

Submission Against the Development of the Hunter Indoor Sports Centre (HISC)

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) object the Hunter Indoor Sports Stadium (HISC) development with major concerns regarding the social and health impacts, environment, traffic congestions and questionable claims under submitted documents, particularly the Social and Economic Impact Assessment (SEIA)). While reading through the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIS), the poor completion of the EIS is evident in the consistently incorrect appendices referenced within the EIS for key issues, making it incredibly difficult to read through. (Examples include: Detailed site investigation, remediation and contamination assessment and action plans, the Acoustic assessment, lighting impacts assessment etc.)

As a resident living 40 metres opposite to the park, I have never had any communication or engagement from anyone falsely claimed in **Section 4 (page 9)- Stakeholder and Impact scoping & Section 6 – stakeholder and community engagement** of **SEIA** at any point of the EIS preparation. No notifications or project flyers were ever received in our household letterbox. This raised questions on the assessments conducted on categorised impact in section 5.1, particularly on issues related to (a) way of life; (b) community; (c) health and wellbeing; and (d) surroundings.

The chronic shortfall of the current 55-year-old basketball stadium is undeniable. The population growth in the Hunter region and Newcastle area no doubt calls for better-supported sport facilities for sport participation. As SEIA pointed out in section 5.2.2 on page 14, there is a higher proportion of children under 18, and people aged 60 and over in New Lambton; Section 5.3.2 demonstrated the projection of population growth to include many who will start families.

It has been pointed out by government agencies, the United Nation (UN) and World Health Organisation (WHO), public outdoor green space is a necessity for health and wellbeing especially with our increasingly urbanised and digitalised society.¹ It is very concerning with the neglect and lack of thoughts about its impacts for people in the community when demographic information pointed out the higher proportion of children. Worrying is that the claims and evidence in the SEIA about social and health impacts are partially examined, selected and neglected in order to justify the proposal, with no consultation with proximate residents as myself.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)² and organisations including the UN and WHO have all acknowledged the necessity of public outdoor green space for children development and growth, physically and mentally, especially with our increasingly

¹ The Necessity of Urban Green Space for Children's Optimal Development [Internet]. New York: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF); 2021 [cited 2024 9 Nov]. Available from: <https://www.unicef.org/documents/necessity-urban-green-space-childrens-optimal-development>.

² Joshi A. Creating environments to support young children's development [Internet]. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS); June 2021 [cited 2024 9 Nov]. Available from: <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/short-articles/creating-environments-support-young-childrensdevelopment>.

urbanised and digitalised society. The link between green space and people's health status have also been repeatedly demonstrated by researchers, where the removal is irreversible and deleterious.³ Due to the lack of comprehensive assessment, not only is the HISC development highly inconsiderate of its consequences and the obvious inequitable health impacts on the future generations listed in the 2021 UNICEF report,⁴ it also goes against the Sustainable Development Goals in relation to people's health and wellbeing (particularly vulnerable groups like children and the increasingly diverse population), and climate change with this highly extractive operation associated with the construction and pollution to an otherwise clean and safe green space.⁵

In the SEIA page 20 : 'Literature review....access to facilities, satisfaction with facilities, safety around the facility, access to exercise equipment and frequently observing others exercise are important factors in increasing physical activity' were incoherent to studies quoted.

Reference 9 used was an outdated study from 2000 with minimal relevance on physical activity and sport facilities. Rather, it pointed out sedentary behaviour and physical inactivity are related to increased digital usage. On the contrary, the study indeed supports access to public spaces like parks as an environmental factor that will support people's physical activity, not simply sport facilities because that is a barrier to be active with the cost associated with participation. The idea that stadium **equals** to sports participation without considerations of the differential inequities arisen to people in disadvantaged or low socioeconomic positions reflected the blanket statements used and lack of thorough assessment regarding the HISC proposal. These inequitable impacts have been demonstrated in a 2021 research paper.⁶

The use of *Reference 10* trying to support stadium for sports participation was from 2017 with the **exclusion** of people under 18 years old, when section 5.3.3 emphasised on the issue where the area has a high rate of children being obese and sedentary; and the lower rates of people (particularly aged 15 – 17) meeting physical activity guidelines—which is incoherent to data used. The use of *reference 11* trying to prove that sport facilities is going to improve the issue of physical inactivity was not suitable. The Korean study examined participants with history of depression, and it was dominated by blue-collar workers aged 20 and over. Despite the large sample size, this not representative of the general population nor the statistics concerning children and youth. Gentrification is also demonstrated to decrease social cohesion and increase crime activities where safety around the facility and neighbourhood become a problem.⁵

³ Twohig-Bennett C, Jones A. The health benefits of the great outdoors: A systematic review and meta-analysis of greenspace exposure and health outcomes. *Environmental research*. 2018;166:628–37. doi: 10.1016/j.envres.2018.06.030.

⁴ "The Necessity of Urban Green Space for Children's Optimal Development" 2020, updated 28 October 2022; file can be downloaded from <https://www.unicef.org/documents/necessity-urban-green-space-childrens-optimal-development>.

