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Confident viability will stack up

Monday, 25 February 2002

TAMWORTH mayor James Treloar said yesterday he was confident the "figures will stack up and we'll get our equine and livestock centre".

His comments followed news at the weekend that Deputy Prime Minister and National Party MP for Gwydir John Anderson had asked for an independent assessment of the business plan for the proposed \$13.7 million facility off the Goonoo Goonoo Rd in Tamworth's Longyard area.

The assessment will be undertaken within two months by Professor John Chudleigh, chairman of the Independent Assessments Panel for the Regional Solutions Program.

"I'm very confident the viability of the concept will be proven and once it is, I'd like to think it'll be fast-tracked," Mr Treloar said.

It was "most important" that Professor Chudleigh be familiar with the equine centre site and not just restrict his examination to the written submission.

"Professor Chudleigh knows Tamworth pretty well, so it's likely he is familiar with the site of the centre. But if he's not, then it's important that he comes to Tamworth to get a physical and visual grip of what we intend doing.

"Ideally, I would like to meet him on site to explain what we can do, but if he does in fact know the site, then I'd be prepared to travel to Canberra or wherever to explain the situation," Mr Treloar said.

He stressed that the submission was "a minimalist one only - it's a good one and it shows how the concept would be viable, but I'd like to be able to expand on what we've come up with. There's so much more involved than what we've put on paper."

Chairman of the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre Working Group Peter Botfield said the



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Chudleigh appointment was "very positive and I believe the concept will stand up".

He was also pleased it would "take the political heat out of it (Federal Government funding)".

Mr Botfield said he believed that if the project was approved and the Federal Government provided the \$3.5 million the equine working group was seeking, it would still take until about December 2003 before the facility would be operative.

This approximate 18-month time-frame would be necessary because development and building applications would have to be lodged (and approved) and funding additional to that provided by the State and Federal Governments organised.

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Windsor welcomes equine centre study

Monday, 25 February 2002

MOVES to take the politics out of the battle to get Federal Government funding for the proposed Australian Equine and Livestock Centre have been welcomed by Independent MP for New England Tony Windsor.

He said yesterday Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson was "on the right track" in his decision to have the feasibility of the project investigated by Professor John Chudleigh.

This was because Professor Chudleigh, as chairman of the Independent Assessments Panel for the Regional Solutions Program, was a man of recognised integrity and ability.

"Because it is John Chudleigh who will be investigating it, it makes me even more confident that it will be given the stamp of approval," Mr Windsor said.

"It's already been investigated by NSW Treasury and found to be financially viable, so I can't imagine Professor Chudleigh will come up with an opposite view.

"I also believe that once it's given the green light, the money should be made available as quickly as possible because there is always the fear that another State Government or city will come in over the top and pinch the concept."

Mr Windsor said his biggest concern was that if there was any procrastination, then some of the industry groups involved - such as some of the horse associations - could lose patience and decide to move elsewhere.

If that were to happen, it could greatly jeopardise Tamworth's ambition to be home to the finest equine and livestock centre in Australia.

Mr Windsor said he found it "somewhat bemusing" that the funding for the business plan had been provided by the Federal Government, yet it now was seeking another (Professor Chudleigh's) opinion.



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"The plan was professionally drawn up and delivered and now the Federal Government wants to have an independent assessment of it," he said.

"However, if the Chudleigh appointment will hasten the process then that's well and good - like most people I want this thing up and running."

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I'll wait my turn – Cull keeps quiet over equine centre

Thursday, 28 February 2002

THE Labor Party has resorted to cheap political stunts over the

proposed multi-million

dollar Tamworth equine centre, Tamworth MP John Cull claimed yesterday.

Mr Cull said Labor had forced a debate on the centre in State Parliament yesterday afternoon, knowing full well he could not take part.

"The Labor MPs who took part in the debate are well aware that under parliamentary rules, I cannot speak in the chamber until

I have delivered my maiden speech, which is scheduled for March 13," Mr Cull said.

He added: "Even an interjection by me would have been interpreted as a maiden speech, but Tamworth electorate citizens know I am 100 per cent committed to seeing the equine centre built and any suggestion otherwise is plain wrong."

Mr Cull said the National Party recognised the need to de-politicise the planning and funding process and the Labor Party was well aware that due processes must be followed.

"After my meeting with Deputy Prime John Anderson last week, those processes are now in place," he said.

Minister for Regional Development and Rural Affairs Harry Woods moved a motion on the equine centre following a decision by the Federal Government last week to establish a second feasibility study into the project.

