



Western Suburbs Junior Cricket Club  
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Incorporation number Y0976936

6<sup>th</sup> November 2024

## **RE: WSJCC OPPOSITION TO THE HUNTER INDOOR SPORTS STADIUM DA**

### **1. Summary of opposition**

The Western Suburbs Junior Cricket Club (WSJCC) strongly opposes the development. As the major summertime user of the grounds proposed for development, we wish to raise concerns that the Social-Economic Impact Assessment (SEIA) for this State Significant Project has not adequately complied with its requirements, particularly relating to SEARS Item 17 (**Social Impact**). We also believe that the model of **engagement** was also significantly flawed and failed to properly consult with our club as a relevant impacted and primary user of the site and failed to identify and address our concerns to mitigate the impact to our club. Because of this, while the SEIA is required to identify, predict, and evaluate likely social impacts in a manner proportionate to the project's context and consequences, we believe that the assessment has overlooked or insufficiently addressed the significant impacts this development will have on our club, its members, and the broader cricketing community that relies on these grounds for sport and recreation. The failure to account for the displacement of a well-established community organisation such as ours raises questions about the completeness and accuracy of the SEIA, which in turn affects the validity of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as a whole.

### **2. Our cricket club and the impact of the development**

The Western Suburbs Junior Cricket Club (WSJCC) plays a crucial role in the local community. We are one of the fastest-growing cricket clubs in the Newcastle region and have witnessed year on year growth over the past 10 years. This season are fielding 24 teams, boasting a membership of 275 junior players, with over 50 additional participants enrolled in its popular Blasters programme for children under the age of 10. We also have a growing contingent of girl cricketers, fielding 4 teams this season. This makes WSJCC the second largest junior cricket club in Newcastle and arguably one of the most important providers of sport and well-being to children in this local government area.

The proposed redevelopment of Wallarah and Blackley Ovals into a basketball stadium poses a serious threat to the club's future and our ability to host all other junior cricket clubs in Newcastle. These grounds are essential to the club's operations, providing crucial space for both training and matches. The loss of these facilities would exacerbate an already strained situation, as the club struggles to secure enough grounds for its expanding teams. Claims of underutilisation of this ground by the CoN as mentioned in the SEIA (page 28 and 51) are based on flawed analysis (see section 4 in this response) and are inconsistent with WSJCC's lived experience.



Even without the loss of Wallarah and Blackley Ovals, WSJCC is already grappling with significant challenges in accessing adequate green space. This year, 22 of our teams play every Saturday morning. This means on a given Saturday we require 11 home grounds, yet with only 9 reliable home grounds available. In past years this squeeze has forced some of our teams to regularly have to travel out of our local area, which directly affects both player experience and competitiveness. To make matters worse, other clubs utilise grounds in our area as their own home grounds, including Hamwicks and Newcastle City, underscoring the broader shortage of cricket grounds across Newcastle.

The situation becomes even more critical when midweek rain leads to ground closures by CoN, further reducing the number of available fields and resulting in game cancellations. While Saturday mornings present their own difficulties, the problem intensifies during the week. As non-exclusive users of these grounds in the summer, we face stiff competition from other sports such as football, touch football and athletics, as well as senior and private cricket competitions, for limited space. This overcrowding not only diminishes the quality of training and preparation but also creates safety risks, with as many as four teams often crammed onto Ford Oval, dodging cricket balls during chaotic training sessions.

While the proponent and CoN may suggest that like-for-like replacements have been found for these grounds, as we will point out, this is not the case from the perspective of WSJCC. The reality is that we are losing two cricket ovals permanently, with inadequate compensation by way of retained access to the new facility or acceptable alternatives. These ovals will never be recovered, and at a time when the area is expecting a rapid influx of households through the planned development of 20,000 new homes in Broadmeadow and another 700 in Adamstown, this loss will be detrimental to the future of cricket and sport more broadly in Newcastle. There will be an expectation of WSJCC to provide a junior cricket club for these new households to use, however, we will not have the ground resources to accommodate this growth.

I will now outline specific reasons for our opposition and significant failings and inadequacies with the EIS.

### **3. Inadequate consultation and engagement with impacted users, meaning WSJCC impact remains unmitigated**

WSJCC strongly refutes the proponent's claim that impacted stakeholders have been adequately engaged in the consultation process for the Hunter Indoor Sports Centre development. According to Appendix D of the SEIA ("Engagement Summary Table"), the key sporting groups consulted included Newcastle District Cricket Association (NDCA), Newcastle Football Association (NFA), and Lambton Jaffas Football Club. This consultation, conducted by the City of Newcastle on behalf of the project, resulted in letters of support from the NDCA and NFA.

As the largest summer sporting user of the Wallarah and Blackley Ovals, Newcastle Western Suburbs Junior Cricket Club (WSJCC) was neither identified as a key stakeholder nor given a fair opportunity to express its opposition, or to engage in meaningful discussions on how the loss of these grounds might be mitigated. Instead, the consultation relied on indirect communication through Cricket NSW (CNSW) and the NDCA.

This method of consultation was deeply flawed and this issue was raised with Cricket NSW on multiple occasions. Firstly, in relation to the support of the NDCA – this association administers the senior cricket competition and rarely uses the grounds in question, has no affiliation with junior cricket or WSJCC and never contacted WSJCC. Its impact from this development is minimal compared to the significant loss faced by WSJCC. Relying on the NDCA to represent broader support from the cricket community is both inappropriate and misleading.

