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**P&A push for showground site**

Wednesday, 22 January 2003

"BITTERLY disappointed" was the reaction of Tamworth's equine centre working group head, Peter Botfield, to news yesterday the P&A Association has plans to push for a regional equine centre at an upgraded showgrounds.

The "we'll go it alone" announcement came from members of the association's board of directors in what was a bit of a bombshell for those pushing for the national centre to be built on a new site off Goonoo Goonoo Rd.

While not disappointed to learn that the association intended to upgrade the showground at a cost of several million dollars if it could secure Federal and State Government assistance, Mr Botfield said it would seriously destabilise the city's determination to provide a world-class equine centre.

Mr Botfield said he believed there were several factors against the plans.

He said the P&A Association did not appear to be listening to its clientele (meaning, among others, the various equine associations and societies headquartered in Tamworth).

He said the promised \$3.5 million funding from the State Government would not necessarily be diverted to the association, nor could it be taken for granted that the Federal Government would provide funding.

Mr Botfield said it had long been apparent that the showground site could never offer the facilities planned for the proposed equine centre, near the Longyard area off Goonoo Goonoo Rd.

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".

Mr Botfield said he was saddened by the fact that the P&A decision would "push the plans for a national equine centre off the books for some



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time".

He said he was disappointed the association board members had not spoken to himself or other working group members about their intentions.

"They (the showground board) did not come to me with their plans and they did not report the working group's activities or aspirations either in full, or accurately, to their members".

Mr Botfield said he had serious doubts that the showgrounds would be enthusiastically supported by the horse industry.

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## Council to snub P&A equine proposal

Friday, 21 February 2003

TAMWORTH City Council is backing the establishment of a national equine and livestock centre on a greenfields site – with or without the cooperation of the local P&A Association.

The council's official position that the showground is unsuitable and cannot be upgraded will go to its monthly meeting on Tuesday night following the recommendation of its finance, policy and community services committee.

The council's attitude to the possibility of the showground being home to an equine centre has not softened in the

wake of a consultancy firm's report that concluded the showground "is not suitable for such a facility of the size and magnitude proposed".

That opinion was a result of discussions and meetings held with various stakeholders and potential users of a national equine centre.

The rejection of the showground comes only weeks after the P&A Association revealed it was prep-

ared to push for an equine centre

on the showground site.

P&A Association management committee president Brian Sutton said "at the end of the day, the users [various horse societies] will have the say" on what proposal – if any – is given the green light.

"If the users don't support us, we have nowhere to go," he said.

Reporting to the council's committee, environmental and planning director Paul Anderson said the latest report had been commissioned after the equine centre working group was unsuccessful in sourcing federal funding to match a \$3.5 million state



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government grant.

In his report to the finance committee, Mr Anderson said the P&A Association had publicly launched its new concept for the redevelopment of the showground for a horse centre, but the design concept had yet to be submitted to the council for assessment and determination.

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**Call for cooperation on equine centre**

Thursday, 27 February 2003

THE renewed push for a Tamworth District National Equine and Livestock Centre could be raised in the NSW Parliament in coming weeks.

New England Independent MP Tony Windsor said he was confident the development could go ahead with a united community approach and determination on all fronts.

He said the collective attitude from equine industry groups, Tamworth City Council and the local business community was that if \$10 million could be raised privately, the development could get off the ground.

Once the community obtained the initial start-up funds, Mr Windsor said, the matter could

be raised in Parliament with greater certainty

of NSW Government

endorsement.

Almost certainly with government approval would come its promised \$3.5 million funding, which Mr Windsor said was still "on the table".

"We have the genesis of a proposal as long as all parties work together and quickly, however all funding revolves around the fundraising," Mr Windsor said.

He believed Tamworth faced a double-edged sword.

If the city didn't raise the initial funds and gamble on the viability of the development, then many if not all the national equine groups would inevitably leave Tamworth and take away enormous financial benefits, he said.

Mr Windsor said some of the equine groups wished to base their headquarters in the centre and it was possible appropriate private enterprise, such as an equine museum and veterinary clinics, could call the centre home.



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Meanwhile, Tamworth City Council deputy mayor Barry Murphy said in an address to this week's council meeting that the "greenfields site versus the showgrounds site" situation had become too political.

Warning that the concept was "heading for disaster", Cr Murphy said there was a possibility of two equine centres being established, with neither being viable.

"I believe the P&A Association should have full access to any reports [concerning the centre] and should be a valued member of any talks," he said.

Mayor James Treloar said he supported the concept of a project manager/coordinator being appointed to advise on the centre.

"He or she would be there to realistically assess the situation and not be captive to any organisation or power bloc ... it would be a valuable contribution with no political involvement," Cr Treloar said.

Cr Allan Joyce said he believed there was a feeling that the council had "locked out" the P&A Association but that was incorrect.

Cr Treloar said he did not think either the State or Federal Government would fund either site or organisation unless there was agreement between the two.

The council voted to seek Regional Solutions Program assistance to fund a project manager and instructed environment and planning services director Paul Anderson to submit a further report to the council on the situation.

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**Equine centre a goer**

By Gary Ruddick

Tuesday, 11 March 2003

A COMMITMENT OF \$1 million and the identification of a site have given rise to confidence that Tamworth's national equine and livestock centre will get off the ground at last.

Four of the key user groups have now received approval from their boards to push ahead with the project and commit funds while the Member for New England, Tony Windsor, has been asked to approach the Tamworth City Council and NSW Premier Bob Carr to help construct a financial package.

Agreement on development of a greenfields site was reached at a meeting on Monday of representatives of equine and livestock groups, ruling out the re-development of the Tamworth

showgrounds.

"It was also the belief of the meeting that the industry would be able to raise in the vicinity of \$1 million towards the construction of a centre and all groups noted they had received the approval of their boards for the centre concept," Mr Windsor said.

He was pleased with the progress being made and believed the industry's commitment and sense of unity towards the project would play a key role in ensuring it became a reality.

The Tamworth P&A Association was not involved in Monday's discussions.