The decision followed a meeting between Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson, National Party Senator Sandy Macdonald, Mr Cull, Tamworth mayor James Treloar and chairman of the equine centre working group Peter Botfield.



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Labor MP for Cessnock Kerry Hickey, who joined in the

urgent motion, said he was

"surprised and disappointed"

that Mr Cull had chosen not to participate in the debate.

"I realise Mr Cull has yet to give his maiden speech to Parliament, but he was never going to get a better opportunity than this.

"I'm sure the families of New England would have expected him to be on his feet fighting tooth and nail for the centre."

Mr Hickey said that following the defeat of the previous MP 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 future that the downfall of Stuart St Clair meant the downfall of the Tamworth Equine Centre," Mr Hickey said.

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Equine funding assault

Sunday, 3 March 2002

DEPUTY Prime Minister John Anderson is the firing line over his handling of Tamworth's proposed equine centre.

Country Labor MLC and central west farmer Tony Kelly has accused Mr Anderson for "once again" steadfastly refusing to commit funding to the Tamworth Australian Equine and Livestock Centre.

Mr Kelly slammed comments by Mr Anderson at a press conference in Sydney on Friday where he claimed the future of the proposed centre lay in the hands of a newly established committee.

Mr Anderson last week announced he would set up a committee to examine the feasibility of the proposal after meeting with Tamworth MP John Cull.

"Despite the fact that a feasibility study has already been carried out on the project," Mr Kelly said.

Mr Kelly said Mr Anderson last week also refused to commit to the project when NSW Regional Development Minister Harry Woods moved an urgent motion on the centre.

"What Mr Anderson has basically said is that the Federal Government has no role to play in the project," Mr Kelly said.

"Just like at the press conference today (Friday) Mr Anderson will be rolling out his 'up to the committee to decide' type response at every turn," Mr Kelly said.

Mr Kelly highlighted that the State Government committed \$3.35 million towards the development of the centre last December.

He said he could not comprehend why the Federal Government was not keen on "such a large job-generating project".

"The equine industry currently injects \$10 million into the region and this project alone would deliver millions of dollars in investment



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and create up to 600 new jobs," Mr Kelly said.

"Once again the question must be asked if New England is going to suffer because they elected an Independent Federal MP," he said.

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Equine grant 'in the bag'

By Gary Ruddick

Wednesday, 13 March 2002

TAMWORTH mayor James Treloar believes the city's chances of getting its Australian Equine and Livestock Centre are "much, much better than 50-50".

He said yesterday some people had expressed concern that there was a grave doubt that the Federal Government would come up with \$3.5 million in funding to make the AELC a "goer", but believed it would be illogical if it was not given the go-ahead.

"The State Government has already committed \$3.5 million to it and they did that after seriously investigating the feasibility study and business strategy.

"They (the State Government) had no problem with it and I should point out that Hoxton Park in Sydney already had a big equine centre operative (for the Olympic Games) when it approved the Tamworth concept," Mr Treloar said.

However, he had been personally able to convince Premier Bob Carr and other Cabinet members that only the Tamworth proposal would be big enough to handle the sort of events envisaged for the equine centre.

Mr Treloar said some of the events would need the participation of more than 3000 cattle "and there's no way Hoxton Park or any other such centre in NSW could handle that sort of traffic".

He was "enormously enthusiastic" about the AELC receiving funding from the Federal Government.

This was because it was being given an independent due diligence study by respected academic Professor John Chudleigh, chairman of the Independent Assessments Panel for the Regional Solutions Program.

Mr Treloar said the AELC's feasibility study had been prepared by respected Sydney planning company Sinclair Knight Mertz and its findings



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were overwhelmingly positive, including:

- Provided that sufficient grant funding was provided, the AELC would return a profit in its first full year of operation and provide a long-term rate of return of more than 10 per cent.
- The AELC would have an annual operating budget of around \$500,000 – sufficient according to the costings to ensure profitability from the start.

However, Mr Treloar said he was aware there was – and should be - a sense of urgency involved because other states and cities had also

"cottoned on" to the many advantages which an equine and livestock centre represented.

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Equine review boss on way

By Gary Ruddick

Thursday, 4 April 2002

THE man who literally has the power to sink or give the thumbs up to Tamworth's proposed Equine and Livestock Centre – Professor John Chudleigh – will visit the city on Tuesday, April 16.

This was reported yesterday by Patrick Maher, chairman of the New England North West Area Consultative Committee.