CNSW, which appointed itself as the representative for cricket stakeholders in the area, also failed to transparently acknowledge WSJCC's opposition to the development during the planning process. While CNSW has written to WSJCC and denies supporting the development, a letter obtained through GIPA contradicts this assertion, showing that CNSW indeed provided a letter of support to Newcastle Basketball. This letter was provided without the knowledge of WSJCC and has been used by the City of Newcastle and Newcastle Basketball to publicly suggest broader cricket community support, despite WSJCC's objections. In email exchanges with WSJCC, CNSW and other cricket stakeholders, CNSW repeatedly misrepresented the intent of its letter and was caught attempting to deny its awareness of how the letter was being used. This demonstrates that CNSW is an unreliable intermediary and has misrepresented the views of the broader cricket community, thus excluding WSJCC from proper consultation.

By relying on flawed third-party representation rather than engaging directly with WSJCC (the largest impacted user group) the proponent has failed to meet basic standards of stakeholder engagement. Because of this WSJCC was not given a meaningful opportunity to raise concerns or negotiate how our activities could be accommodated within the new development.

On page 52 of the SEIA, the proponent claims: *"It is acknowledged that several sporting clubs that do not currently utilise the site do not support the development (on the basis of reduced overall playing fields), although Council has noted that there is significant capacity to meet sporting needs into the future through its portfolio of fields."* By suggesting that opposition comes only from clubs not currently using the grounds, the proponent either misrepresents the situation or demonstrates a poor understanding of the actual users of the ground and an unwillingness to properly consult with them.

In conclusion, the consultation process has been inadequate. WSJCC was not properly engaged or given the chance to express its opposition, nor were any discussions held to explore possible accommodations on the site as the proponent suggests is the case on page 42 when it says the project will have a positive impact on other sporting users through *"accessibility to regional indoor sporting centre for potential training and elite athlete pathways."* If required I can submit the full email correspondence and discussions with CNSW as evidence to support my claims around inadequate consultation.

#### **4. Assertion that this proposed site is seen as appropriate due to low utilisation is incorrect and relies on flawed analysis.**

The notion that the ground was underutilised as referred to in page 28 of the SEIA and page 51 (in the mitigation plan) is simply inaccurate. The classification of *"Low utilisation (as identified through its sports strategy, 2020)"* is based on flawed analysis from the City of Newcastle's



Sporting Strategy, which considered winter sport rather than summer utilisation. Furthermore, anything less than 25 hours a week was deemed underutilised. Even if cricket was played on both ovals on both Friday night and Saturday morning, as well as daily after-school training (3 hours each day) on every other day, it would not be possible to achieve the benchmark for not being underutilised. Even throwing in a Sunday game doesn't meet this threshold. It is not reasonable to conclude that a ground used every day of the week is underutilised. It would not be possible to utilise the ground anymore, as junior sport is not carried out during school hours. The approach taken and information relied on is flawed and should not be relied on as grounds for underutilisation.

The lived experience of WSJCC is very different and is one of ground undersupply, not over. This fact has been made clear to both the Newcastle Junior Cricket Association and CNSW frequently over the years. However, unfortunately Cricket NSW, as the self-appointed spokesperson for cricket, has failed to reflect these concerns to the CoN or the proponent. As former club secretary who worked with NJCA to schedule WSJCC games I can speak with authority on this matter. In recent years, our 19 Saturday morning sides needed 10 home grounds. It was impossible to meet this need. We constantly struggled to find grounds, particularly for mid-week training, competing with football and athletics, which often had historical bookings that took priority. This year we are only two weeks into the cricket season and WSJCC is having to hold home games as far afield as Stockton because of the unavailability of grounds across the broader Newcastle LGA.

As the club has mentioned multiple times to CNSW, once we lose these grounds, we never get them back. While the upgrade of two existing grounds might seem like a short-term solution, in the long run, this approach doesn't serve cricket's best interests. We are already at capacity based on availability of local grounds, and with 20,000 new homes planned for Broadmeadow, where will the game expand? The CoN has no current plan to knock down residential or commercial premises to turn it into greenspace.

#### **Refute the statement regarding positive impact of access to sporting clubs to site.**

In *Section 9 - Socio-Economic Impact Mitigation Assessment*, the proponent makes the comment that in relation to "Indoor Sporting Facility Demand, Access and Capacity", that the development will "have a positive impact on Local sporting clubs –for accessibility to regional indoor sporting centre for potential training and elite athlete pathways." This is certainly not the case for WSJCC. The club was never consulted by the proponent about how it may be able to utilise the indoor sporting centre. Given the loss of training facilities, the provision of space for either outside or indoor cricket nets on the development site would have been both appreciated and warranted. This was never discussed and doesn't form part of the development. The stadium therefore does not provide training opportunities for our club.

#### **Mitigation plan as summarised on page 51 is inadequate to meet the needs of WSJCC**

WSJCC refutes any suggestion that the "replacement" grounds negotiated between CNSW and CoN are adequate 'like for like' replacement grounds. This is because these are just enhancement of existing grounds. Therefore, there is still a net loss of grounds. The grounds are not within our club's catchment area and the quality of grounds like Dangar are notoriously



poor. Furthermore, the new facility does not adequately cater for displaced cricketers, despite suggesting that the facility will provide training facilities and pathways for elite players. There are no indoor or external cricket training nets planned, which would have been beneficial for our club as we struggle to secure alternative training facilities. For a facility to take up so much space but not provide even allocate this small amount of area to displaced sports like cricket is unreasonable.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Craig Boys".

Craig Boys Designated Spokesperson for Western suburbs Junior Cricket Club Committee