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Interview with NAGC President Kevin Naughton on the release of plans to upgrade North Adelaide Public Golf Course.

NARELLE GRAHAM: It is 11 minutes past five on ABC Radio Adelaide, South Australia and Broken Hill. We got our first look today at plans for the redeveloped North Adelaide public golf course. We're hoping to be able to speak with Kevin Norton, who has said he'd be available for an interview this afternoon. He's the president of the North Adelaide Golf Club, just having a bit of trouble getting hold of him currently. There have been, of course, months of controversy over the proposed redevelopment, concerns over the loss of trees, a loss of biodiversity, concerns over the loss of areas of cultural significance for Kaurna people, and concerns over North Adelaide being the new venue for Liv Golf from 2028. Have we now reached a compromise? Hopefully. Is it also a good use of public money? Your thoughts, 0467 922 891 is the number to text me on, or you can give me a call on 1300 222 891.

NARELLE GRAHAM: To help paint a picture of the redevelopment, Kevin Naughton is the president of the North Adelaide Golf Club. Kevin, good afternoon. Good afternoon, Narelle. Good to hear your voice in the summer again. Yes, they keep me in a cupboard and out I come when it's this time of year. How much will change to the course itself from this redevelopment?

KEVIN NAUGHTON: The course is substantially different. It elevates itself from being a very good, reasonably flat Parklands-style golf course to world championship standard, able to host international events. So that's quite a significant leap. It means that the holes will obviously be longer and there'll be more sandbunkers and things like that. But that doesn't mean that for, say, your average competition golfer that you're going to find yourself in great difficulty because there will be different T-blocks, for example, from where you start the hole if you're playing handicap golf as opposed to a professional golfer. So it services international standards and it services day-to-day golf for the everyday South Australian. Okay. And we know that there will be a loss of trees. There won't be nearly as many as was first concerned about. So there's going to be 585 trees that will be removed as part of this. And will there also be any loss of public access, you know, to non-golfers I'm talking about, Kevin? Okay. No, no. In fact, some of the walking trails, and that'll be –

But just going back to that tree loss issue, it was really disappointing from a club perspective that that was all whipped up, I think, nine or ten months ago, that 5,400 trees were going to be axed and there were going to be five-storey fences, all sorts of horror

stories, none of which were based on any sensible assessment of what was likely to occur. And even when you look at the 583 trees that will be removed, a lot of those are trees that are actually unsuitable for the area anyway. Quite a lot of trees that have been planted, particularly in the last 40 to 50 years, are really not fit for purpose and some are now classified as invasive trees. And in some parts of the world, you're not even allowed to plant them because they're environmentally not suitable. So a lot of rubbish trees will go if you like.

NARELLE GRAHAM: What sort of ones are now considered to be invasive, Kevin?

I'll give you an example. There's a type of white poplar that was bred in the Americas in around about the 1980s, I think it was, and they're a very tall tree and they look quite stately if they had run down the side of a fairway, for example. And they were planted in the 80s. But what they didn't know at the time was that they have root systems that run enormous distances and interfere with other plants. And as one arborist explained to me one day, they use 20 times the amount of water that a native Australian tree would use. So... they're the types of trees that you don't want on a golf course. And they're not a particularly stable tree either when they get a bit old. So you get to see a lot of those go. I mean, because this course has been developed and built from scratch again, if you like, utilising the trees that are there, it actually gives you an opportunity to create biodiversity systems and botanical excellence standards that we haven't been able to do because of the mishmash of development over the last 50, 60 years.

NARELLE GRAHAM: Have they got wildlife living in them, those trees, the white poplars?

KEVIN NAUGHTON: Not that I've ever seen. The only things I've ever seen in there are golf balls.

NARELLE GRAHAM: Fair enough too. They're probably mine. No, I don't play golf. And there's a new club room that's going in. Where will that be?

KEVIN NAUGHTON: At this stage, I don't think a final decision has been made, but it will be very close to where the current one is. The plan for a long time was to renovate the current one, but it was built in 1960. It's quite a serviceable building, but I think when they were assessing the cost of renovating it and the difficulty they were having with some of the plumbing systems and the wirings, it was probably more sensible to build a more energy-efficient facility not far from the current one.

NARELLE GRAHAM: Kevin Naughton is the president of the North Adelaide Golf Club. I had a text through earlier. I'll just give that text line number again, 0467 922 891. The plan is to

move two Moreton Bay fig trees, says this texter, they can grow more than 50 metres tall and have massive roots. How do you even do that? I would love to hear from an expert. But, Kevin, I just wanted to establish if that is true. Are there two Moreton Bay fig trees that are going to be moved as part of this plan that came out today?

