

Submission on Proposed AFL Stadium – Sam Rando (22/11/2023)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on aspects of the AFL Stadium proposed to be sited at Macquarie Point. The following comments relate to the Terms of Reference of the Committee.

Process

The Agreement between the State Government and the AFL regarding construction of a new AFL stadium in Hobart is an appalling example of poor governance. Where else would a corporate entity stipulate the **exact location** for a stadium as a non-negotiable precondition for a locally-based AFL team? Has the AFL ever placed similar demands on other jurisdictions as the basis for the creation of new AFL teams? Of course not. Where else would a government blindly accede to such a demand without testing it and other options with the community? This process shows a staggering level of arrogance on the part of the AFL and deeply disappointing subservience on the part of Government.

Surely the proper process would have been one in which the AFL stipulated its requirements for a stadium (eg seating capacity, roof etc) to Government and left it at that. The Government would then have then consulted with the public before presenting one or more options to the AFL for consideration. This would have been a transparent and democratic process likely to have created widespread community support. This is in stark contrast to the current divisions within the community resulting from the secretive arrangement between the AFL and State Government, presented as a fait accompli without community involvement.

Suitability of Macquarie Point

Since when does a corporation identify the most desirable undeveloped foreshore site available in Hobart and demand to have it – or no deal? And this irrespective of any planning scheme provisions or constraints?

The height and bulk of the proposed stadium will overshadow the low convict-era buildings of Hunter Street and the Sullivans Cove area, severely degrading the visual

appeal of this central part of our city. A key feature of Hobart, for both residents and visitors, is the history of the city as reflected in its built heritage. The planning scheme does not allow for such a development for very good reasons! Why is a football ground so important that it's proponents can ignore robust town planning principles?

The visual impact of the proposed stadium on the adjacent Cenotaph will be extreme. The site currently encourages a sense of reflection and expansiveness. Construction of the stadium and associated roadworks will completely diminish the community value of the Cenotaph area.

Squeezing the stadium into the Macquarie Point site will dramatically impact upon other components of the precinct as demonstrated in the recently released draft Precinct Plan. What was once envisaged as being a central part of the Mac Point redevelopment, the Aboriginal Culturally Informed Zone is now nothing short of a disgrace. It appears squeezed into a remaining sliver of real estate not needed for other purposes. Rather than being a landmark development that speaks of the history and survival of Tasmania's indigenous people, it is a trumped-up lawn area that must be viewed by Aboriginal people as just one more belittlement and disappointment. Instead of a development that encourages visitors to contemplate our history with a peaceful and expansive outlook, it will be an open space that has to be traversed by football fans on their way to and from games and dwarfed by the adjacent stadium.

Cost

Earlier this year, the Premier drew a line in the sand with regards to Marinus Link when faced with projected cost blowouts. He indicated that the State did not have an open cheque book and he would withdraw support as the cost was now too high for the State to bear. Does he have a similar view regarding likely cost blowouts with the Stadium? This is a very fair question to be put to him – **how much is TOO much?** Or is this such a vanity project for the Premier that he will stubbornly proceed with regardless of the financial risks to this and future generations of Tasmanians?

Blind Freddy can see that the guesstimate of \$750 million for the stadium is laughably inadequate. As anyone contemplating building work will tell you, cost overruns are

the norm at present. Recent backtracking by the Commonwealth Government and other state governments on major infrastructure projects due to spiraling costs should be enough for the Premier to take a deep breath and place an upper limit as to what cost he is prepared to commit us to. This is especially important given the shamefully inadequate position we find ourselves in concerning public education, health and housing. How a billion dollar-plus football ground can be viewed as a higher priority than these matters beggars belief.

On a specific matter, I cannot understand why the AFL and/or State Government has insisted that the Tasmanian stadium **MUST have a roof**. Why? Hobart is the second driest capital city in Australia after Adelaide. Was Western Sydney or Fremantle or Gold Coast (all wetter than Hobart) required to stump up the cost of a roof for their stadiums as a precondition of getting a team? Of course not.

Presumably the Government's guesstimate of the cost of the stadium makes no financial provisions for the transport infrastructure associated with it let alone the construction of the other envisaged developments at the site. One can only presume that the Government is keeping the public in the dark about this due to the uproar that such huge costs would most likely generate.

Other Stadiums

Putting (unrealistic) Rolls Royce aspirations and untethered egos aside, surely upgrading Blundstone Arena is the most logical and cost-effective solution to the stadium needs for a Tasmanian AFL team. Arguments against this solution are self-serving and indefensible. If it has been more than adequate for the AFL up until now, what has changed?

Building a new stadium at Macquarie Point will result in Blundstone Arena being an expensive white elephant or stranded asset. What will become of it as there will surely be concerted efforts to use the new stadium for all and every sporting event to justify its extravagant construction costs. Will Blundstone Arena only be the venue for local or school sporting events? An honest and clear-eyed assessment of the future of existing sporting venues should have been part of a considered analysis of the pros

and cons of any new stadium. Alas, the secretive process adopted by the Government regarding the stadium has been found to be wanting on so many levels.

Finally

The refusal by the State Government to renegotiate with the AFL on behalf of its citizens to create the best deal for Tasmania has been unbelievably negligent. With a new leadership at the AFL, the Government should take the opportunity to revisit the terms of the Agreement to find a solution which is financially realistic, and one which all Tasmanians can be duly proud of.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment.

Kind Regards

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