Meanwhile the National Party MP for Tamworth, John Cull, yesterday called on Premier Bob Carr and the Labor Party to confirm before the NSW elections on Saturday week its \$3.5 million commitment to the proposed equine and livestock centre.

The Liberal/National Coalition had committed \$3.5 towards the establishment of the centre and voters should know where the Labor Party now stood on the issue.

However, the Country Labor candidate for



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Tamworth Ray Tait said: "I don't know what planet John Cull is on.

"He must have been away on the three separate occasions that the Minister for Regional Development (Harry Woods) reaffirmed the State Government's offer of \$3.35 million for the equine centre. If only Mr Cull's mates in Canberra would put their very short arms in their very long pockets and meet the State Government's commitment."

Mr Cull said that the centre, if developed, would provide an opportunity for regional and national equine and livestock groups to work together towards the creation of a facility that met the interests of all user groups and satisfied community expectations.

"To ensure full utilisation of a centre, all groups need to work towards a consensus, respecting each other's autonomy, and fully encompassing their individual needs," Mr Cull said.

"For the centre to be financially viable, it would need to be fully supported and utilised by all sections of the equine and livestock industry, including the Tamworth P&A Association."

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**Equine centre may become reality**

By Gary Ruddick

Friday, 14 March 2003

TAMWORTH'S ambition to establish a world-class equine and livestock centre may have taken a giant stride forward following a meeting this week of representatives of four national horse associations and the Independent MP for New England Tony Windsor.

Those present agreed on a new strategy designed to fast-forward the centre and it involves the various horse associations finding a collective \$1 million, other business interests and organisations finding – in cash or kind – another \$4 million and the State Government providing \$5 million towards the initial \$10 million set-up.

Mr Windsor said yesterday he was optimistic the \$5 million could be raised from non-government sources.

Tuesday's meeting was attended by representatives of the Tamworth-based National Cutting Horse Association of Australia, the Australian Quarter Horse Association, the Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association and the Scone-based Australian Stock Horse Society.

As well, he was confident the city council would offer support in various ways, such as the possible provision of engineering and design services.

This was because the council recognised the long-term advantage the centre would bring to the city and district, Mr Windsor said.

A number of other groups had indicated that if the centre looked to be a serious goer, they would offer financial support.

Mr Windsor said he had spoken to Premier Bob Carr earlier this year and he had acknowledged the importance of the centre to Tamworth and the State

generally.



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"I believe that if we find the starting \$5 million, Mr Carr would look sympathetically at finding the finishing \$5 million," Mr Windsor said.

"Mr Carr has already promised he would provide \$3.5 million if that was matched by the Federal Government, but if that was not forthcoming, I think he would still look kindly at the \$5 million proposition.

"What must be clearly understood is that if we don't do something, it will be an enormous blow to the city ... but if we do succeed, it will boost tourism, industry and property values and result in many other advantages."

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**Equine centre plan pleases groups**

By Gary Ruddick

Monday, 17 March 2003

REPRESENTATIVES of four of Australia's major equine organisations have expressed strong support for a new plan designed to ensure Tamworth gets its long-awaited equine and livestock centre.

The new plan, as reported in Saturday's Leader, revolves around the horse industry and other industry and non-government organisations finding \$5 million and the NSW Government coming up with a "finishing" \$5 million grant.

The plan was outlined by independent MP for New England Tony Windsor who met representatives of the National Cutting Horse Association of Australia, the Australian Quarter Horse Association, the Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association and the Scone-based Australian Stock Horse Society.

Commenting on the "new plan", Gail Ritchie, the general manager of the cutting horse association, said she had "a feeling of optimism that I've never had on this issue before".

She added: "This is the first time the equine industry has said it can and will find \$1 million to help make the centre a goer."

Ms Ritchie said it was also hoped that cattle and sheep interests – plus other livestock organisations – would also throw their support behind the centre.

"But we also need help from the community – business interests, community organisations and individual citizens," she said.

She believed that once it was up and running, "the whole city will get behind it and make it a winner".

"We equine people need it, but so does the whole town," she said.



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As for the P&A Association, she said: "In no way would we want them shut out of it."

Rosemary Harmer of the campdraft and rodeo association, was equally optimistic and said the centre would attract her association as a permanent administrative and events tenant.

"Our thinking is that if we can offer the right centre to horse and other livestock societies and associations, people will come from all over the eastern states because the right venue is a more important consideration to them than the cost of travelling."

Ms Harmer said her association had 5000 members and was responsible for many events during the year.

Hunter Jones, of the Australian Quarter Horse Association, said his organisation had 112,000 horses on its registry, of which 50,000 were purebred.

"Without doubt we'd move our administration there and if the new plan is successful, I would be hopeful that a start on the centre would be made within months," he said.

Kevin Humphries, the chairman of the New England and North West Area Consultative Committee, said he had told Mr Windsor that if the committee could help in any way, it would.

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**Equine centre needs a united front**

By Gary Ruddick

Friday, 21 March 2003

TAMWORTH'S hoped-for equine and livestock centre will not progress if it continues to be debated in the media, according to chairman of the New England and North West Area Consultative Committee Kevin Humphries.

Mr Humphries, who lives at Moree, said on Wednesday 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 the stakeholders and the community and keeps it on a merry-go-round".

Mr Humphries said he was making his feelings known because he wanted to clarify the role of the consultative committee.

After an initial study in 2000, which recommended developing a new site, the investigation was expanded in 2001 after the city council acted as the proponent and the consultative committee funded a \$35,000 study.

That study proposed a two-stage development made up of stage one at \$16 million and stage two at \$23 million.

Mr Humphries said the chairman of the Federal Government's Regional Solutions program Professor John Chudleigh then investigated the

proposal, and while identifying it as a "good concept", he concluded there was insufficient evidence to support the economic viability of the centre.

The professor's recommendation included revisiting the showground site and that through the consultative committee and Regional Solutions, a feasibility study be conducted on linking the future of the equine industry to the

showground.

"That is our current position," Mr Humphries said.