Professor Chudleigh has been commissioned by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Regional Services John Anderson to rule on the validity of the feasibility study of the centre which was prepared by Sydney firm Sinclair Knight Mertz.

Mr Anderson has gone on record that if Professor Chudleigh believes the centre will be an economic success as the consultant's report indicates, he will ensure the required federal funding of approximately \$3.5 million will be forthcoming.

Last month Mr Anderson met the equine centre's committee in Tamworth and repeated that the consulting company's feasibility study would be assessed independently by the Federal Government

Mr Maher said Professor Chudleigh would meet with the centre committee when in Tamworth and visit the showground and the proposed centre site near the Tamworth Regional Entertainment Centre.

"The process as agreed, between the Federal Government and the centre committee, ensures that the project is assessed within a timeframe, independently and on its own merits," Mr Maher said.

Mayor James Treloar said he and other members of the committee were looking forward to meeting Professor Chudleigh to discuss the potential for business "generated by equine activity in the region and opportunities for its development".



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He said Professor Chudleigh was in Tamworth last September to chair the New England North West Regional Forum.

He is chairman of the Regional Solutions Advisory Committee, director of the Rural Australia Foundation, chairman of the Asian Agribusiness Research Centre Advisory Board and member of the Orange Innovations Advisory Group.

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Three week wait

Gary Ruddick

Tuesday, 16 April 2002

THE man who holds the key to Tamworth getting its \$14 million equine and livestock centre will advise the Federal Government within three weeks on how the concept shaped up.

Professor John Chudleigh, chairman of the Independent Assessments Panel for the Regional Solutions Program, flew into Tamworth yesterday.

Speaking at a media conference, he gave a guarded response when asked if he believed the odds favoured the Federal Government producing \$3.5 million to match the State's promised grant.

His message was basically optimistic and he made it clear that if the figures stacked up, then he believed it would almost certainly get the green light.

However, the ultimate decision would be up to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Regional Services, John Anderson.

He also stressed that his first report to the Federal Government on the equine centre working committee's feasibility study and business strategy would not be definitive. There was more work to be done to determine the scheme's feasibility.

Professor Chudleigh said the equine centre was a "very ambitious project" but that did not mean it was a "pie in the sky" concept. He believed it had genuine merit.

Professor Chudleigh said the most pertinent matter was whether the concept was sustainable long-term.

It should also be understood that there were "just so many millions of dollars to go around" (meaning there were many similar



Not "pie in the sky": Professor John Chudleigh looks over an artist's impression of the proposed Tamworth equine and livestock centre. He said if the figures stacked up it would almost certainly get the green light. Photo: Robert Chappel



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schemes being promoted in regional Australia and Tamworth should not necessarily expect preferential treatment).

Professor Chudleigh said the concept was "not really tourism in the pure sense of the word". Unlike the Country Music Festival, it would be an industry project and on an individual basis the horse industry was "not known for big spending".

However, the good news was that the working committee had shown the centre would be used for about 240 days a year – "a big plus".

The "not-so-big-plus" was the element of risk involved in such ventures, notably ineffective or bad management.

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**Multi-million horse stud
invests**

Thursday, 18 April 2002

WHILE Tamworth's

proposed equine centre remains up in the air, the industry continues to flourish, with a multi-million dollar thoroughbred stud being built just south of the city.

Called Orange Grove Thoroughbreds, the development will be used to breed yearlings for both

private and commercial

purposes.

Sydney businessman Stephen Young, who owns the property, said he had many reasons for choosing Tamworth as its location.

"It's really a go-ahead town, it has all the facilities one requires. In terms of horses, it's free of all diseases endemic to the soil like the Hunter Valley where there are heavy horse populations. Stratheden Stud has proven what marvelous horses can be produced in the area," Mr Young said.

The property, which consists of 118 hectares, is situated on the New England Highway at Timbumburi.

Mr Young said the location was ideal because of its proximity to Tamworth and its abundance of water.

"We wanted to have a year-round supply of irrigation water to grow out our yearlings properly," he said.

Steers will also be raised on the property as part of its pasture management plan.

"They (steers) clean up the rough stuff, horses are very picky grazers," he said.

The development entails a number of buildings, which include the owner's residence, the manager's residence (already constructed), a

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worker's cottage, foaling and yearling barns, vet sheds, feed and tack rooms and a machinery and hay shed.

Around 15 km of wooden fencing has been erected and major irrigation works are under way, including 1.5 km of underground mains.

"It's obviously a project that's going to take time to get right. We've also got a large tree-planting program to begin later this year,"

Mr Young said.

