

From: [Peter Williams](#)
To: [PAC](#)
Subject: Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's processes in planning for a new stadium in Hobart - attention Mr Simon Scott
Date: Friday, 23 December 2022 3:48:53 PM

Well done to the Committee for resolving to hold this inquiry . I would like to make the following submissions –

1 . The process to select Macquarie Point as the proposed site ?.

The AFL are probably the only ones who can answer that . All that the public know, is that shortly after former Premier Gutwein unveiled an architects drawing of a proposed stadium at the Regatta Grounds on 1 March this year [the reason for which he did not explain] , the AFL sent one of their senior executive , and their advisor on stadiums , to Hobart to investigate Macquarie Point as their preferred site . The provisional estimate for the build at the Regatta Grounds was \$750M . Following that visit the AFL said they thought it could be built at Macquarie for \$500M , by reducing capacity , installing a fixed , rather than retractable roof , and because at Macquarie it would not have to be built partially on reclaimed land , as would have needed to be done at the Regatta Grounds , the construction cost would be less .

I don't believe there was any reference as to whether the Macquarie Point Authority had been consulted . The City Council Lord Mayor was annoyed the Council had not been .

Subsequent to that first visit , the AFL sent at least one further group over to look at other possible sites , but they were not identified , and the only public disclosure since has all been to do with Macquarie Point .

My comment on that process would be that in the first instance , rather than go off on a tangent and do his [or the Government's own thing , if indeed the Government were involved] , Mr Gutwein should have informed the public what he was proposing , and why . That is , had he been told in 2021 by the AFL that our submission would not be considered unless we committed to building a new stadium ? And that he had acceded to that demand , and was intending to have the Regatta Grounds investigated as a possible site ? . But before doing that , there would be period of 3-4 weeks , or whatever , for public consultation / suggestions on any other possible placements ? .

Open and transparent are the buzz words these days , but unfortunately our current Government does not seem to subscribe to that mantra .

2 . How a roofed stadium became a Condition ?

Again , the AFL are the only ones who can answer that . I wrote to both the AFL and the Government some time ago , with that question , but neither answered . Likewise neither have answered why Blundstone Arena has been acceptable to host games for North Melbourne since 2012 , [with their contract recently extended for a further three seasons] ,but for some unexplained reason , the AFL have deemed Blundstone to be unacceptable for a Tasmanian team .

The building of a Stadium was not part of the submission which the Government put to both Houses of State Parliament for in principle support , before forwarding it to the AFL in 2020 . Nor was it in the report of Colin Carter , the man the AFL appointed to scrutinize the submission , and who subsequently fully endorsed it , with a recommendation to the AFL for acceptance .

So , sometime after the AFL received Mr Carter's Report mid 2021 Mr Gutwein , and / or the Government , must have commissioned an architect to prepare plans for a stadium at the Regatta Grounds , which , as mentioned , Mr Gutwein unveiled to the public 1 March 2022 . Mr Gutwein never said why he [or the Government] , did that . But in an interview on the ABC's 7.30 Report 21/12/22 , he denied that he had been bullied by the AFL . He said in that interview that he did it because he believed it would be in Tasmania's best long term interests to have a new multi-purpose stadium . I recall Tony Abbott referred to that sort of thing as a ' Captains pick ' .

A few weeks after the Regatta Ground unveiling , and after Mr Gutwein had handed over the reins to Mr Rockliff , the latter was quoted in the press as saying that a new stadium was not part of our submission . Which , as mentioned , was true . But it was then only a matter of a further few weeks before the AFL CEO , Gillon McLachlan made a flying visit to Hobart to make it clear to the Premier that a stadium was in fact a pre-requisite for our getting a license .

I believe the first mention of a stadium came from Eddie McGuire when he demanded on his TV programme ' Footy Classified ' , in season 2021 , that if Tassie wanted to be admitted to the ' Big League ' , they would have to commit to building a new stadium with a retractable roof . I doubt that many people watching , would have taken that announcement seriously . He repeated it again on the same programme this year , adding that if Tassie were admitted on their own , [contrary to his opinion that we should only be admitted in partnership with an existing Melbourne club] , we would not win a game for 10 years , and would have to contribute \$20M in support of our team , ' forever ' . Eddie is a good man , but unfortunately he does have a history of making silly statements .