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Saying it was important to "stay with the facts on any project development", Mr Humphries said he did not believe it was helpful for New England Independent MP Tony Windsor to be "constantly quoting million dollar support from various groups" because it was misleading and confusing.

Mr Humphries said like any well coordinated project, he was sure the Minister would look on it favourably, but "the rabbit out of a hat approach" wouldn't work.

If the Tamworth community wanted the equine centre to progress, a strong partnership needed to evolve, but to date this had not been achieved, he said.

"Support has been offered through the consultative committee and the Federal Government. How the Tamworth community accesses that support is up to them," Mr Humphries said.

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**Never say die**

Matthew Deans

Tuesday, 3 June 2003

DESPITE fears that the lucrative National Cutting Horse Futurity could be taken away from Tamworth, key supporters of the proposed National Equine Centre are confident they can "kick a goal".

The Federal Member for New England, Tony Windsor, was responding to comments that the proponents of the equine centre had just six months to get a firm proposal on the table and get approval for State Government funding before a decision was taken to move the Futurity.

As thousands of cutting horse enthusiasts rallied at the Tamworth Showground for the NCHA's annual showcase event, the Futurity, Mr Windsor said the revised design had to be completed and handed to Premier Bob Carr as soon as possible. If not, he agreed with comments from National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA) secretary Gail Ritchie that "the equine centre could be dead in the water".

"I am confident we can kick a goal," Mr Windsor said.

He said another reason to rush, other the NCHA's claim was that if Mr Carr did not assess and approve the design then the \$3.5 million State Government's pledge, that was again renewed in January, could grow stale.

The development's future rests with the equine centre working and steering committee's and the user groups - the National Cutting Horse Association of Australia, the Australia Quarter Horse Association, the Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association and the Australian Stock Horse Society.

"Basically the equine group representatives on the working committee have been told to draft the development plan and as it would be a positive avenue for Tamworth, community contributions are also going to be part of the



National  
Cutting Horse  
Association  
secretary Gail  
Ritchie.



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financial plan," he said.

Mr Windsor said he would have liked to have handed over the design two weeks ago, however, but understood planning for the recent Australian Quarter Horse Association Championships, the upcoming ABCRA calendar event and the current futurity had impacted on progress.

Mrs Ritchie said it has been evident at the Futurity that cutting horse association members are seriously talking of relocating the major event to Dubbo, Rockhampton or Toowoomba.

"It just sickens me to think that there are privately owned equine centres similar to our development scattered across the US . . .we really do need a community fund for this to be built," she said.

In 2002 the development received its greatest blow when the Chudleigh report questioned the long-term viability of a \$10 million Tamworth equine centre.

As a result the Federal Government would not offer funding.

Nevertheless Mr Windsor and the steering and working committees rallied supporters and requested a second proposal be completed.

He indicated the revised equine centre could cost between \$8-10 million, , with the \$3.5 million State Government pledge and a \$1 million commitment from the three major equine bodies to date.

The Tamworth P&A Society has maintained its opposition to involvement in the project on a greenfields site, preferring to have the showgrounds redeveloped.

The identified option for the location of an equine centre is vacant land off the Sydney Road, near the Regional Sporting Complex.

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**Tamworth may lose Futurity in 2004**

By Matthew Deans

Tuesday, 10 June 2003

THE National Cutting Horse Association of Australia could choose to stage next year's Futurity away from Tamworth if progress isn't made on the proposed Australian National Equine and Livestock Centre development.

Coming off its most successful Futurity, the cutting horse association board has three options to consider in six week's time.

The association board could downscale next year's event at the Tamworth Showgrounds or relocate the calendar event to Toowoomba, Newcastle, Dubbo or Werribee, Victoria.

The Futurity could be held elsewhere for one year with plans of relocating it back to Tamworth once the equine centre is built.

Another scenario is that Tamworth could lose the Futurity permanently.

National Cutting Horse Association secretary Gail Ritchie said either way the association headquarters would remain in Tamworth in the short-term.

"We say we are thinking of going elsewhere every year. I am sure people are sick of hearing us say this, but we are at the point where the event cannot grow at the showgrounds," Mrs Ritchie said.

"Basically the Futurity's future here hinges on whether the equine and livestock centre starts to develop, even if a block of land is bought then that's a start."

Pleasingly, she said, profits, competitors and crowds were up markedly at the Futurity, which concluded on Sunday, however complaints had come from participants and spectators who battled for showground space.

"If we chose to downscale the event then that's a retrospective step, but we could do this for a year if there's assurance the centre would be



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built."

She said while power failures and the showground's lack of stalls and stables had hindered the Futurity, a counterbalancing positive was the support of Tourism NSW board chairman Maurice Newman.

"Maurice attended the dog trials and the flagship event and said he was more than committed to assisting the Futurity to grow further and this can only happen if the equestrian centre is built which he was also very supportive of," Mrs Ritchie said.

The cutting horse association last week used the last of a \$90,000 three-year Tourism NSW grant to promote the Futurity.

Next month the board will meet in Tamworth to assess the success of the Futurity and the event's future.

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**Equine groups put forward joint plan**

By Matthew Deans

Wednesday, 17 September 2003

A REVISED plan for the proposed National Equine Centre has been finalised.

Tamworth-based equine user groups – the National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA), the Australian Quarter Horse Association of Australia (AQHA) and the Australian Bushmen's and Campdraft and Rodeo Association (ABCRA) – have offered unequivocal support to a united cause.

Representatives from the user groups have drafted the revised plan.

It is an amended version of the \$10-20 million equine centre that was proposed in 2000 and was the focus of the unfavourable Chudleigh report on behalf of the Federal Government.

Comments from the industry groups, Member for Tamworth Peter Draper and New England Federal Member Tony Windsor suggest the starting cost of such a centre could have been downscaled to about \$8 million.

Mr Draper recently informed the NSW Government of the updated proposal and will request an audience for the involved parties with Premier Bob Carr.

"This is all very positive. It is encouraging that the industry has worked together to get to this point. Historically this hasn't happened before," Mr Draper said.

"Hopefully we'll be given the opportunity to present this new and exciting proposal to the Premier in its entirety. If I haven't heard from him in the next two days I'll be banging on his door."