Michael Collison has been appointed as manager, which Mr Young called a small coup for the stud.

"He was born and raised on Widden Stud. He's had experience in Kentucky and most recently was manager on David Haine's famous Kingston Park Stud in Victoria," Mr Young said.

"I've got an expert horseman second to none."

The stud is estimated to generate around \$300,000 a year.

Mr Collison said the farm won't stand any stallions, but sends its mares to studs in the Hunter Valley.

"To make it all viable, from the private side of it we'll run 20 mares and on the commercial side we'll need to run around 20 (client) mares to offset costs," Mr Collison said.

"The big vision is to produce horses that are sound, get to the race track and perform and give their owners a lot of enjoyment," Mr Young said.

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Return of AQHA boosts equine centre campaign

Friday, 26 April 2002

TAMWORTH is once more the hub of horsepower, with the Australian Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) National Championships kicking off yesterday after a two-year hiatus.

It's been a welcome return for both competitors and local residents alike, with the event expected to generate more than \$1.2 million in the city.

"Our roots are in this town. Really it was a decision to come back. Where the members wanted the event to be, was Tamworth," AQHA director Peter Belldon said.

The AQHA moved the national championships to Sydney last year after complaints from members about inadequate facilities at the Tamworth Showground.

Despite the top-class grounds at Homebush, the relocation proved a costly exercise for the association, which lost \$155,000.

The association's decision to return was sweetened by the Tamworth City Council offering assistance and local businesses putting up sponsorship.

The AQHA now hopes the return of its premier event will add weight to the city's bid for a multi-million dollar equine centre.

"The facilities here need an upgrade, we've been discussing this for years. We've shown our willingness to be part of the future regional developments here by moving back to Tamworth," Mr Belldon said.

"We're looking to expand both the AQHA office and the event. The equine centre will offer facilities for the benefit of everybody."

"I think the days of sleeping under a truck are gone. I think people want greater comforts," he said.

The three events – the Opal Classic, the New



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England Quarter Horse Association Pre-National Championships and the AQHA National Championships – boast a total of 1400 entries this year.

Competitors have come from as far afield as Perth, Cairns and Tasmania.

"Tamworth is more central for competitors," Mr Belldon said.

With 120 events contested over the five days of the national championships, just about every horse discipline is featured including dressage and camp drafting.

"We're trying to accentuate the versatility of the quarter horse, its trainability, attractability, all those qualities that make up the cadence of the horse," arena director Don Northey said.

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**Independent equine centre
assessment almost ready**

Sunday, 12 May 2002

DEPUTY Prime Minister and Minister for Regional Services John Anderson will learn this week if an independent investigation into the viability of Tamworth's proposed equine centre is positive or not.

Professor John Chudleigh, chairman of the Independent Assessments Panel for the Federal Government's Regional Solutions Program, expected to complete his report by late last week.

The report – deliberately designed to be detached from either business or political bias – was commissioned by Mr Anderson earlier this year.

The crux of the report is whether Professor Chudleigh will convey his belief that the concept could be a "goer" or not.

If, in his opinion, the facility would have a good chance of being a long-term success, then his report will indicate that – thereby making it difficult for Mr Anderson to reject federal funding of about \$3.5 million.

The State Government has already committed itself to \$3.5 million and the rest of the total money required, in the order of \$13 million, would be found via various funding measures such as individual and business donations and bank loans.

"I had to get some more details from the horse people following my visit to Tamworth early last month and I received them early this week," Professor Chudleigh said on Thursday.

"I'm in the process of writing the report and barring unforeseen circumstances, Mr Anderson should have it sometime next week."

Professor Chudleigh said however the report "may not be a straight recommendation... the minister will be presented with a number of options".



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He could not say when Mr Anderson would make his determination, but expected it would probably be fairly soon after studying the report.

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Equine centre decision near

Tuesday, 21 May 2002

TAMWORTH and district should know within a fortnight whether it is to get Federal Government funding of \$3.5 million for its proposed equine and livestock centre.

Press Secretary for acting Prime Minister and Minister for Regional Services, John Anderson, Paul Chamberlain confirmed yesterday the decision was close.

"Mr Anderson has received Professor John Chudleigh's report but was overseas earlier this month and is in Moree today and with Prime Minister John Howard overseas, he has a fair bit on his plate - I'm not sure if he's read the report yet, but I know there'll be a decision fairly soon," Mr Chamberlain said.

The decision hinges on Professor Chudleigh's report into the economic viability of the equine centre concept and plans which was commissioned by Mr Anderson as a politically impartial document.

