

16 | GONE TO THE DOGS

TRACKS OF TEARS

Rural history to be torn down

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HISTORIC greyhound tracks across NSW could be torn down and turned into flats and shopping centres as property developers eye sites potentially worth millions of dollars that will become redundant thanks to Mike Baird's greyhound ban.

There are 34 greyhound racing venues in NSW and the Premier (below) has promised sites on Crown land, including Wentworth Park, will be retained for community use.

However, many in the industry are sceptical now cashed-up developers are taking a keen interest in the future of some tracks located in regional and urban areas.

"The urban (tracks) are ideal sites to incorporate affordable housing along with a mix of private housing," Chris Johnson, head of developer lobby group Urban Taskforce, said.

Many of the state's greyhound tracks are owned by local racing clubs on freeholds or leased on long-term deals from private owners.

Others, such as Mudgee, Moree and Grafton, are held by trusts. Many of the tracks are at least 10ha in size.

Bulli is owned by

Wollongong Council, while Dapto and Maitland are owned by horticultural societies.

The future of Border Park at Tweed Heads could be decided late next month. Tweed Heads Coursing Club has been considering moving just a few metres north into Queensland to escape the racing ban.

While a small number of greyhound clubs have not given up hope of challenging the ban, despite the legislation passing Parliament last week, there is acknowledgment within the industry that at least parts of some tracks will be sold.

"You'll see some of these historic sites getting apartments or shops built on them, all that heritage down the drain," said one club source, who declined to be named.

The Urban Taskforce claimed the government was making a "mistake" by ruling out housing at Wentworth Park, an indication of the strong appetite that exists within the industry to develop the site.

South Camden greyhound owner and trainer John Smart, 49, said his local Appin Greyhound Track was critical to his community. "We just honestly don't know what's going to happen to it," he said yesterday.



Second generation trainer John Smart with his dog Lovelace. Picture: Jonathan Ng