Mr Draper said NSW Regional Development and Small Business Minister David Campbell answered his question in Parliament about whether the NSW Government's \$3.35 million commitment to



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the centre in 2000 was still on the table.

The minister's response, "yes, it's still there", referred to the former equine centre proposal.

In 2000-01 the NSW Government committed the funding on the basis the Federal Government would also contribute financially, but the Chudleigh report found the \$20 million proposal would not be viable and the Commonwealth didn't support the project.

AQHA general manager Hunter Jones and NCHA secretary Gail Ritchie indicated the NSW Government would receive a summary of the proposal, which would hopefully be elaborated on at a later date.

Cost amendments to the original proposal would include downsized stabling.

"Our ideas have also evolved," Mrs Ritchie said.

"A lot of things have changed in three to four years, such as insurance cover and accreditation."

She said the centre would benefit not only the equine and livestock industry, but also sports such as beach volleyball and motocross.

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**State backs equine centre**

By Matt Deans

Friday, 31 October 2003

THE horse has again led Tamworth to water.

NSW Premier Bob Carr on Wednesday pledged a "no strings attached" \$3.35 million commitment to the proposed National Equine and Livestock Centre.

From a meeting with a unified audience of equine user groups and committed local politicians and community leaders, Mr Carr confirmed

the State Government's

willingness to push on in support.

No longer is the State commitment reliant on a similar commitment from the Commonwealth.

The task ahead for the Australian Quarter Horse Association, the National Cutting Horse Association and the Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association is to raise \$6 million from the wider

community.

More than \$750,000, which the three organisations have set aside for the project, is also worked into the equation.

Mr Carr envisaged the Federal Government would add its financial weight to see the centre erected.

"Whether the Federal Government comes to the party or not, if the equine centre can raise their funding support we'll be there," he said.

"Tamworth is the perfect location for a National Equine and Livestock Centre."

"As well as the infrastructure, tourism and geographical advantages of Tamworth, four of the peak national equine associations are already based there."



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In December 2001, Mr Carr initially announced the funding commitment provided the Federal Government made a matching contribution.

After an unfavourable independent assessment of equine activities, the Federal Government doubted the viability of what was floated as a \$10 million facility.

Yesterday, the Member for Tamworth, Peter Draper, described the breakthrough as the best news Tamworth had received all year.

"It was the weight of the argument and the unified approach that was shown which guaranteed the Premier's decision," Mr Draper said.

"The difference between the original centre proposal was that it was to be built by individuals who were hoping to attract the interest of the equine groups.

"Under this revised proposal it is three equine industry groups that are working together to achieve the centre," he said.

Mr Draper said more importantly politics had been put aside."

He said the Federal Government could still come to the party because a vacant seat remained at the table.

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**Feds may come to party**

By Matt Deans

Friday, 31 October 2003

THE stable door remains open for a Federal Government contribution towards Tam-worth's proposed National Equine and Livestock Centre following the State Government's \$3.35 million commitment this week.

On Monday, the North West Area Consultative Committee is to receive a copy of the revised proposal for the multi-purpose facility and will pass on the information to the Federal Government for reassessment of its funding stance.

Yesterday the city woke to the news that Premier Bob Carr had extended his initial funding promise and in doing so made the funding non-reliant

on a Federal Government contribution.

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.

Member for New England and chairman of the equine centre steering committee Tony Windsor said yesterday an application would be made under the Federal Government's Regional Partnership Program.

A spokesperson for Deputy Prime Minister and Regional Services Minister John Anderson said the Federal Government would assess the merits of the revised proposal and announce whether funding would be forthcoming.

At the back of the minds of the Australian Quarter Horse Association (AQHA), the National Cutting Horse Association and the Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association is the lesson learnt from the Chudleigh report.

The report ruled out Commonwealth funding for a \$13 million plus equine centre on viability



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grounds.

AQHA general manager Hunter Jones said the revised proposal was closer to the tune of \$9 to \$10million.

Mr Jones said the next step involved forming a tight-knit working group.

Mr Windsor said: "The working group would prepare plans to present to the relevant Commonwealth agencies and to industry and local business groups to finalise the funding process."

Mr Jones said at this stage a handful of potential greenfields sites had been identified as ideal locations for the centre.

"Three are in close to the CBD," he said.

He said for each benefit the centre brought to the equine industry there would be five extra benefits for Tamworth.

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**Sport** - Local - General Sport**Rodeo push for bigger venue**

By Samantha Newsam  
Friday, 30 January 2004

THE success of the recent Australian Bushman's Campdraft and Rodeo Association's National Rodeo Finals has once again reinforced the support for the proposed National Equine and Livestock Centre.

All three nights of the Inner Circle Rum finals were sold out, with tickets some of the quickest selling tickets of the entire Country Music Festival.

After their most successful finals ever, ABCRA promotions co-ordinator Di Hallam said the only negative feedback she had received was from disappointed fans who missed out on tickets.

"This is the fourth year that we've sold the event out," Hallam said.

"The rodeo again this year just reinforced that Tamworth needs a bigger venue."

ABCRA executive officer Rosemary Harmer said the association wouldn't be able to grow without a new venue.

Asked whether the response to the finals indicated the need for the equine centre, Harmer said it was an "unequivocal yes".

"From our perspective it's gone as far as we can go at the showground," she said.

"We're certainly limited by the seating so it's imperative that we get a new venue.

"Another reason we want to move somewhere is so we can run both our rodeo and campdraft finals at the one venue."

Currently the rodeo finals are held at the Indoor Arena, and the campdrafting finals at Dungowan but Harmer is hoping they will be able to run both together in the near future.

She said the ABCRA would continue to push for the centre but was expecting an announcement

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on the Equine Centre future in the upcoming weeks.

At last report, the proposed centre had been buoyed with the State Government announcing a commitment of \$3.35 million.

And while Commonwealth funding had been ruled out for a \$13 million plus centre on viability grounds, the three major associations behind the proposal – the Australian Quarter Horse Association (AQHA), National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA) and ABCRA – were hopeful of still securing funding for a revised proposal.

