



MEDIA RELEASE

WINTER OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALLIST RESPONDS TO NSW GOVERNMENT DECISION TO HALT SKI JUMP WATER RAMP PROJECT IN LENNOX HEAD

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Olympic Winter Institute Australia Chairman Geoff Henke AO and Olympic Gold Medallist Lydia Lassila have acknowledged the NSW Government's decision today not to proceed with the multi sports development at the proposed state government owned Lake Ainsworth site at Lennox Head on the North NSW coast.

The proposed new Olympic Swimming Pool and Ski Jump Ramp project at Lake Ainsworth had planned to provide Australia's elite winter athletes with a training base alongside an all-year facility that offered full community access to the pool for multiple sports, gym, meeting spaces and expert sports personnel.

"Whilst we are disappointed that the local community at Lennox Head felt that this project was unsuitable for their area, we respect their view and also welcome the state government's commitment to find an alternative regional site for this much-needed facility," Mr Henke and Ms Lassila jointly said today.

In announcing the government's decision today, Nationals Parliamentary Secretary for Northern NSW Ben Franklin said, "I support this project being built in regional NSW. At the right location, the facility would provide a much-needed boost for local jobs and businesses."

Sports Minister Stuart Ayres said that despite the project not being built at Lennox Head - "We're looking for an alternative site."

The project is a collaboration between the NSW government, Australian Olympic Committee, Australian Sports Commission and the Olympic Winter Institute of Australia (OWIA).

Winter Olympic gold and bronze medallist Lydia Lassila has been personally lobbying for an Australian facility since her win in 2010 in Vancouver.

"Without a facility such as the one proposed, Australians continue to be at a competitive disadvantage - always at the mercy of international training facilities and unable to recruit and develop young Australian athletes in cross sport transfer programs who wish to compete, or experience different sports, because the cost of training overseas is prohibitive," Lydia Lassila said.

“Today’s decision is saddening because the Lake Ainsworth Sport and Recreation Centre in Lennox Head was (and still is) impressive, due to the existing sport and recreation as well as lodging at the facility and in the town itself.”

The Lennox Head community cited the height of the ramp structure as its main contention.

“The Ski Jump Water Ramp is a 30 metre structure – not a building nor real estate development, which forms only part of the proposed new facility,” Lassila explained.

“The project would provide a state-of-the-art Olympic sized swimming pool and additional services such as a gym, medical services, amenities, meeting spaces and more for any local sporting or social group or individual who wishes to use the facility.”

“As athletes, we are not potential developers nor do we have any commercial aspirations.”

Mr Henke outlined various social and economic benefits for a regional facility of this type.

“We know there is an increased demand for water polo training facilities on the northern coast and that is just one water sport that could benefit from a facility such as the one we are proposing,” he said.

“In addition there is the potential for diving, Learn-to-Swim schools, synchronised swimming, competitions, school classes, squad swimming and water-based exercise classes in a heated pool all year round – we see an opportunity for other sports such as trampolining, scuba diving training and talent cross over programs.”

“Economically, it makes sense. Short-term rental in the winter months for homes, units and caravan parks by athletes, their parents and sports program coaches and staff would increase.”

“International visitors, Australian athletes and their families in winter would increase trade in local business. As a multi-purpose project with water sports enthusiasts in the summer and winter athletes utilising the facility in the winter months, patronage is assured all year-round and makes social and economic sense.”

“The pool would never need to be the exclusive domain of elite athletes because it can be divided into sections by floating booms. Plus, the number of high level coaches and elite athletes relocating or accessing this facility and its services can only be of benefit to young upcoming athletes in many other sports.”

Many winter sports use ramps as a training tool including Aerial skiing, Moguls, Big Air and Slopestyle.

High level sports services experts and practitioners include physiotherapists, physiologists, Sports Medicine, biomechanists, nutritionists and support personnel who would complement local practitioners with experience, expertise and opportunity.

Mr Henke looks forward to continuing to work with the NSW Office of Sport in finding a suitable site as soon as possible.

“Training in favourable conditions would give Australians an enormous advantage over the rest of the world, enable us to recruit and develop our grass roots athletes on a larger scale and give more kids the opportunity to participate in a range of different snow and indeed summer sports.”

For Lydia Lassila the ‘Will to Fly’ never leaves.

“With an Australian facility, we will be able to develop our own Australian coaches rather than rely on international coaches,” she said.

“Elite athletes working, eating, studying and living in the local community. A place where you can cycle or walk to training. A place where an athlete can focus on their sport, yet find balance in life.”

“I would hope a regional community will support this facility and become an integral part of it. “

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