

HUNTER REGION UPGRADES RACING AHEAD

LAST MONTH THE NSW MINISTER FOR GAMING & RACING, DAVID HARRIS OFFICIALLY OPENED WORLD-CLASS FACILITIES AT SCONE TO COMPLEMENT UPGRADES AT MUSWELLBROOK

As part of a Minns Labor Government investment of \$36 million, Scone Racecourse's new facilities were unveiled recently as part of Hunter upgrades.

The NSW Government's \$67m Racing for the Regions program allocated \$20m to install a state-of-the-art Polytrack training track, new stables and enhanced supporting infrastructure to put Scone on the international racing map.

Minister Harris joined Racing NSW Chair Dr Saranne Cooke, Racing NSW Director George Souris and members of the SRC Board to inspect the completed Polytrack and the first of five new stables that will provide best-in-class facilities for local horses, riders and trainers.

The 8m-wide Polytrack is an all-weather, synthetic training surface that doesn't require watering down or irrigation, saving precious resources, time and effort.

It also enables horses to be worked throughout the year, even during wet weather, and minimises the risk of injury by providing a consistent, secure surface.

Stage One of the stables project has seen 113 horses relocated to a modern, two-storey 'hotel for horses'.

Once completed by the end of 2026, four single-storey stables will be added to accommodate 302 horses, bringing the total number housed at the centre to more than 520, making it NSW's largest regional training facility.

It is also home to the prestigious Scone Cup Carnival, Australia's leading two-day country racing event each May.



Dr Saranne Cooke (Racing NSW Chair) and David Harris (NSW Minister for Racing) in front of Scone's new two-storey stables

The Hunter region is also home to two other Racing for the Regions projects investing millions of dollars into boosted infrastructure at Muswellbrook and Cessnock.

Muswellbrook had \$4.2m spent on a grandstand upgrade with improved viewing, expanded multi-purpose function centre, enhanced male and female jockeys' facilities with an 80% increase in the size of the female jockey room, and improved steward facilities.

The renovated site is now operational, hosting its first event, the Hunter & North West region's Country Championships in March.

"Muswellbrook Race Club is delighted to showcase the renovated racing and function centre at the Hunter and North West Country Championships Qualifier in March, and then again on Muswellbrook Cup Day on March 27," said Muswellbrook Race Club's GM, Christine Williams.

"Each component of the building has a real 'wow' factor – whether that be the floor to ceiling glass windows in the function centre, which allow a magnificent view of the track or the updated and expanded jockey facilities including a common room and spa.

"Our Club is extremely grateful to the State Government and Racing NSW for this state-of-the-art racing and function centre, which is a stylish and functional showpiece not only for racing but the local community."

Cessnock received a \$4m grass track renovation and construction of new sand-based training track and \$7.5m for multiple stables and associated infrastructure to accommodate 160 horses.

The stables are under construction, with the tracks to follow shortly. Once complete the upgrades will give Cessnock a premier dedicated pre-training facility offering significant cost



Part of Muswellbrook Race Club's new function centre

efficiencies to trainers and free up racecourse stabling.

These projects are funded through the Racing for the Regions program, with additional support from Racing NSW, to ensure rural and regional racecourses and associated infrastructure are up to date. Over the past five years, Racing for the Regions has provided funding for upgrades at six other racetracks around the state at Gosford, Tamworth, Hawkesbury, Sapphire Coast, Moruya and Albury. Minister David Harris said: "It was fantastic to officially open the state-of-the-art new training track and to see the impressive new stabling infrastructure so close to completion at Scone and other major works completed at Muswellbrook and underway at Cessnock.

"Country racecourses and clubs play a crucial role in developing our champions of tomorrow, and these upgrades will ensure the Hunter and Upper Hunter regions are competitive, grow jobs and offer world class facilities for both participants and the community.

"These projects also enable the creation of modern, inclusive workplaces, with an 80 per cent

expansion of female facilities at Muswellbrook accommodating the increasing number of women in racing.

"The redevelopments are about more than just improving racedays and training facilities, they're also about creating versatile venues that can host a wide range of community events and securing the long-term future of racing in regional NSW.

"The NSW Government supports a competitive, responsible and sustainable thoroughbred racing industry that generates more than half of its economic impact in rural and regional NSW.

"We're proud to work with Racing NSW to support regional racing and I look forward to seeing further projects come online this year."

Alister Fraser, Scone Race Club's Chairman said: "The new Polytrack enhances training safety, reduces weather disruptions, and provides a reliable, modern surface that trainers can use year-round.

"It strengthens horse welfare outcomes and improves consistency in training, which benefits the entire industry. This investment is a turning point for

Scone and for country racing across the state."

Yasmin Catley, Minister for the Hunter said: "The Hunter is already producing some of the world's best thoroughbreds, and this investment is about backing that success into the future – supporting local breeders, strengthening the industry and making sure the region continues to lead on the global stage. "The Hunter is known for its world-class beaches, wineries and racing heritage and this funding recognises the important role the racing industry plays in the region's economy and future growth."

Clayton Barr, Member for Cessnock said: "It is great to see the major upgrades being made to the track and infrastructure at Cessnock Racetrack thanks to investment from the Minns Labor Government.

"Once the \$11.5 million of new stables and tracks are completed, Cessnock will have a premier dedicated pre-training facility offering significant cost efficiencies to local trainers while attracting those from outside the area to boost our local racing industry and economy. This means more new jobs." *RNSW*