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**'Good news' on equine  
centre expected soon**

By Sam Bartlett

Tuesday, 17 February 2004

THIS week's National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA) national finals event at the Tamworth Showground has put the long-debated equine centre for the city back in the spotlight.

And both the Member for New England Tony Windsor and NCHA general manager Gail Ritchie are expecting good news.

Speaking from Canberra on Monday, Mr Windsor said an announcement on the centre was close, within the "next couple of weeks".

"I'm extremely confident that the equine centre will go ahead. I don't want to pre-empt anything but it will go ahead," he said.

Mr Windsor said he would wait for the announcement before commenting further on the matter.

Gail Ritchie also declined to go into detail on the matter, saying only she was "very confident" the long-awaited centre would be approved for Tamworth.

Cutting horse competitor Donna Flynn, in Tamworth from her Keerong home to train for the June Futurity, fully supported the construction of an equine centre in Tamworth and believed it would have wide-ranging benefits for the horse industry in general.

"It would be fantastic and it's long overdue. I think it's going to boost the breeding side of it and the overseas market should improve. It gives a better market for the breeders and the trainers and it would be easier to import bloodlines from overseas," she said.

The proposed National Equine and Livestock Centre has already attracted a \$3.35 million grant from the State Government, but a contribution is needed from the Federal Government to see the project realised. The Australian Quarter Horse Association, the National Cutting Horse Association and the



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**Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association also aims to raise \$6 million to put towards the project.**

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**Everyone gets a prize**

Tuesday, 20 April 2004

"CALL ME Santa Claus" ... that could well have been the message from a friendly and relaxed Premier Bob Carr when visiting Tamworth yesterday.

Mr Carr brought with him or re-pledged \$5,091,000 in funding for the tourist and leisure, sporting, cultural, community and health sectors during his time in Tamworth.

In the almost-four hour visit to the city by private jet, the Premier kick-started the region's dream for a greenfields-sited equine and livestock centre by anno-

uncing a new board of directors to bring it to fruition.

At the same time, he declared the \$3.35m his Government had "put on the table" some years ago had stayed there, waiting to be spent.

He also announced \$1.5 million for the New England Area Health Service's Tamworth Base Hospital, to ensure the best elective surgery waiting times in the state, \$200,000 for the city's Riverside Sports Complex, \$21,000 for Meals On Wheels for a kitchen redevelopment project and \$20,000 for the new regional art gallery.

While "Santa Claus Carr" could be forgiven for being mightily upbeat about the largesse, he nevertheless conceded that the future of the CountryLink rail services was "still being evaluated" - politspeak for the service may be axed.

And when questioned about the forced amalgamations of so many councils throughout the state, he said it would prove "a good thing in the long term" and



Riding high: Greg Maguire, the new head of Tamworth's National Equine and Livestock Centre board, is pictured with Premier Bob Carr, who yesterday announced the State Government's \$3.35 million funding package was still "on the table".



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pointed out that the amalgamation of the Tamworth city and all or parts of the Barraba, Manilla, Nundle and Parry shire councils would be "tremendously positive for the region".

But the "big news" of the day concerned the equine and livestock

centre.

Premier Carr and his entourage travelled out to a Nemingha horse training complex to tell the world that the "new look" board would be headed by businessman Greg Maguire.

The board's aim was to do everything possible to get it off the ground and in action as soon as possible, he said.

Importantly, while everything should be done to persuade the Federal Government to also chip in – and Mr Maguire said he was confident this would happen – the venture according to Mr Carr could still be a "goer" without Federal funding.

While the new board contains some prominent names in the Australian equine industry, it is dominated by business and non-equine industry

people.

Mr Maguire's board comprises James Treloar (Tamworth Regional Council (TRC) administrator), Paul Anderson (TRC), Member for New England Tony Windsor, Member for Tamworth Peter Draper, businessman Scott Higginbotham, businessman Terry Keating (Tamworth Regional Development Corporation), Ray Tait (community representative), Dick Cameron (Australian Stock and Station Agents' Association), Rosemary Harmer (Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association), Hunter Jones (Australian Quarter Horse Association) and Gail Ritchie (National Cutting Horse Association of Australia).

Welcoming Mr Carr, Mr Maguire said the three equine societies represented on the board

had collectively pledged \$750,000 towards the centre.

"It's money they've got, it's already there, it doesn't have to be raised," he said.

The Tamworth Regional Council had pledged a

land/services package worth \$1.6

million.

The estimated cost of the project was about \$9 million and he was confident Federal funding could be arranged, although that had proved a problem in the past.

Mr Maguire made the following points:

(1) The concept had been pursued for more than 10 years because of the "ever present understanding of the dynamic growth in equine-related sports and stock events".

(2) There was a recognised shortage of facilities for national equine and stock events.

(3) The centre would boost tourism, add increase employment possibilities.

(4) It would add \$30 million to the economic benefit of the region.

Mr Windsor and Mr Draper welcomed the confirmation of the untied NSW Government funding and the announcement of the new board to drive it forward.

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### Acting PM has his say on the equine centre

Gary Ruddick

Sunday, 6 June 2004



Giddyup: Doubly busy as acting Prime Minister last week, John Anderson nevertheless found time to visit the annual NCHA's Futurity at the Tamworth showgrounds on Friday. Photo: Robert Chappel.

WITH John Howard overseas meeting such globally important people as California Governor Arnold

Swarzenegger, Tamworth was

graced by the

presence of Australia's acting Prime Minister John Anderson on Friday.

Mr Anderson flew in for a quick visit to the showgrounds where the National Cutting Horse Association of Australia's annual Futurity was being held.

Accompanied by the chairman of the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre, Greg Maguire, Mr Anderson said he was "thoroughly aware" that all of Tamworth and the north-west was supportive of the push for a \$9 million equine and livestock

centre.

However, Federal funding, if it was to be forthcoming, would have to be sourced from the Regional Partnerships program and that could only be achieved if all the "i's were dotted and the t's crossed".

