

Submission
No 87

**INQUIRY INTO PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP ROSEHILL
RACECOURSE**

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 18 July 2024

Partially
Confidential

Inquiry into the proposal to develop Rosehill Racecourse – Submission 18 July 2024

Introduction and context

I have been a member of the Australian Turf Club (ATC), formerly the Sydney Turf Club, since 2002. I am not a racehorse owner or trainer. My interest in the sport of racing began in my childhood during the 1970s. Trips to racecourses at various locations throughout New South Wales were often a part of family holidays, along with regular attendance at all existing Sydney racecourses, including Rosehill. Horse racing has always been an important facet of my social and cultural life. The preservation of Rosehill Racecourse as an important historical and cultural precinct is deeply important to me, my family, and my friends. It has been a place for people from all walks of life to gather for more than 140 years, having hosted many of the most important races in the world as well as being an important contributor to the Parramatta economy.

Having attended the two members' consultation sessions that went ahead, one at Rosehill and one at Randwick, during February 2024, I know that I am not alone in my bewilderment, anger and distress at the possibility of losing the best racecourse in Sydney and a very important historical site in western Sydney. The secrecy of the process and the betrayal of members by the board in conducting secret discussions with the government about a proposal that has never been endorsed by members has added to the sense of outrage that I feel in the way that I and other members, along with members of the local community have been treated with contempt when asking valid questions about how this proposal came to be and also when we have asked for details.

I wish to record that I have written to the NSW Premier twice about my objection to the sale of Rosehill racecourse. My first letter, dated February 2024, attracted a response that I consider to be an insult to my intelligence. It was clearly a template, sent to anyone who raised any issue in relation to the Rosehill Racecourse proposal, without giving respect to the writer by addressing the actual issues raised. I wrote again to the Premier in April 2024, advising that the response that I received to the concerns that I raised in my original correspondence was unsatisfactory and that I would require comprehensive answers to all of the issues that I had raised. To date, I have not received any response to my letter of April 2024 at all. This is demonstrative of the dismissive way that those with objections to this utterly woeful proposal have simply been ignored and belittled. I am not someone who habitually writes to government officials, but when I do, I expect that someone will treat my concerns seriously. Unfortunately, the experience of writing to the Premier has left me feeling that a deal has already been done and that making any comment is futile as it will not be treated as being worthy of a response. I hope to be proven wrong by this inquiry process.

My submission in relation to the terms of reference are as follows:

a. The unsolicited proposal process

Despite being a member of the ATC of 22 years standing, I found out through a media announcement in December 2023 that Rosehill Racecourse was to be sold so that 25,000 new dwellings could be built on the site and that covert discussions had been taking place between the ATC Board and the NSW Government, with the Board having approached the government without the knowledge or authorisation of the membership. Hearing about this through the media was shocking, confusing, and saddening. Not only had the Board, elected as the representatives of members, gone behind the backs

of the membership, but the Premier and the Housing Minister, who participated in the press conference in December 2023, behaved as this was a victory to be celebrated, demonstrating that they had not considered, for one moment, what ordinary people who are affected by this decision would think or feel, let alone horse trainers and owners, who make great contributions to the industry and employ many people. It was as though they were oblivious to the idea that any opposition to this proposal would ensue. This led me to the view that the Board may have led the Premier and the Minister to believe that this was an easy deal to be done and that the members and industry participants would be forced to accept it. As elected representatives of the membership, the Board had no right to engage in the covert discussions without the knowledge and approval of the membership. Consequently, they have breached their responsibilities as Board members. The Board of the ATC and the Government rode roughshod over the membership of the ATC, industry participants, those whose livelihoods depend on the existence of Rosehill Racecourse, and the people of western Sydney, all at the same time.

After the announcement was made in the media, a notification was then sent to members stating that consultation would take place despite the fact that consultation should have taken place before any discussions with the Government were undertaken. This was not in keeping with proper business and consultation processes and gave the appearance of the Board trying to tidy up a mess in order to cover themselves. Further to this communication, four dates for consultation meetings were then set down during February 2024 and March 2024. However, only two of these meetings took place, both in February 2024, one being held at Rosehill Racecourse and the other at Randwick Racecourse. During these meetings, many members spoke against the proposal. The anger, hurt, and distress of many members was evident. While many members spoke against the proposal, I do not recall one single person speaking in its favour. Many questions asked by members were left unanswered.