Broadly, if the concept is seen by Professor Chudleigh as viable, then Mr Anderson could be expected to give it the "thumbs up", Mr Chamberlain said.

Professor Chudleigh was chosen for his economic expertise and because of his high reputation as chairman of the Independent Assessments Panel for the Regional Solutions Program, which was where the \$3.5 million would come from if the report was positive.

If the money is forthcoming, it will match the \$3.5 million promised by the NSW Government late last year.

The balance will come from interested groups such as stud and other horse and livestock societies and bank loans.

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Funding blow to equine centre

By Phillip Heads

Thursday, 30 May 2002

TAMWORTH'S push for a multi-million dollar equine centre at the Longyard hit its biggest hurdle yesterday.

The Federal Government would not kick in the \$3.25m needed to get the project off the ground after a damning financial report of the proposal, Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson said.

Professor John Chudleigh's report said the centre was not commercially viable and posed a significant financial risk for all involved.

He also said the most suitable option – and one likely to get government funding – was

to redevelop Tamworth Showground.

"While it is accepted that current facilities are lacking in many respects, the potential for improving these facilities to overcome most of the limitations should again be considered," Professor Chudleigh said in his report, which was based largely on the feasibility study prepared by Sinclair, Knight and Merz.

"The lack of commercial viability of the proposed centre (i.e. without significant subsidised support from all tiers of government) should be a major concern to all involved."

The decision means the State Government's promised \$3.25m injection is also in jeopardy. It was only ever tied to an equal commitment by the Federal Government.

The news was met with anger and disappointment at the National Cutting Horse Association's Futurity, an event worth about \$7m a year to Tamworth.

"This is a dump," a key figure in plans for the equine centre, Olympian Brien Cobcroft said from the Tamworth Showground.



Redevelop this site: No Federal funds for a new centre but perhaps for revamped showground facilities.
Photo: Barry Smith



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"I think Tamworth will lose this event and we could lose others as well."

Tamworth Equine and Livestock Centre working group chairman Peter Botfield said the showground was not suitable for redevelopment.

"If John Anderson and Professor Chudleigh could visit the Tamworth Showground now with the Futurity being staged there, they would see the showground is totally inadequate," Mr Botfield said.

Tamworth MP John Cull and the man he replaced, New England MP Tony Windsor, yesterday called for an urgent meeting of the equine centre working group.

Mr Botfield agreed: "Yes we'll re-group and have a look at the options ... we still have a chance as long as we keep the scrum tight".

Professor Chudleigh's report cast doubt on the proposed centre's ability to support itself and the ability of the equestrian industry to keep it going.

"The level of support requested for this project from the government and councils is well beyond the proportion which any community or interest group should expect," he said, adding that predictions of 240 days' use a year were off the mark; the showground was used 132 days a year.

The report said the working group should reconsider the project's scale and consider revamping the existing management of the showground.

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**Chudleigh report
disembowels city's equine
future**

LEADER EDITORIAL

Thursday, 30 May 2002

COMMERCIAL reality? Pure politics? Too high a risk?

Whatever the reason, the disappointment that the Federal Government will not commit \$3.5 million towards the Tamworth Equine and Livestock centre project is tangible.

There was no hiding the disappointment of the people behind the project yesterday after Deputy Prime Minister and National Party Leader John Anderson accepted the finding of Professor John Chudleigh that he was not able to recommend funding for the project.

Their disappointment will be mirrored by many who believe that the project offered enormous potential for Tamworth to establish itself as the equine centre of the country with the resulting economic spin-offs for the city and surrounds.

The Leader has supported this project since its inception because of the potential benefits and kudos it would bring to the city and its people.

We still believe that and share the disappointment.

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.

Others will point to the State Government's preparedness to back the project (condition on Federal matching funds), based on the Sinclair, Knight and Merz feasibility study findings.

That study found that the proposed centre based near the Longyard would be commercially viable - in its

operations.



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It did, however, also point out that the question of being able to service loans required to complete stage 1, even with \$5 million from the State and Federal governments, would be difficult. With \$8 million of funding, it would be feasible.

Professor Chudleigh has relied on these projections in his assessment.

He has not questioned the operating assessments of the feasibility study in that it could turn an operating profit in year 1.

Instead, he uses levels of proposed use and fee structures, accepted commercial wisdom that cost estimates tend to be on the conservative side, to say that even in stage 1, there could be a shortfall of funds.

Potentially, this he finds could be an unwelcome millstone around the necks, or in his own words, "a poor investment and a potential drain on local resources".