⁵ Sport stadium and environmental justice, Timothy Kellison

⁶ Tandon PS, Kroshus E, Olsen K, Garrett K, Qu P, McCleery J. Socioeconomic Inequities in Youth Participation in Physical Activity and Sports. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 2021;18(13):6946.

Public free open green space (currently Wallarah and Blackley ovals) arguably provides all the suggested health and wellbeing benefits on page 19 of the SEIA, if not more and better, without inequitably disadvantage people from low social economic position (SEP) face when it comes to accessing sports facilities that often cost. These include (a) Improved physical health; (b) Reduced risk of chronic and acute disease; and (c) Improved mental health. This is supported by UNICEF, WHO, and various NSW government agencies including the DPHI.⁷

In relation to **social inclusion and increased community connectedness** in **section 5.3.6**, studies used are also outdated with total lack of consideration on environmental justice. As pointed out in the 2023 book *Sport Stadiums and Environmental Justice* Chapter 1 by Timothy Kellison,⁵ sports stadium as part of a larger entertainment district (exactly in this case), ‘reproduce social inequalities, shred social fabric, and eliminate public spaces and culture by sanitising and isolating groups and people of different race and ethnic backgrounds, age, gender and sexual orientation, physical ability... (Mincyte et al., 2009, p.108)’. By removing the free public green space where social cohesion, sport and leisure physical activities do not cost like accessing the stadium, it is false to assume the new HISC is going to build stronger communities instead of further exacerbate the current societal divide with the strong objection to this proposal along with increasing cost of living. This logic completely ignored existing inequities and studies that have proven otherwise.

Once again, the health benefits listed in **section 7.3** have ignored the importance benefits of green space, distorting the health benefits of the HISC derives without the consideration of the differential inequitable impacts to many lower income households, children, families.⁶

Due to the lack of consultation, it is totally false to have claimed in **section 8** that no improvement is required to accommodate existing traffic, seeing current events hold by the McDonald Jones (MJ) Stadium alone is causing chaotic parking issues and hazardous stress safety on residential street. Visitors usually illegally park on yellow lines, in areas that stated ‘no parking’, and even destroying grass areas to park their cars (Appendix 1) with little consequences. Whenever MJ Stadium has events on, it is often impossible and dangerous pulling out of my driveway absolutely no visibility on oncoming traffic due to the dangerous way visitors’ park across the residential streets.

The insufficient parking spots provided by HISC disproportionate to its projected visitors numbers will mean visitors parking on residential streets as shown from the current situations and attached modelling. (Appendix 2) With the clearly inadequate parking

⁷ Climate change, green cover and open spaces [Internet]. AdaptNSW - Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW); 2024 [cited 2024 02 September]. Available from: <https://www.climatechange.environment.nsw.gov.au/impacts-climate-change/built-environment/green-cover-and-open-spaces>.

spots and proposed operation hours (6AM to 11PM) of 7 days per week with weekly ~27,000 visitors each week, it will disrupt the local residential area and create a highly unsafe environment due to the traffic congestion. As a resident, I question how the proponent will resolve this key issue as the Newcastle and Hunter region is a heavily car reliant region, with very poor and near non-existence public transport system. Buses and trains are unreliable, and limited where visitors and residents need and utilise cars for transportation.

The proposed ovals are home to many native birds where the EIS stating that there are no impacts to biodiversity with only considerations to threatened species. (Appendix 3 and 4) How will the proponent ensure such practice of removal of green space will not endanger our local species? As the proposed sites is affected by the Local Catchment Flooding, the proposed locations as ovals also provide water management properties to mitigate flood risks. As shows in photo in Appendix 5, a mere 10-minute rainfall recently on the 7th of Nov 2024 has resulted the adjacent drain to be filled. Without the ovals ability to hold excessive rainwater with the water management property of green spaces, I wonder how the HISC and proponent will ensure flood risk do not increase in the area as the present is already presenting major flood risk. In 2020, the adjacent Turton road has also seen major flooding where cars were submersed. (Appendix 6 and 7)

Arguing for stadium to be build based on benefits including job creation, tax revenues, and economic benefits is the usual practice where minimal considerations of the environment, and the social and health impacts is not unusual. I agree a new sports facility to be built due to the growth demand and growth in the region. However, I fully object the current proposed location for the HISC to be built. Sport participation have many benefits that are undeniable, but the removal of green space of this development is not acceptable and must not go ahead.

The many false claims illustrating the net positive picture to the social, health and wellbeing of people is troubling. The flawed process seen in the report lead no zero mitigation strategies observed in **section 9- Socio-Economic Impact Mitigation Assessment**. Other issues such as flood risks, social and health impacts related to air, noise and light pollution, escalated traffic congestions and potential injuries, biodiversity and environmental concerns, climate change etc are key areas little detailed attention have been given. The incoherent evidence trying to support the social and health impacts itself reflected an alarming and unconscionable proposal of the HISC. I urge the NSW DPHI or the Independent Planning Commission to reject the development application and consider the implications in all angles such as the environmental impacts, climate change, health and wellbeing, and sustainability.

Yours sincerely,

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