He chose not to become engaged in questions and answers about whether a revamped Tamworth showgrounds could be the venue for the equine and livestock centre or whether the two organisations should join forces to collectively work towards a new

combined showgrounds/equine/livestock centre on a greenfields site.

"That's entirely, in my opinion, a matter to be addressed locally," he said.

Asked if the Regional Partnerships program



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could only be successfully "tapped" for money  
 if competitive neutrality was observed – in  
 other words, neither  
 the equine/livestock centre board nor the  
 showgrounds committee would be treated  
 favourably or unfavourably at the expense of  
 the other – he again pointed out that local unity  
 was the key to getting the new facility up and  
 running.

Politics, he stressed, would not be involved in  
 any decision that might be made.

However, as a farmer himself, he was  
 thoroughly conscious that should Tamworth get  
 a new equine and livestock centre, it would be a  
 "tremendous boost" to the city and north-west  
 generally.

So, in a nutshell, what was the acting Prime  
 Minister's message?

Nicely, it was: "Tamworth, get your act together  
 and you may get what you are seeking."

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**Centre step closer**By Gary Ruddick  
Friday, 2 July 2004

TAMWORTH'S proposed multi-million dollar Equine and Livestock Centre is another step closer to becoming the jewel in the crown of the north-west horse industry.

A 21ha block of land in the Longyard area has been earmarked as the preferred site and a consultancy firm has been given the go-ahead to draw up a business plan to facilitate federal funding.

But backers of the project – which has been a political football in recent years – are keen to steer clear of further controversy and say they won't pursue funding from Canberra until after the federal

election.

The centre's board of management this week appointed Bevan Coote and Associates to undertake and prepare an application for \$4 million in Federal Government funding under its Regional Partnerships program and to complete a business plan.

NSW Labor Government funding of about \$3.5 million has been guaranteed for some years.

The Bevan Coote expertise will come at a cost of \$30,000 which the Tamworth Regional Council agreed to pay at its meeting this week.

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



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centre board – Greg McGuire – is bending over backwards to avoid this."

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**Equine centre funding mooted**

By Matt Deans

Monday, 20 September 2004

**SPECULATION** mounted last night that Tamworth's Regional Equine and Live-stock Centre may at last get the green light for federal funding.

A major announcement is to be made in Tamworth this morning, when Deputy Prime Minister and Regional Services and Transport Minister John Anderson attends a function at the Golden Guitar complex.

A media alert issued late yesterday by Tamworth-based Nationals' senator Sandy Macdonald stated simply that a "major" announcement would be made regarding regional partnerships funding for a Tamworth project.

The Golden Guitar site at the Longyard Complex on Ringers Rd is close to the proposed Greenfield site for the equine centre.

Sources close to the equine centre development, who The Leader spoke with last night, would not confirm or deny the content of the announcement.

It is thought that if the development proceeded with a Federal Government commitment - estimated to be double the State Government \$3.5 million pledge - the centre would be established near the Tamworth Regional Entertainment Centre.

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 and Livestock Centre board chairman Greg Maguire confirmed two seats had been reserved for the Tamworth P and A. He then reportedly met with the P and A to discuss the project.

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**Board travelled long, hard road to get the right result**By Gary Ruddick  
Tuesday, 21 September 2004

Unveiled: Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson, Senator Sandy Macdonald, Tamworth Regional Council administrator James Treloar and Greg Maguire.

IT'S been a long and rocky road to get to the historic stage where the Federal Government was able to announce yesterday that it will throw \$6 million into the Australian Equine Livestock Centre (AELC) pot.

Peter Botfield, the foundation chairman of the AELC board of management, said there had been discussions and meetings going back 15 years between people involved in the horse industry about the possibility of Tamworth building the nation's finest equine and livestock centre.

However, it wasn't until 2000 when the AELC was established, made up of local MPs, city council representatives, horse association representatives and other stakeholders, that the idea was formalised.

Independent MP Tony Windsor was largely instrumental in getting the organisation up and running.

Northern Daily Leader files show there were many rocks ahead for the enthusiastic and vigorous board, but in hindsight, it can now be said it was not until April this year when a new AELC board of 12 members was established under businessman Greg Maguire that the rocks started to be kicked aside and traction gained.

Mr Maguire then went on record: "I promise you, I'll get this."

Only days ago, he said: "It's the hardest challenge I've ever faced, but we'll get it."

And now he has.



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**Showpiece as 'big as Texas'**

By Simon Chamberlain

Tuesday, 21 September 2004

WHEN the ribbon is cut to open the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre, Tamworth will have a nationally significant multi-purpose equine and livestock venue.

Equine architectural specialist Timothy Court – who was the man behind the plans for the Sydney Olympics equine facilities – has designed the concept.

Mr Court also designed the Scone racetrack and the Scone Equine Research Centre as well as numerous projects around the horseracing world.

Crucial to the design of the equine and livestock campus will be its proximity to the Tamworth Regional Entertainment Centre.

A paved, tree-lined forecourt will link the centre with the TREC and, according to Mr Court, creating a visual link between the two massive buildings will drive the design.

The total roof area of the arena – including the administration building – will be close to 7000 square metres. The indoor competition arena where the horses compete will be 80m by 40m.

The Sydney International Equine Centre's arena is only 70 by 35m.

In the first stage of construction there will be seating for 3100 people, however when the centre is finalised it will be able to seat 5200 people.

There will be 500 stables contained within a secure area as well as fields for show jumping, dressage and polocrosse.

The fields can be split into two polocrosse pitches, eight dressage arenas or three large jumping arenas.

There will be parking for 220 semi-trailer, gooseneck vehicles or horse floats and the car park will have 320 permanent spots that can be



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expanded to a total of 1000 parks.

Mr Court said the overflow parking would be on grass. The truck park will overlook the grassed competition arenas. There is also a campdraft and rodeo arena.

The centre will link with the TREC, as it will play host to livestock sales as well as hosting merchandising and the majority of food outlets during big events.

The TREC will only 130m from the centre's livestock yards.

The security offered by the enclosed compound in which the stables will be built will be acceptable under Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service rules to host international horses for equine events.

