



Greg Piper MP
Independent Member for Lake Macquarie

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Mr Anthony D'Adam
Acting Director – Industrial
Public Service Association of NSW
GPO Box 3365
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Mr D'Adam

POTENTIAL PRIVATISATION OF SPORT AND RECREATION CENTRES

Many thanks for your letter regarding the potential privatisation of sport and recreation centres across NSW, including the Myuna Bay complex which is located in my electorate of Lake Macquarie.

As my office has indicated in phone discussions with you, I share the PSA's concerns about any actions which might in some way diminish the operations of Myuna Bay Sport and Recreation Centre, or the services it offers.

Myuna Bay has served generations of young children in this region and it is a highly valued community asset. Additionally, it has served many sporting and cultural groups, and also serves the broader community with trained and highly-qualified teaching staff.

As you are aware, I have met with a number of staff and staff representatives who expressed their concerns to me regarding the future of Myuna Bay and the potential of job losses should any privatisation proceed. Again, I have expressed my opposition to any sell-off, and any plan that may deprecate existing services and programs at Myuna Bay, particularly those which cater for the disabled or special needs and school groups.

...your independent voice for Lake Macquarie

I have made initial representations to the Minister for Sport Stuart Ayres MP, and also had a meeting with his office which was attended by the executive director of Sport and Recreation at the Office of Sport, Mr Phil Hamdorf.

I received a fair hearing and some assurances from those discussions.

The Minister has assured me that the Myuna Bay site will not be sold off. He reiterated that the Government is looking solely at current services and programs, and whether or not they could provide a better deal for taxpayers if operated by non-government organisations. We will not know the extent of any proposal until the review is finalised.

We also held discussions about the existing cost of running Myuna Bay and other centres throughout the State as figures quoted by various parties differ. Mr Hamdorf told me the current accumulated losses each year is "*in the order of \$9m*" which includes building maintenance, capital works and head office costs. This, of course, differs to the \$4.6m quoted by the Minister in August when he addressed the parliament's General Purpose Standing Committee. Both these figures are well above the collective figure shown in the annual reports of all 11 centres.

Both the Minister and Mr Hamdorf said the review is not about costs alone, but whether or not private operators could bring better and broader services on board. In the initial stages of the review, Mr Hamdorf said his department approached 22 companies or organisations to gauge interest in the centres, and they responded positively.

Importantly, Mr Hamdorf said any changes would not affect the basic functions of the centres – they "*must remain outdoor education centres*". Private operators suggested the addition of services such as men's sheds and other youth schemes, he said.

The Minister told me the final review would go before State Cabinet for a decision before any proposed legislation was presented to Parliament, or any formal approach was made to the market. I am also informed that the matter is expected to go before State Cabinet "later this year" with any formal tendering process possibly starting early next year, pending parliamentary approval.

In regard to the retention of existing staff, I was told that a current agreement requires any private operator to retain existing centre staff for five years, but we will not know exact details until the review is finalised.

Additionally, I was given an assurance that any private operator would be contractually obliged to continue existing programs for disabled or special needs groups.

I was also assured that the department would continue to keep existing staff and centre management updated on the progress of the review.

Whilst I take some comfort from those assurances, I cannot be entirely comfortable until I see the final review, the final recommendations or an actual proposal from the State Government.

In the meantime, I hope this letter will at least provide the PSA and its members with my current position and thoughts on the matter, details of the representations I have made so far, and my intention to continue ensuring that Myuna Bay, its programs, its services and its highly-valued staff are not lost to this region.

Enclosed is a copy of a Private Member's Statement which I read to the Parliament on 19 October. It informed the Parliament not only about the functions of Myuna Bay, but also its importance to the local community.

I will of course be following the review very closely. If you or any of your members who are constituents of the Lake Macquarie electorate wish to discuss the matter further, they can do so through my office.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Piper', written in a cursive style.

