

# TAFE sale decision on same day as prospective buyer meeting

**Anna Patty**

The decision to sell a TAFE NSW facility was approved on the same day a state government minister met with Racing NSW after it had expressed interest in buying the Hunter Valley site.

In his response to parliamentary questions on notice, Skills and Tertiary Education Minister Geoff Lee said a decision to divest the Scone TAFE site was approved on August 6 last year. This was the same day he met with Racing NSW chief executive Peter V'landys, who had expressed interest in buying the site the previous month.

"The divestment of the TAFE NSW site at 2 Flemington Drive, Scone was approved on 6 August 2020," Dr Lee said.

Dr Lee yesterday said the revenue secured from the sale to Racing NSW will be invested in teaching and learning facilities for the Hunter region.

Asked at a budget estimates hearing on March 1 if he discussed the sale of Scone TAFE at his meeting with Racing NSW, Dr Lee said he had no recollection. His

diary note said the meeting was to discuss "TAFE matters".

A letter released by the state government in response to questions on notice from the NSW Greens and NSW Labor shows that Dr Lee wrote to Mr V'landys on

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Jihad Dib, Labor

August 7 last year, the day after their meeting, saying the Scone TAFE site had been deemed as surplus and would be transferred to another government agency or sold on the open market.

The letter said the site "is no longer required for TAFE NSW training delivery following the success of the recently opened Scone Connected Learning Centre". Racing NSW had written to Dr Lee on July 20 last year to express interest in buying the site.

Greens MP David Shoebridge said it appeared the Coalition had delivered a prime public asset to

Racing NSW "on a platter". "Now that TAFE and the minister have been forced to release the actual timetable, we can see that from the moment Racing NSW's letter was received, the Coalition sprang into action to sell off the Scone campus," Mr Shoebridge said.

Dr Lee said other government agencies were given the opportunity between August and September last year to acquire the site, but none had expressed an interest.

Steffen Faurby, managing director of TAFE NSW, said it formed the view in 2019 that the Scone site was surplus to its needs "due to low utilisation and increasing maintenance costs".

The latest valuation put the market value at \$3.2 to \$3.5 million.

Labor's TAFE and skills spokesman Jihad Dib said the government "appeared to be happy passing on the responsibility of delivering skills and vocational training to a private operator".

"This was a done deal from the outset," Mr Dib said.

Dr Lee told the *Herald* that the sale process had been managed by TAFE NSW.