After the second meeting, another communication was sent to members to state that the third and fourth consultation meetings would not go ahead as questions had been raised at the first two meetings about which more research needed to be done and that these meetings would be postponed to a future date. These two meetings have never been rescheduled.

It is difficult to find words to describe how appalled I am by this woeful example of business management and consultation and how sad I feel about the way that the Board seems to think that it can treat the membership of this race club, some of whom have been attending Rosehill and supporting racing for their entire lives. It seems that everything that has been done by the Board flies in the face of transparency and fair dealings. It is a case study of how not to conduct a membership organisation. I am also disgusted that the main source of information that I have been able to obtain as a member since the postponement of the third and fourth consultation meetings has been mainly through the media. I have read numerous articles written by racing journalists about discussions that have taken place and statements that have been made, but have not been communicated to members by the Board. I have heard the Premier say in the media that the sale of Rosehill isn't a "done deal", with comments that members would have to vote. I have also heard Mr V'Landys state that not enough work had been done on the proposal and that if it wasn't good for racing, it wouldn't be happening, or words to that effect. How anyone can think that it is appropriate to be communicating with members through the media boggles the mind. Members have

been disenfranchised and disrespected without any good reason. Now, this Upper House enquiry is taking place in lieu of any contact from the ATC with its own members.

I hope this inquiry can do better in properly considering valid concerns about this proposal.

Even now, it has never been explained why discussions with the Government occurred without members' knowledge and without authorisation. I would like this inquiry to discover why this happened.

c. The role of the proposal in meeting housing targets

I note that the role of the proposal in meeting housing targets was a topic that I raised in my correspondence to the Premier of April 2024, which has never been answered.

I currently live in Waterloo, NSW, nearby to the new metro station and the Waterloo housing estate. Having lived in this area for more than 10 years, I have attended multiple consultation meetings organised by officials under the previous state Government, at which proposals for the redevelopment of the public housing estate were discussed and reviewed at length. The last time I attended one of these meetings, prior to the last election, the proposal that had been developed for the estate appeared to me to be impressive and a vast improvement on what is currently in existence. The proposal not only sought to improve streetscapes, but was also aiming to increase the number of dwellings available with vastly improved quality of accommodation. The proposal contained a mix of public and private housing and would have increased the number of public housing dwellings. In my letter to the NSW Premier of April 2024, I requested to know why this plan had been shelved when taxpayers have already spent countless thousands or millions on its development. Of course, I have received no answer. The silence in relation to this matter is in stark contrast to what I consider to be an irrational focus on the destruction of the historic Rosehill Racecourse and social precinct for the sake of 25,000 dwellings that the Government seems hellbent on placing on this site.

Why is the 'government turning a blind eye to the crime, the human misery, and the degradation that is part of life around the Waterloo Housing Estate while it focuses on selling Rosehill racecourse for housing?'

Much of this could be addressed by implementing the already developed and detailed plan to rejuvenate the Waterloo Housing Estate, a plan that has been completed and is ready to be activated, which included additional public housing to what already exists in the area. The lack of action on this ready to go plan makes no sense.

Please explain why the plans for the Waterloo Housing Estate, which have been developed in detail, have not been implemented while much of this public housing estate is left in a state of disrepair?

I also note that I raised the issue of violence and anti-social behaviour that is commonplace around the Waterloo Housing Estate, which has been a problem for years, but is now affecting the workforce of the Waterloo metro site. NSW Police are currently stationed there on a permanent basis because ordinary security guards were considered to be not enough to protect the workforce at the Metro site from the locals. The plans for the Housing Estate were intended to heal some of the anti-social behaviour that occurs in the area. Unfortunately, the NSW Government does not focus

on this area at all while it is fixated on a land grab at Rosehill, supposedly for housing. There is also a plan for the airspace above the Waterloo Metro site to be used for 750 units. While some are allocated for social housing, the vast majority are to be used for student accommodation. I explained to the Premier that Waterloo/Redfern is awash with student accommodation, with very little of the new housing being devoted to ordinary people who will be living here permanently, including families. Yet, the government is acting like a cheer squad for the demolition of Rosehill racecourse when so many other options are available.

I would like the inquiry to investigate why most of the airspace above the Waterloo metro station has approved for student accommodation and not for accommodation for permanent residents, including social housing and whether or not the plans can be changed to cater to essential permanent accommodation for the people of this area.