Environment concerns are also a major part of the design process, Mr Court said.

Storm water from the complex will be collected in a large dam on the roadside of the block and it will be purified using the same technology used in the Sydney complex.

Macrophite ponds, which are beds of reeds and rushes, use the plants to collect any particles with their root

systems.

Bedding and animal waste will be collected and carted offsite for composting.

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**Potential to generate****\$550m in 10 years**

By Simon Chamberlain

Tuesday, 21 September 2004

THE establishment of the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre in Tamworth will generate an estimated \$550 million in the first decade of operation.

This is the opinion of the centre's board chairman Greg Maguire who was on hand at yesterday's announcement of \$6m in funding by the deputy prime minister and Member for Gwydir, John Anderson.

The funding has been granted by the Federal Government from the Regional Partnerships' program and will be available on a needs basis during two years.

It will be combined with \$3.35m from the State Government, \$2m from equine user groups and a contribution from the Tamworth Regional Council of up to \$2.7m.

It will also mean that when the centre opens for business it will be debt-free according to Mr Maguire.

Progress on the development is expected to be speedy. Contracts for the 22.3ha block of land south of the Tamworth Regional Entertainment Centre [TREC] have been exchanged and Mr Maguire expects earthworks for the \$14m project to begin next July at the earliest.

Administrator for the Tamworth Regional Council, James Treloar said the announcement that the centre was to go ahead was the most significant in this region.

"This centre will be to Tamworth what grapes are to the Upper Hunter," Mr Treloar said.

He said Tamworth's vicinity to Scone, the horse capital of Australia, and Armidale, home of a number of beef breed organisations, will enhance the economic and geographic value of the centre.

Mr Anderson said yesterday's funding



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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.

"This development is the result of much hard work and dedication over the last decade from the Tamworth community and industry."

He said Tamworth was already recognised as the major equine centre in the country with the value injected by the industry to the Tamworth regional economy to be estimated in excess of \$40m to \$50m annually.

The centre would cement Tamworth's reputation as a place of excellence in regional Australia and put it on level footing with facilities that could only be found in the big cities, he said.

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**Vision may overtake music****fest**

By Gary Ruddick

Tuesday, 21 September 2004

"ECSTATIC. That's how I feel ... this is a magnificent result," James Treloar, immediate past mayor of Tamworth City Council said yesterday of the long-awaited equine and livestock centre winning \$6 million in federal funding.

The proposed centre was "potentially of equal significance to the region as grapes are to the Hunter Valley".

"It's even potentially more significant to Tamworth than country music," he said.

At present, 149 days of every year saw a horse event or competition staged in Tamworth "and if we can grow that by another 100 days, it'll be a fantastic boost".

Mr Treloar said that the centre would not just be for equine events ... "don't forget it's going to be a livestock centre and with so many cattle breeds secretarially headquartered at Armidale, the sky's the limit".

Peter Botfield, the foundation member of the initial Australian Equine and Livestock Centre board (AELC) and former city councillor, joined Mr Treloar in applauding the news.

"It shouldn't be forgotten, either, that we owe a lot to the show society, because they developed the horse sports in Tamworth," he said.

Mr Treloar said there was "no political strings attached, no electoral or political advantage for anyone" in the funding, although he paid tribute to federal Nationals' leader John Anderson for his contribution.

"The \$6 million 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



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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 \$6 million and not be tainted by accusations of "pork barrelling".

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## Many hands made light(er) work of bringing plan to fruition

Tuesday, 21 September 2004

THE input from Deputy Prime Minister and Member for Gwydir John Anderson was one of the crucial factors giving Tamworth a national equine and livestock

centre.

Chairman of the equine and livestock centre board, Greg Maguire, said Mr Anderson's meetings with the Tamworth P&A helped smooth the path for the acceptance of two seats on the board by John Rodd and John Collier, the P&A's president and vice-president.

Mr Maguire said the P&A had fully signed on to the project with all documentation now finalised.

The Member for New England, Tony Windsor extended his congratulations to all groups involved in the development.

Mr Windsor said the announcement recognised the value of the current equine and livestock industry to the region and the potential for growth. Mr Windsor also congratulated the equine centre board and particularly Mr Maguire for his efforts as chairman and former steering committee chairman Peter Botfield.

Those who had campaigned for a modern equine centre and members of the P& A Association who initiated the process many years ago also came in for praise.

The Member for Tamworth Peter Draper was another applauding the announcement, however he said it was not surprising the announcement was made on the eve of the Federal election.

Executive Officer of the Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, Rosemary Harmer, said it was great to see what had been a long-term dream come a step closer to reality.

"We've been behind the project the whole way.



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We put our money where our mouth is, and are ecstatic that it now looks like taking shape," Ms Harmer said.

But she says that not everyone was so optimistic that the project would go ahead.

"This project has been talked about for about 10 years, so I think a lot of people were getting cynical about the prospect of ever seeing it get off the ground."

Ms Harmer has said that the centre would open up a range of new prospects for development for the association, as well as promoting the expansion of all equine-related ventures in the region.

"This is going to not only give us an opportunity to expand the range of events that we run, but will also give us a nationally recognised venue to stage them."

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**Shared interests merged for better**

Tuesday, 21 September 2004

JOHN Rodd, Chairman of the Tamworth Pastoral and Agricultural Association and member of the National Equine and Livestock Centre board, said the announcement was a positive move.

"You can't have two venues like this in the same area, and so by bringing the two organisations together we are going to be 100 steps forward ..." Mr Rodd said.

Mr Rodd also expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to join the board with fellow P&A member John Collier, saying that the move had helped merge the interests of the two organisations.

"The Federal funding was more or less dependent on marrying the P&A into the arrangement, so having two positions on the board has given us the chance to see first hand how we fit in," Mr Rodd said.

Also cited as a deciding factor in the P&A's co-operation with the project was the involvement of Member for Gwydir John Anderson and Nationals candidate for New England Trevor Khan.

"We have been talking on and off with John Anderson and Trevor Khan, and that has allowed us to take a new look at the development," Mr Rodd said.