As well, he relies on the Regional Solutions Program, from where the funding was sought, as another justification for his decision.

That program's objectives, he says, are to help communities develop infrastructure, for which they have a high priority, and for which, in most cases, they have provided the majority of funds.

"The level of support requested for this project from government is well beyond the proportion which any community should expect. What Professor Chudleigh doesn't question is the need for better facilities.

He suggests redevelopment of the showground could provide the answer, and has gone as far as to suggest to the Deputy Prime Minister that he consider funding for such a project if it comes

forward.

Professor Chudleigh also describes the project as visionary and perhaps that is what the Federal Government is

lacking.

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By Phillip Heads

Monday, 3 June 2002

THE Tamworth Regional Entertainment Centre (TREC) should be seen to complement the city's proposed equine centre, not as an alternative.

Equine centre working group chairman Peter Botfield yesterday reinforced the organisation and the sporting horse industry's commitment to a brand new site at the Longyard.

The group had an emergency meeting yesterday morning in the wake of last week's news the Federal Government had refused to fund the proposal in its current form.

The report on which Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson based his decision suggested Tamworth Showground should again be considered as a

possibility. But Mr Botfield said that was not an option.

"The maths is simple; the showground is 38 acres, we're looking at a site that is 120 acres," Mr Botfield said yesterday.

That site is at the Longyard in South Tamworth, near the under-used TREC and that controversial lack of use could change if the equine centre is built.

"TREC could be used as a spill over facility for the equine centre and vice-versa. Traders, catering and other activities could be based there," Mr Botfield said.

"They could complement each other and we could create a precinct that covers all sporting and entertainment needs.

"And there are a lot of relationships – such as grounds maintenance – that still need to be investigated which could work in favour of such a plan."

Tamworth MP John Cull said the Government's decision gave the working group the perfect opportunity to get it right.



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"There is no point in forging blindly ahead with a proposal that could end up as a burden on the community and the industry," Mr Cull said yesterday.

"Professor Chudleigh's report gives us the opportunity to revise the original proposal to one that will ultimately be in the best interests of the community as a whole."

Last week's knockback was a temporary setback, but Mr Botfield was confident the project would go ahead.

"We will succeed if we remain focused on the goal and we must have one plan that is supported by all the groups," Mr Botfield said.

"We just need a little bit of time to have a look at the basis of the things we are proposing and we need to make sure our figures stack up.

"That will give us a better picture of what we want to do and where we want to go with this. It's not the end of the world, just the end of the day... and there's always another day."

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Long road for equine centre

Sunday, 28 July 2002

TAMWORTH'S quest for a multi-million dollar equine and livestock centre is still grinding away with no "quick fix" in sight.

Tamworth Pastoral and Agricultural Association president Greg Backhouse described the quest as having no quick fix after a meeting on Thursday night between representatives of the association and the equine centre working group.

While conceding that the talks were amicable, he said their main purpose had been to try to find out what was involved for the showground if the equine centre went ahead there rather than at the preferred South Tamworth site near the Tamworth Regional Entertainment Centre (TREC).

"It was made pretty clear that there's still a lot of work to be done - they [the equine centre people] have to do another study, they have to go back to first base," Mr Backhouse said.

While conceding that there had been "some friction" in the past between the show society and "some civic leaders", he believed that there was sufficient goodwill "for that bridge to be fixed ... I think the signs are good".

He said it was now thoroughly understood that for an acceptable equine centre to be built, sufficient funding was of paramount importance "and fragmentation won't get us anywhere".

He said it would be "nice to have the ultimate" - the world-class facility earlier sought when hopes were high that the Federal Government would provide more than \$3 million of Regional Solutions funding to the project and

therefore match a

commitment from the State Government.

But that had not happened and it now seemed that for Tamworth to get a high-class equine centre, both the working group and the show society would need to work in tandem to

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achieve the ambition, he said.

"But we have to know what they want first," Mr Backhouse said.

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Showground back in city's sights for equine centre

By Gary Ruddick

Monday, 26 August 2002

TAMWORTH City Council is still optimistic it can help get a multi-million dollar equine and livestock centre up and running – even though, if built, it won't be as grandiose as originally planned.

Because of the Federal Government's decision earlier this year not to partly fund the proposed \$20 million-plus centre near the TREC building off the New England Highway, attention has turned towards the showground which was originally claimed to be too small.

At its monthly meeting tonight, the council will decide whether or not to allocate \$5500 for the completion of an independent report on the showground as a suitable site.

