

ENSW- ARENAGATE

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Berni Saunders

June 23 at 7:50 PM · 🌐

SIEC "Arenagate" - A parliamentary Inquiry will be conducted by the Public Works Committee.

The following was approved by the NSW parliament this afternoon.

The Minister for Sport Natalie Ward supported an Inquiry. The Hon Mark Latham moved and all members of the Legislative Council supported the following:

That the Public Works Committee inquire into and report on the granting of contract number OoS17/18-021 by the Office of Sport, and in particular:

(a) the awarding of a contract to Barrie Smith Motor Sports P/L by the Office of Sport to resurface two arenas at the Sydney International Equestrian Centre (SIEC),

(b) the role played by the board, CEO and members of Equestrian NSW (ENSW), Equestrian Australia and officials within the Office of Sport, in both the application for funding and the process for selection of the grant by the Office of Sport,

(c) the potential or otherwise for the existence of corrupt conduct and/or conflicts of interest within the Office of Sport, Barrie Smith Motor Sports P/L and ENSW, in the granting of the contract, with

reference to the ICAC letter of 1 December 2020 to the Office of Sport, 7295 Legislative Council Notice Paper No. 90—Wednesday 23 June 2021

(d) Office of Sport correspondence to Mr Barrie Smith showing that the original tender specifications were changed from 'importing new material and mixing onsite' at SIEC to 'relocating a surface from another site which had (already) failed' and these contaminated materials were taken from the Wallaby Hill (Robertson) property of Alex Townsend, a ENSW Board member,

(e) whether successive ministers for Sport and the Office of Sport failed to report the information in paragraph (d) above to the appropriate authorities for probity investigation,

(f) the engagement of and role played by O'Connor Marsden in the examination of probity issues in regard to the granting of the contract and the failure to examine aspects prior to and following the evaluation and awarding of the contract,

(g) the granting of a peppercorn rent by the Office of Sport to Equestrian NSW for access to and usage of the SIEC site,

(h) options for rectification of any defects or complete replacement of the indoor arena surface to ensure the arena is safe for horse and rider and capable of use for high level competition; and

(i) any other related matters.

The inquiry has the power to compel witnesses to appear if they choose to ignore a request by the committee to do so, under the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901.

<https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/.../current/act-1901-043...>

A warrant can be issued for them to be brought before the committee and if they refuse to answer questions they can go to jail for a month.

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I remind all that the documents pertaining to the application for funding AND the terms of reference for the works tender were penned by Bruce Farrar who acted way beyond his charter as the Equestrian NSW CEO. He put an enormous amount of time and effort into a project to upgrade a government owned asset, and was assisted by his cronies and the winning supplier to make the the outcome a "one horse race".

Mr Farrar should have spent the 1000's of hours that this entire swizz has taken him on member services/benefits and improving the sport and left the task of upgrading a publicly owned facility to the correct personnel who are paid to do such jobs.

Staff at the Office of Sport raised numerous concerns about conflicts of interest and potential corruption, but these were covered up and/or ignored but Freedom of Information laws allowed public scrutiny which has led to this Inquiry.

Hopefully the "Arenagate" saga will send a very clear message that people are watching and their parliamentary representatives will take public interest seriously and have the power to prosecute.

I am sure that the new EA CEO Darren Gocher will be scratching his head as he ponders the mess that he is charged with "cleaning up".

Perhaps he will take a long hard look at the members' vote gathered by Korda Mentha leading up to the 2nd meeting of the creditors of EA on the 14th July 2020 and realise that the members want to be rid of the expensive, unaccountable, unscrupulous management style that is dished out by the states.

The savings, improved efficiency and tighter controls make it appealing to give EA total authority (with the correct structure in place) and remove the states except for the necessary representation that streamlines member services and other administration tasks.

People say, "oh no the State's self serving veto clause will continue to prevent the members from having a voice", but nothing will protect the states from scrutiny that shows them to be outmoded and unaffordable. Bring it on!

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More information is available in the Hansard, Wednesday 23rd June 2021.

The file is too large to include