But Mr Rodd also indicated that gaining full support for the project from the P&A's rank and file was far from a done deal.

"Our role at the moment is to study and digest the report and take the findings back to our members, so that they can decide if it is the best option for them," Mr Rodd said.

Another stakeholder in the development, the National Cutting Horse Association, has also welcomed an injection of Federal funds into the project, saying that it will allow their organisation to thrive.



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General manager of the association, Gail Ritchie said the announcement of Federal funds for the project would come as welcome news to their members.

"We are absolutely thrilled. We had been hoping something like this would happen; its great news," Ms Ritchie said.

"We need larger facilities to grow, as there just aren't enough stables at the showgrounds, and this will allow us to hold larger shows and get more members involved."

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**'Ordinary Australians' at  
mercy of 'privilege'**

By Aidan Cromarty

Tuesday, 23 November 2004

Tamworth businessman Greg Maguire has hit out at Tony Windsor and Greens leader Bob Brown, flatly rejecting the need for any inquiry into funding for the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre.

The suggestion of an inquiry into the funding comes after suspicions that such funding may have been reliant on Mr Windsor's exclusion from the project, a claim Mr Maguire vehemently denies.

Central to his defence of the project funding – as chairman of the Equine Centre board – was the assertion that all funds were granted in accordance with national funding guidelines and after review by independent consultants, and were not related to any allegations of bribery.

Mr Maguire also expressed in a written statement his "disgust" at the actions of Mr Windsor in bringing his claims to attention under parliamentary privilege while investigations by the Australian Federal Police were still ongoing.

And although Mr Maguire said he had been publicly vindicated by the failure of the AFP to find any substantial evidence suggesting he made any offer towards Windsor, he said this was not enough to rectify the damage done to him personally, as well as his family and friends.

The statement called for an apology from Mr Windsor and other unnamed politicians who had "jumped on the bandwagon" to accuse Mr Maguire of being involved in bribery.

Mr Maguire also called for changes to the parliamentary privilege system in order to provide some form of redress for those who were publicly attacked under this provision, saying that ordinary Australians were powerless to defend themselves against accusations made in parliament.



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**Equine funding deal remains solid**

Tuesday, 23 November 2004

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," he said.

Similarly, the State Government is still committed to funding the equine centre, confirming that its funding offer would be unaffected by the results of any inquiry into the matter.

A spokesman for premier Bob Carr's office said that the State Government funding offer remained solid. "We are still fully supportive of the project, and our funding offer remains the same," the spokesman said.

An offer of \$3.5million in state funds for the centre was initially announced to be conditional on Federal funding, but this condition was later withdrawn.

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," Cr Treloar said.

"The Opposition can have a copy of our business plan to scrutinise if they wish, but this project has nothing to do with the allegations and will be going ahead."



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**Maguire key to centre**

Thursday, 25 November 2004

THE current chairman of the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre, Greg Maguire, was responsible for developing the project

into a viable and realistic funding opportunity.

This emerged when the consultative committee, caught up in independent MP Tony Windsor's bribery allegations, yesterday released confidential board papers relating to its decision to endorse an equine centre in Tamworth.

The New England North West Area Consultative Committee (ACC) released details of its involvement in the processes and gave reasons for its recommendation to the government to support the project.

"In order to allay any of Mr Windsor's concerns over our processes the New England North West ACC has taken the extraordinary step of releasing confidential board papers relating to the assessment of the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre and the board's decision to endorse the project to the Australian government," committee chairman Kevin Humphries said in a statement.

Mr Humphries said the project was found to have deficiencies when it was assessed by Professor John Chudleigh in mid 2002. Mr Humphries said the deficiencies were addressed under the leadership of Tamworth businessman Greg Maguire.

The equine centre won the support of the consultative committee after the problems were addressed.

"At all times Mr Windsor has been made aware of the concerns of the New England North West ACC and our offers to assist any proponent wanting to develop this concept," Mr Humphries said.

"It was not until the current chair of the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre, Greg Maguire, at the request of Mr Windsor, did the project develop into a viable and realistic



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funding opportunity."

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**Fears of equine hold-up**

By Gary Ruddick

Thursday, 2 December 2004

THE Windsorgate affair and its aftermath has the potential to delay work on Tamworth's \$14m equine centre, according to mayor James Treloar.

With a Senate inquiry going ahead into the Government's Regional Partnerships Pro-gram – of which the National Equine and Livestock Centre was a beneficiary – Cr Treloar said he felt there was "totally no doubt at all" that establishment of the centre would be held up.

The Senate inquiry was rubber-stamped yesterday, once the Democrats had agreed to support the call from Labor, the Greens and Independent Senator Meg Lees.

Recent allegations by the member for New England, Tony Windsor, appeared to have been the catalyst for the inquiry motion, when he claimed he had been "uninvited" from an official Government party for the opening of an aged care centre in Bundarra.

He has since been "reinvited" to the ceremony tomorrow.

But Cr Treloar is concerned at the possibility of no Federal Government money being allocated while the inquiry is held – and with a reporting deadline in August, that could mean months of stalling.

Cr Treloar said the initial attempt to obtain Regional Partnerships (RP) funding for the equine centre had been thwarted because the figures didn't add up.

But after further work on

the submission, the Federal Government agreed to fund it by \$6m, which was announced during the election campaign.

Cr Treloar said all relevant criteria had been followed, and a business plan put forward by the centre's board of directors had been assessed by a review panel.

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The board recruited an external analyst to assess the conceptual plan for the centre and contracted a Brisbane-based quantity surveying firm.

"This involved roadworks, the structure of buildings and materials to be used in them, earthworks, traffic movement, people and animal safety – you name it, we had all of those things checked out by the experts," Cr Treloar said.

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 McGuire to take over as chairman.

No

"The council even invested another \$40,000 to ensure the board was in a position for the RP funding, and was advised in August that it had been favourably reviewed by the New England North-West Area Consultative Committee," Cr Treloar said.

Cr Treloar said the financial aspect of the equine centre had been "very conservatively" costed and would, at worst, break even in year one, and possibly even make a modest profit.

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