Council's environment and planning services director Paul Anderson has advised that "the money is there" – from the internally restricted reserve for the equine centre investigations.

Mr Anderson said the equine centre working group had met with the Tamworth Pastoral and Agricultural Association in June to discuss the matter and it was agreed that a further study of the showground "to resolve the issue of its unreality or otherwise" was

warranted.

Members of the P&A Committee had spoken to Sinclair Knight Mertz (the company which completed the original New England Highway site report) and were told that such a report could be completed within a suitable timeframe.

"Although not identified in the current financial year's management plan as an item of expenditure, there are sufficient funds (\$13,104) within the internally restricted reserve to fund the new report," Mr Anderson said.

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**The \$5000 survey
Tamworth had to have**

Gary Ruddick

Sunday, 8 September 2002

LAST week this column mentioned the Tamworth City Council's decision to spend \$5000 on a survey to determine if the old showgrounds site could be used for an equine centre.

The point was made that it was like chucking money down the drain because the survey would most certainly prove that because it would cost about \$4 million to relocate the trotting track, and the site would be totally unsuitable for the multi-million equine and livestock centre.

I must admit that when I wrote it, the piece only told half the story, and I must say the other half is quite funny.

The facts are:

(1) Yep, the survey will almost certainly give the thumbs down to the

showgrounds.

(2) Yep, the council will have knocked off \$5000.

(3) However, the council actually wants the survey to formally prove the showgrounds won't be suitable for the new equine centre.

(4) It actually wants the thumbs down so the equine centre board (and committee) will then be able to say to the Federal Government: "You knocked back our original proposal to site the equine centre off Goonoo Goonoo Rd on the grounds that it was not economically feasible, but hey, with the showgrounds site now finally and formally discredited, we'll come up with a more modest plan for the Goonoo Goonoo site, and our hand will be out for some of that Federal funding, thank you."

"We'll get our equine centre, don't worry about that," one councillor told me while at the same



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time stressing that he "wasn't" telling me. ... I think he was trying to tell me something for the record but off the record.

ooo

IT'S funny how some people embrace rumours which are unfounded and can be extremely hurtful to others.

Last week, for example, I received a letter from the resident of a small town which stated that a prominent citizen – who was named in the letter – had been convicted in court for (1) drink driving and (2) a speeding offence.

Yes, the speeding bit was correct, but the drink driving allegation was

a total fabrication –

completely unfounded.

Interestingly, the person who wrote the letter actually provided his name, address and phone number.

He even signed it, which I guess is to his credit, but the whole idea really wasn't very smart.

That's because if the letter had been passed over to the clearly defamed person, the letter writer himself could have ended up in court, facing a very serious charge.

ooo

I COULDN'T understand what The Leader photographer Robert Chappel was on about the other day when he said, "I'm flying to Sydney next week and guess what day I'm going?".

But the penny eventually dropped. He was referring to the fact that he'd be up in the sky on September 11.

He thinks there won't be many passengers aboard to talk to on the way down or back.

ooo

FAST food outlets (1): It's no secret that Burger King is now under new ownership and operating with much vigour from the city council-owned building.

What rent does it pay the council, you ask?

Answer: \$45,000 a year, so maybe the council made a good investment when it whacked the building up at the corner of Peel and Murray streets. Funnily enough, the original tenant – Matilda's – paid \$90,000 and actually volunteered that figure. Naturally, the council couldn't get Matilda's signature on the contract quickly enough, but, of course, the famous kangaroo jumped too high and fell over. In Tamworth, anyway.

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Patience, please

Gary Ruddick

Monday, 30 December 2002

THE possibility of the Tamworth Showground being used as the venue for the city's proposed equine and livestock centre will soon be able to be formally considered.

Chairman of the centre working group, Peter Botfield, reported the decision following comments from National Party MP for Tamworth John Cull who believed a decision would need to be made as soon as possible on where the centre would be sited.

Mr Cull made the comments in Saturday's Leader.

If the decision wasn't made, Mr Cull said, the National Party's funding commitment of \$3.5 million could "not go on forever and the stakeholders need to identify a proposal that will secure the future of the equine industry in Tamworth".

Greater urgency needed to be placed on progressing the issue and achieving a positive outcome for the industry before it was too late, he said.

Mr Botfield said he believed the public was "getting the wrong message" because of the report from independent assessor Professor John Chudleigh, which appeared to skittle the preferred Goonoo Goonoo Rd site.

"We were advised to revisit the showground site and we have done this and the Melbourne design and planning company Sinclair Knight Metz has just about finished its report - it's now in draft form," Mr Botfield said.