But if it was all his idea , he will probably be expecting the stadium to be named the ' Eddie and MacL Stadium ' .

3 . Figures and assumptions relating to Macquarie Point ?

I don't think we have ever seen any figures or assumptions . The Opposition Parties have asked the Government on several occasions in Parliament ' where is the Business Plan ' ? But have just been fobbed off . The Government announced in the press recently there had been 44 days of events identified for the stadium , but have ignored calls to provide detail . The figures provided by consultants on the number of jobs [4,200] that would be involved in the construction of the stadium , and thereafter [95] in management of it , were misleading . Not deliberately intended to deceive , but figures requiring a lot of understanding in how they were determined .

The Government finally announced this week that the Business Plan had been forwarded to the PM's office , and that Premier Rockliff was to meet the PM later in the week to discuss . The announcement also said that the details in the Business Plan would be released to the public shortly .

It was subsequently reported in today's press that that meeting had taken place , and that the Government were working on a revised cost of \$715M for a stadium at Macquarie Point . There were no details on the proposed construction .

4 . Expectation of contribution from the Australian Government ?

It was not clear until the press release today , whether the Tasmanian Government had committed to pay $\frac{1}{2}$ the cost of a stadium , or a maximum of \$375M , being $\frac{1}{2}$ the cost of the original estimate for the Regatta Grounds . It has now been confirmed that the State Government contribution will be \$375M , and whilst the Government had hoped the Commonwealth would contribute the other half of that original estimate of \$750M , the State is now looking for the Commonwealth to contribute only \$240M , being about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the revised cost . Those figures leave a shortfall of \$100M , which the State advise will be met by a contribution of \$15M from the AFL , plus \$85M from ' borrowings against land sales or leases for commercial uses .' Problem solved – provided the Commonwealth will in fact contribute that one third .

The Commonwealth contributed 25% of the \$144M cost in the redevelopment of Metricon Stadium on the Gold Coast a few years ago . It would probably not be unreasonable to expect they contribute a bit more than that % to the cost of a new stadium in Tasmania , and a third would not seem unreasonable . But of course that remains to be seen . The Commonwealth might well agree with a lot of us that a fully enclosed stadium costing \$715M is a luxury Tasmania can ill afford , particularly as the need for it as a venue for football has never been explained . The AFL's commitment of \$15M [about 2%] has been described as paltry considering they contributed \$13.3M [about 9%] ,to the Metricon project . And of course bearing in mind the Macquarie stadium is their ultimatum , many would say they should be doing a lot more. But they won't unless push comes to shove , and I'm not sure our Government is up to doing that .They have bowed to every demand the AFL has made so far .

On the other hand Mr McLachlan has said on more than one occasion there was a possibility of him being able to obtain some private investment . But that seems to have been forgotten . As has been his commitment to have a decision on our admission by 31/8/22 .

5 . Level of borrowing ?

As mentioned , I personally cannot see how the State Government can justify putting \$375M towards a project such as this . Does the Government have that sort of money lying around unaccounted for ? I doubt it , which means it has to be borrowed – and if it's borrowed , it has to be paid back . The proponents of the scheme argue there will be enormous economic benefit to the State during construction , and ongoing economic benefits once completed . There will be – but does that stand up to scrutiny ?I'm not qualified to comment . The Government's economic advisors must think so . I guess only time will tell .

6 . The future of Blundstone Arena and UTAS ?

It is probably premature to speculate on this , until the question of the stadium is resolved .
However –

[a] – if a new stadium is built , obviously all future AFL games in Hobart will be played at that venue . In the meantime , North Melbourne are contracted to play 4 games at Blundstone , for the next 3 years . And presumably the Government [TT Line] will extend that contract until the Stadium is ready for use by our Tasmanian team . After that it is again speculation , but Tasmania will either have a Second Tier [or Reserves] team playing in the VFL , or the Tasmanian Statewide League will continue as is , and the Second Tier players will presumably play with a team in that competition . But either way , Blundstone Arena will probably still be required to host those games , as it does at the moment .

And it would still most likely be required for Second Tier cricket [men's Sheffield Shield and Women's equivalent] , which unfortunately do not attract any meaningful numbers , keeping the new stadium for Men's and Women's International cricket . Not that , on past experience , we should expect to receive too much of that , stadium , or no stadium as mentioned .

