald to say that the problem had been compounded by the fact that some people apparently did not know that applications for federal funding usually had to be made via such channels as the Regional Assistance Program or the National Heritage Trust, but that it had been deemed more prudent to seek the necessary funding via a pre-budget submission is just splitting hairs," he said.

"If the committee should have made the submission to the Budget Policy Division, the committee should have been informed by the two National Party representatives on it. Why didn't they? They were there to help get through the maze to the Federal Government funding as I was to obtain State Government funding.

"Any other explanation is just an excuse for their ineptitude," Mr Windsor said.

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Protocol not politics will win Federal funds

Wednesday, 13 February 2002

CONTINUING attacks on politicians and political parties is not helping Tamworth's attempt to gain Federal Government funding for an equine and livestock centre.

This was claimed yesterday by Patrick Maher, chairman of the New England North West Area Consultative Committee, (NENWACC), the organisation which arranged \$33,000 from the Federal Government's Regional Assistance Program to enable the funding of the centre's project report.

The report was prepared for the Tamworth City Council by Sinclair Knight Mertz and the subsequent business plan, also prepared (in April 2001) by Sinclair Knight Mertz and funded by the city council, cost \$12,000.

A submission for funding by the city council for consideration by the Federal Government during its 2002/2003 Budget was made late last month.

Referring to claims that the Federal Government had been formally presented with a submission for funding (about \$3.5 million) before last month, Mr Maher said the development and presentation of a business plan did not constitute an application for funding, "neither from your bank nor from the Federal Government."

He added: "There is a protocol for seeking government funding.

"However, it appears some people have chosen to use media persuasion rather than formal channels available in trying to force a funding announcement without the existence of a formal submission to accompany the various reports and/or studies being distributed."

Mr Maher said the experiences of NENWACC "would indicate that continuing attacks on politicians and political parties has no place in the overall process and is not likely to enhance the progress of the submission which (is now) in



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the hands of the Federal Government".

He would also like to draw an analogy between what had happened with the equine centre project and the Australasian Pacific Aeronautical College in Tamworth.

It was "a text book case of partnerships and cooperation between private enterprise, government and funding bodies".

When the project had been identified late in 2000, the partners were sought, the submissions were prepared and the funding was announced in the middle of last year.

"All were achieved without the need to move away from the established protocols.

"All partners worked toward the common goal of a new enterprise for the region and were able to demonstrate their commitment to the funding body.

"As a result, the Federal Government has committed to \$4.1 million over three years and today, the Class of 2002 - 32 students - are commencing their duties with the Australasian Pacific Aeronautical College and 18 are already enrolled for 2003."

Mr Maher said that both the city council and NENWACC were continuing to seek funding from various sources for the equine centre and both organisations had worked "in a professional manner throughout this process and have displayed commitment and leadership in trying to effect a positive outcome for not only Tamworth but for the region".

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Equine centre talks

By Gary Ruddick

Friday, 22 February 2002

POLITICS would be taken out of the debate for federal government funding of Tamworth's \$13 million National Equine and Livestock Centre with an independent body being asked to investigate its financial viability©

The move to depoliticise the funding issue came from Deputy Prime Minister and National Party MP for Gwydir John Anderson who yesterday chaired a meeting in Gunnedah of interested parties©

At the meeting were Tamworth-based National Party Senator Sandy Macdonald, National Party MP for Tamworth John Cull, Tamworth mayor James Treloar, equine centre board chairman Peter Botfield, and Tamworth City Council Environment and Planning Services director Paul Anderson©

Claiming political grandstanding was "not the way to go", Mr Anderson said he would ask Professor John Chudleigh, formerly of Orange Agricultural College and chairman of the Independent Assessments Panel for the Regional Solutions Program, to conduct the investigation©

He said the application for federal funding of \$30.5 million was a lot of money and it would be morally improper of him to fast-track Tamworth's case for such a development when there were many other worthy submissions which also had to be impartially considered©

"But I believe " we all believe " the concept is a good one and would be good for Tamworth and the New England electorate as well as all other parts of the north-west," Mr Anderson said©

He added: "So while saying we would like it to go ahead, it is my political and moral duty to ensure that after a proper investigation, it is deemed to be a viable proposition by an independent body made up of people of



Tamworth MP John Cull (left), mayor James Treloar and Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson map out their strategy in Gunnedah yesterday©
Photo: Paul Mathews



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integrity©"

If it were to be found viable, the funds could be made available "fairly quickly" and they could only come from the Regional Solutions Program which he had personally set up 18 months ago with a budget of some \$90 million©

"I would point out that we've had upwards of 1000 requests for similar projects, although I must say the Tamworth submission is one of the more costly ones," Mr Anderson said©

He said all submissions were looked at fairly and without bias, although usually "but not always" those towns and cities which were "not travelling well" were given a somewhat more sympathetic consideration©

"I don't think anyone could possibly quibble at us depoliticising the matter and certainly no one could question either the ability or integrity of John Chudleigh," Mr Anderson said©

Professor Chudleigh was well known to Tamworth, having chaired a three-day summit on new regional growth opportunities in the city in September last year©

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