Some people were strongly of the opinion that the showground site was totally unsuitable because it was not big enough, "but we were advised to consider it as a viable location and that's what we've been able to do, thanks to the report's generous financing by the city council".



To be at the showgrounds or not to be there?: Peter Botfield at the showground's indoor arena yesterday.
Photo: Robert Chappel



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Unfortunately, the issue had also been clouded by the fact that neither Professor Chudleigh nor the Federal Government, which commissioned his report, had issued the working group with any financial parameters for the project.

"It's true to say that there have been various political issues involved and they have not made it any easier," Mr Botfield said.

The show society was under pressure on the issue of location, but had at all times been helpful.

"They've got a difficult enough job as it is because show societies all over Australia are increasingly short of volunteers and they all have a limited financial base, so I can only say their continued help and goodwill has been extremely welcome," Mr Botfield said.

He also claimed that while he personally admired Mr Cull, he did not think his comments as reported in The Leader were very helpful.

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Taking the reins

Gary Ruddick

Wednesday, 22 January 2003

THE Tamworth Pastoral and Agricultural Association yesterday lobbed a grenade into the debate about the establishment of an equine centre in Tamworth by coming forward with its own plans.

The society has been the meat in the sandwich in the bid to establish a national equine centre here, but has decided to take the initiative by proposing a regional centre capable of staging national events at a revamped

showgrounds.

And it believes funding for such a project could come from the same sources as that proposed for the national equine centre - the State and Federal Governments.

The P&A's action has been prompted by what it believes is too much procrastination and not enough progress with the Goonoo Goonoo concept and a concern that if quick action is not taken, the city may lose some, if not all, the horse industry and association events it already has.

The "grenade" is that neither the equine centre working group nor the Tamworth City Council has been formally advised about the intentions of the P and A Association's board of direct-

ors which is headed by Brian Sutton, general manager of the Tamworth Cooperative.

"The association's board of management today announced an ambitious plan to upgrade the showground facilities to meet the expectations of user groups which in recent years have demanded improvements," Mr Sutton said.

The improvements would include:



We're on the move: members of the Tamworth P&A Association's board of directors at the showground yesterday. From left are Bob McPherson, Greg Backhouse, John Rodd, Ian Southwell, chairman Brian Sutton, Toots Gilder, Don George and Brett Nies. Photo: Paul Mathews



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- New stabling to accommodate an additional 100 horses and designed to allow owners to camp closer to their animals. The new stables would be completed within a year.
- A new indoor arena designed to seat up to 3800 people.
- Private boxes, featuring an upstairs entertainment facility capable of accommodating 1000 people.
- A substantial upgrading of the car parking area, involving a tunnel under the existing trotting track with 700 car parking spaces in the centre of the showground.
- More stables to allow for the accommodation of 400 horses in modern, permanent facilities. Portable stabling would increase the number of horses able to be housed 600.

Mr Sutton said the board believed it had been waiting long enough for people to make decisions on the future of a modern • From page 9

equine facility "and in the meantime, other centres are building facilities which are taking events away from Tamworth".

On the important aspect of finance, Mr Sutton said the project could be completed within three years at a total cost of about \$6 million "which is less than half the cost of the proposed first stage of the equine facility in the Longyard area now being

debated".

"We have \$2 million in assets which no one else has got and we believe we have a good chance of funding from the Federal and NSW Governments," he said.

The State Government had committed about \$3.5 million and the Federal Government had told the equine centre working group it was not opposed to the concept but it would have to "tone down" its funding requirements.

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Centre could be lost

Wednesday, 22 January 2003

"WE DID not decide Tamworth wanted a national equine centre – others did."

That was the frank comment yesterday from Tamworth P&A Association board of management chairman, Brian Sutton, when questioned about the decision to upgrade the showgrounds and whether it might mean the end of plans for a national equine centre in the Longyard area off Goonoo Goonoo Rd.

Asked if the association's plans would effectively scuttle the proposed Longyard scheme, Mr Sutton said the biggest hurdle would be Tamworth City Council.

"They will be disappointed with what we are proposing, but we'll just have to work around that," he said.

He said his board colleagues were concerned some horse associations had announced they had either lost hosting rights for annual events to a competitor or they might have to move their secretariat from Tamworth.

The Tamworth City Council last year helped finance an independent report on the showground as a suitable site following the Federal Government's decision not to partly fund the proposed \$20 million-plus centre near the Tamworth Regional Entertainment Centre.

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