Greg Piper, MP
Member for Lake Macquarie
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LAKE MACQUARIE SPORT AND RECREATION CENTRES

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) (16:50): When we fail to educate our children properly I believe our future is not only compromised but also bleak. I have great faith in the public education system and the work that is happening inside classrooms. But I am also a great supporter of the public education that is taking place outside the classroom. Lake Macquarie is fortunate to have two of the finest outdoor classrooms in the State: the Point Wolstoncroft and Myuna Bay sport and recreation centres. Both are situated on the shores of Lake Macquarie, with Myuna Bay on the western side of the lake. It is a well-known location that is seen by all as they move between Morisset and Toronto. It is a 22 hectare outdoor classroom staffed by trained and trusted teachers.

Few local people would not have spent time at Myuna Bay as part of a school camp, community group or sports training event. It has hosted corporate training events, programs for seniors and family camps. The centre is equipped with on-site lodging, pools, classrooms, kayaks and outdoor training facilities such as climbing walls and flying foxes. It is situated in natural bushland adjacent to the lake and Whiteheads Lagoon, which has become a renowned and popular location for waterskiing. Of the estimated 1,200 competitive waterskiers in Australia, about 100 of them are regular competitors at the Myuna Bay Waterski Club tournament, including champion waterskiier and local resident Tim Bradstreet. They all agree that the lagoon is a world-class waterski venue. Disabled skiers also use the lagoon to train and compete. The centre is bidding to host the 2017 World Disabled Waterski Championships.

Myuna Bay offers a fun and appealing learning challenge for young people because it takes them outside the classroom and away from the textbooks. It provides practical lessons that cannot be taught in a classroom. Myuna Bay's success over many decades is due largely to its capacity to adapt and to the dedication of its qualified staff to training and educating young people. These young people do not just arrive with school camps; they visit with disability groups, cultural groups or other sporting or community groups. In recent years Myuna Bay has hosted disabled and special needs groups such as Camp Breakaway, Camp Quality, Sydney Health, CanTeen, The Samaritans, the Northcott Centre and many others. It has also hosted groups from the Rural Fire Service, NSW Police Force, Scouts, State Emergency Services and United Muslims of Australia. It has hosted big-name sporting clubs such as the Newcastle Knights and was the venue for the International Children's Games and the Special Olympics.

Staff at the centre and the broader Lake Macquarie community are alarmed at State Government plans to review the operation of the State's 11 sport and recreation centres. They fear that changes of the kind being proposed will reduce the quality of service and programs at the centre and see job losses among dedicated professionals. If the mooted changes eventuate I am concerned about the future of Myuna Bay and Point Wolstoncroft, which have served several generations in the local area. I have had discussions with the sports Minister and with the Executive Director, Recreation and Sport, at the Office of Sport, Phil Hamdorf. They have given me some assurances about process, but I remain concerned that these centres are being considered for any type of privatisation. I would hate to see either of the centres lost or diminished in any way.

In the financial year to 30 June 2016, Myuna Bay was among the best performers of its type. Its revenue was \$3.28 million and expenditure \$2.81 million in employee and operating costs. It was a similar story across the lake at Point Wolstoncroft. Myuna Bay will host more than 40 events and programs for disabled and special needs groups this year alone. It will do this with professional, highly trained staff who are committed to providing excellence in education. The highly respected Ken Clifford passed away last year after many years at the helm of the Hunter Academy of Sport. He described Myuna Bay as "the ideal mix of sporting and recreational facilities". He said it was the "ideal venue to conduct a sports camp" among trained professionals. He was correct.

I await with some trepidation the results of the Government's review and its recommendations. I am privileged to acknowledge the work of Myuna Bay Sport and Recreation Centre in this Chamber and, in particular, all the staff who work under centre manager Nick Rendell. At a time when society should be doing more to engage our children and youth with the outdoors and the natural environment there should be further investment in our sport and recreation centres rather than risking the quality of service delivery for, at best, a modest saving. I call on the Government to commit to maintaining sport and recreation centres in New South Wales and supporting the dedicated and professional workforce who go above and beyond the call of duty in operating those centres to the benefit of New South Wales residents.