[b] – if the plans for a stadium fail , what should happen is what should have happened in the first place , once our submission was accepted in it's original form , that is that the AFL admit Tasmania in to the competition playing out of Blundstone Arena and UTAS , in the same way as North Melbourne and Hawthorn have done , without any problem , for quite some time . The building of a stadium should never have been allowed to be a precondition of our admission . Totally wrong , and the Government should have rejected that right from the outset . And then spoken to some experienced legal people in the field of discrimination ! Because clearly we have been discriminated against – for a long , long time .

[c]- as for UTAS , the situation is pretty much the same . Contrary to what Premier Gutwein said in 2019 about having had a gutfull of the disrespect the AFL had shown towards Tasmania over that long period of time , and that if our submission ' stacked up ' there would be no further extension of the contracts with Hawthorn and North Melbourne unless there was a firm timeline for our admission to the National competition . But that is in fact what Premier Rockliff has done – extended those contracts , without that timeline . A very poor and disappointing decision in my opinion , because that was just about the only bargaining tool we had to gain the serious attention , and respect , of the AFL.

The only point of contention that I am aware of with UTAS , is that apparently there is a push from the Launceston City Council to increase the capacity of the ground from 21,000 to 27, 000 , and the State Government has committed to pay ½ the cost of \$130,000 . To me that also does not make sense . Just a silly parochial decision . No matter that that capacity will rarely , if ever , be needed for anything . It would be akin to the Victorian Government deciding to add another layer to the MCG to increase that capacity , because for that one day in September the current capacity of 110,000 might not be adequate .

7 . The role of a Major Stadiums Business unit ?

This could be another of those ‘ things we want ’ , rather than things we need . ‘ Other States have got Stadiums Authorities , so we had better get one ’ . That is of course being cynical – I don’t know whether the benefit of these sorts of things justifies the cost . Obviously the Government thinks it does. One can only hope they are right , and that it does not become just another Macquarie Point Authority fiasco .

8 .Any other incidental matters ?

As mentioned at the outset , I would congratulate the committee on raising this inquiry . I am a little bemused however that the closing date for submissions is not until 10 February 2023 . I hope that is not shutting the door after the horse has bolted . In other words , what is the inquiry hoping to achieve ? Can it influence Government decision making in relation to the proposed stadium ? If it can’t , or it’s too late , what is the point ?

There is no doubt in my mind that our Government has again been ‘ duded ’ by the AFL . I believe just about every Premier from Paul Lennon to Will Hodgman took a submission to the AFL , all ‘ well received ’ , but nothing done . Your Committee may not be aware that in 2009 there was a Senate Enquiry in to why Tasmania was the only State not represented in the AFL . In addressing the inquiry , the AFL acknowledged that Tasmania deserved to be in the competition , but at that time they were concentrating on getting teams in from non AFL areas , such as the Gold Coast and GWS , and Tasmania would have to wait . A few years later the Government spent a lot of money having a submission prepared by external consultants . That one was famously said by the AFL to ‘ tick all the boxes , and Tassie would be next cab off the rank ’ . And that fobbing off is still happening , and unfortunately Premiers Gutwein and Rockliff have not been able to keep up with the play , and worst still , have dropped the ball . Having said that , as mentioned , Premier Gutwein was on the right track in 2019 when he said he had had a gutfull of the disrespect shown by the AFL towards Tasmania . He was still saying that in August 2021 when he could not get any sense out of the AFL .And his sentiments at that time were captured beautifully by Mercury cartoonist Kudelka depicting Mr Gutwein dribbling a soccer ball on the lawns of Parliament House [which we understand MP’s often do after a hard day at the office !] , and a staffer rushing to him holding a phone with the message ‘ Gillon McLachlan’s on the phone [as if to say , drop everything] , but the Premier was sick of that , replying ‘ tell him I’m out playing football ’ , and then as an afterthought ‘ in fact , send him a photo ’ . Meaning of course , Mr Gutwein , having been an Aussie Rules player of note ,wanted to let Mr Mclachlan know , he had been converted to soccer ! But I think in the end the AFL must have worn him down , or worn him out . And hence the introduction of their disgraceful demand for a new stadium was accepted .

Good luck with your inquiry .

Peter Williams

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