I also raised with the Premier that it is my belief that the NSW Government is under pressure to cater to the Federal Government's immigration policy, which has seen more migrants and asylum seekers arrive here in the history of the country. Sydney is one of the destinations of choice for migrants and with so many arriving in a short period of time, housing is under pressure. It is well known that the people of Sydney struggling with a lack of infrastructure and the cost of housing, which has been adversely impacted by these unprecedented numbers of new arrivals. I raised with the Premier that it appears that a quick fix for this problem has been to take Rosehill from the local community after having been conveniently offered up by the ATC Board without authority. As I have already stated, the Premier did not respond to my issues. I hope that the Inquiry can look into this matter. I consider it to be grossly unfair to expect the members of the ATC and the people of western Sydney to sacrifice a much loved 140 year old racecourse because of the whims and mismanagement of the Federal Government and the acquiescence of the Premier to the Federal government's policy excesses.

It is proposed that a large leisure facility, the racecourse, be sacrificed for 25,000 homes, which will house about 100,000 people with reduced leisure space in the area and placing pressure on already existing infrastructure. In this respect, it will reduce the quality of life.

e. Potential impacts on parklands in Western Sydney

Rosehill racecourse is the only significant green space in the vicinity. To place 25,000 homes there will be a blight on the landscape and cause more pressure on local infrastructure while removing one of the few large multi-purpose recreation facilities in the area. The proposal is completely blind to the needs of local residents and other racecourse users. Rosehill racecourse is an oasis in the middle of a busy metropolitan area. Nothing has been said about how the people of the area and racecourse users will be compensated for this loss of green space.

What is the solution to this lack of green space and amenity that will be lost to the area forever, not just for racecourse users but for those in the local community?

g. Animal welfare

I am aware that industry participants have raised concerns regarding animal welfare, such as significantly longer travel time to the races, with associated costs. I also understand that heat is an issue with a new proposed training site.

h. Other related matters

The claim that Rosehill must be sold to secure the future of Sydney racing

Rosehill is the most valuable asset owned by the ATC. Members have been told by the Board that the sale needs to take place to secure the future of Sydney racing. I do not accept this standpoint. First, if there has been maladministration or mismanagement of funds, whoever is responsible should be held accountable. There is no rational business reason why this, our most valuable asset, should be sold. There can be no benefit to the membership, the actual owners, of this sale. A proper audit of the accounts should occur to establish exactly what the financial position is. Even if the club is in financial difficulty, there are a myriad of options that would be available to rectify this before reaching the worst case scenario of having to sell assets. I am unaware of any other option being examined apart from the proposal that was put secretly to the government behind members' backs. This is an outrage.

Is there really a financial problem? If so, prove it and explain the reasons for the lack of funds. I am yet to see any documents or figures that indicate this and no mention of this was made at Annual General Meetings. If the Board has failed to do its job, this should be made clear. The sale of assets should not be considered until or other options are identified and explored in consultation with members.

I hope that the inquiry to come to a conclusion about the true state of the finances of the ATC and whether or not there is a real need to sell assets.

The history and cultural significance of the site

The Joni Mitchell song comes to mind... "Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone". Rosehill racecourse is where Phar Lap won his first race. It has been the traditional home of the Golden Slipper. Horses such as Todman, Vain, Luskin Star, Manikato, Marscay, and Vancouver have won at Rosehill. A statue was recently erected of Winx. Winx won many races at Rosehill, where she was trained. This may not mean much to members of the committee who are not racing fans, but it is hugely important to racing fans, participants, residents of the area, and historians. It is heartbreaking that such an iconic Sydney racecourse, one of the best in Australia, which is used for so many other social events apart from racing, is to be used as a cash cow by people who are blind to its social and cultural importance for short term political gain, or to obtain an easy flow of cash without having to undertake proper financial management. The sale of this racecourse will do nothing to resolve Sydney's housing crisis, which is not of ATC members' making.

An alternative racecourse site

Part of the proposal is to build another racecourse in Sydney with the proceeds of the sale. No information has been provided about where this site might be by the Board. I am aware of a media report that an old brick pit near Olympic Park was being considered. I was shocked and surprised that a contaminated site would be considered as the site of a new racecourse. I also understand that a protected species of frog resides there, so it seems like this is not a realistic proposal. However, I began to wonder if the new housing estate that is so desirable to the Government could be placed on the brick pit site instead of moving the racecourse there.

I would like the inquiry to consider the following question: If land can be identified for use as a racecourse at any other location in Sydney, why can't the same land be used for the housing estate instead of Rosehill racecourse? In short, why are members of

the ATC and the people of Rosehill being forced to suffer the loss of their racecourse when other land is available for housing?

Thank you for considering my submission.