

**SENATOR MURRAY WATT**

Shadow Minister for Northern Australia  
Shadow Minister for Disaster and Emergency Management  
Labor Senator for Queensland



18 September 2020

Mr Grant Hehir  
Auditor-General for Australia  
Australian National Audit Office  
GPO Box 707  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

**By email only:** [grant.hehir@anao.gov.au](mailto:grant.hehir@anao.gov.au)

Dear Mr Hehir

I refer to the Guardian article titled “Pauline Hanson takes credit for \$23m Coalition grant to build 16,000-seat stadium in Rockhampton”, published Friday 18 September 2020, regarding Senator Pauline Hanson’s announcement of \$23 million in Commonwealth Government funding for the Victoria Park stadium in Rockhampton. Details of this announcement were also published on Senator Hanson’s Facebook page on Monday 14 September (see screenshot attached).

As you will see, the screenshot shows Senator Hanson presenting a cheque to the Rocky Sports Club in the sum of \$23 million. The cheque purports to be issued by Senator Hanson and the “Australian Federal Parliament” and bears Senator Hanson’s image and branding.

In the Facebook post accompanying the image, Senator Hanson says that she is pleased “to hand over a \$23 million cheque to build Rocky Stadium” and attributes the funding to a dinner she had with “the Prime Minister and Finance Minister last September”.

Nowhere does Senator Hanson indicate the real source of the funds. There is no mention of any Commonwealth grant program in any of her social media posts or on the GrantConnect website. The Community Development Grants Programme, the programme identified within the Guardian article as the source of the funds, does not have any information regarding the funding on its website. I have also been unable to identify any relevant announcement on the websites of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, the Department of Health or on the websites of any of the relevant ministers, including the Minister for Sport (Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck) or the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development (The Hon Michael McCormack MP).

It is therefore unclear how Senator Hanson came to learn of the Commonwealth’s \$23 million funding commitment – or even whether such a funding commitment has, in fact, been made.

The \$23 million that has reportedly been provided to the Rocky Sports Club is not a gift from Senator Hanson. It is completely inappropriate for Senator Hanson to treat taxpayers’ money as if it were her own, and to mislead Australians about the true source of these funds.

The conduct of Senator Hanson is reminiscent of the circumstances surrounding Ms Georgina Downer’s presentation of a cheque to the Yankalilla Bowling Club in March 2019. As you will recall, the cheque in that case bore Ms Downer’s image and Liberal Party branding and was clearly intended to convey the impression that Ms Downer, an unelected candidate, and the Liberal Party were the source of the funds to the Yankalilla Bowling Club.

Taxpayers' money should not be treated as campaign contributions to, or as gifts from, individual politicians or political parties. The Australian people should know how and why Senator Hanson has been allowed to "announce" a grant of \$23 million to a local sports club prior to any announcement being made by a relevant department or minister. It raises concerns that the Morrison Government is using taxpayers' funds to support joint campaigning by Ms Hanson and the LNP for the forthcoming Queensland election.

I ask that you please investigate the conduct of Senator Hanson, relevant government ministers – particularly Senator Colbeck and Mr McCormack – and the relevant departments in relation to this concerning matter.

I would also ask that you investigate the assessment process of the project undertaken by the relevant government ministers and their departments before awarding the \$23 million grant. This announcement is highly reminiscent of the "sports rorts" affair, in which funds were awarded to hand-picked projects for political purposes, outside of the established funding process.

I have copied this correspondence to the Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, Mr Simon Atkinson, and the Secretary of the Department of Health, Dr Brendan Murphy.

I ask Mr Atkinson and Dr Murphy to treat this correspondence as if it were personally addressed to them

Thank you for considering this matter.

Yours sincerely



**Murray Watt**

Shadow Minister for Northern Australia  
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Attached:

- Facebook post by Senator Pauline Hanson