KEVIN NAUGHTON: Yeah, the Premier confirmed that today. And the last walkthrough that I did with the Greg Norman course design team and Greg Norman himself and the Premier about 10 days ago, they sort of identified a couple of trees which were ideally, for the course design, they thought would be better off not being there. But there's such significant trees that they'd also done an assessment on whether they could be moved. And they sought advice from some people who've done that sort of thing before. And apparently it can be done. There's a cost attached to that. I don't know what that cost is, but it is possible now. to do it.

NARELLE GRAHAM: Okay. The cost of this is \$45 million. Is that any of that money coming from the golf club or all of it's coming from South Australian taxpayers?

KEVIN NAUGHTON: So it's coming from the South Australian government because it would be a state-owned facility. It's currently managed by the Adelaide City Council but under legislation passed in July this year that will pass to the State Government who will um who will manage it when you say 45 million dollars it's taxpayers money it will also be taxpayers money uh in reverse when uh this course starts to develop a revenue stream that is way beyond what it's currently able to.

NARELLE GRAHAM: That'll go back, will it, into government coffers, Kevin? Any money raised?

KEVIN NAUGHTON: Yeah, well, yeah, because it's a state-owned asset. Right. That stands in the state system. I'll give you an example of how a World Championship standard course and events like the Live event that's on, you know, once a year and the Women's Australian Open, which is booked to be played there, what that does through visitation. There's a golf course here, and I won't name them because they probably want it kept a bit quiet, but... the last LIV event that was here, which wasn't at their course, they turned over half a million dollars in extra rounds sold to interstate and overseas visitors in the space of one week. So that's one golf course, one week. They benefited to the tune of half a million dollars in your

pocket because they were hiring out rounds at \$350, \$400 a go to people who are happy to pay that.

NARELLE GRAHAM: Good, gee. Kevin, stay with us, please. More to discuss. Kevin Naughton is the president of the North Adelaide Golf Club. Sarah Russo, I want to bring her in on the conversation, president of the Adelaide Parkland Association. G'day, Sarah. Hi, how are you? Very well. Your group has been very concerned. Has what you've seen today allayed some of those concerns?

SARAH RUSSO: Oh, look, certainly this is 585 trees is still very concerning, but it is certainly an improvement on some of those expert forecasts that we saw for thousands of trees. So it's a step in the right direction, you think.

NARELLE GRAHAM: What more information would you like to know about this project, do you think?

SARAH RUSSO: I think in particular we're really concerned about the fact that 585 mature trees still represents a substantial loss of established canopy in a city area that's facing increased heat, declining biodiversity and mounting pressure on open green space. Many of these trees have taken decades to mature and the replacement plan that the government's quoting, which is three for one, doesn't actually highlight or explain how or where those trees are going to be replaced and what level of maturity those trees might be. I think it's widely accepted that three saplings is not a replacement for a mature tree.

We're really keen to have a conversation with the government to understand what their plan is there. Certainly it's an improvement on the 5,000 that was the expert opinion that was originally touted for this development. But we are really keen to see what the plans are for that replacement and for the protection of the biodiversity of the area.

NARELLE GRAHAM: And what about for the protection of areas of cultural and spiritual importance to Kurna people? Because the Premier, when he spoke about this earlier today, has said that there will be measures in place. I'll just read you from the release. The government is keenly aware the course and its surrounds, including the River Torrens, directly adjacent to the site to this day, holds strong cultural and spiritual importance to the Kurna people. We were told to ask you about that and whether or not the protections that have been outlined meet the needs.

SARAH RUSSO: Look, certainly I cannot and will not comment on behalf of the Kurna people of South Australia. That's not my role. But, you know, my understanding is that there

has been some consultation that has taken place that areas will be protected. But, of course, we remain concerned that, you know, the government needs to be held to account.

The seizure of this park through the legislation that was put in place earlier this year, I think just highlights that the government has had the ability to do things without a certain amount of transparency and accountability. And I think, you know, at least the Parklands Association, our supporters, our advocates will be watching the actions of this government very closely to see whether they do stick to the plans that they are committed to.

NARELLE GRAHAM: Sarah Russo, thank you. The president there of the Adelaide Parkland Association, Craig Pickering, has called in. Craig, good afternoon. Good afternoon. And, yeah, good to hear from you on this particular project. What are your thoughts?

CRAIG PICKERING: My main concern is the complete lack of any public consultation at all regarding this golf course, whether it's a good idea or a bad idea. This government has just taken over this land which is ours.

They've made a decision by themselves with the help of very rich people in the golf business and have not asked one community person whether they want it or not.

NARELLE GRAHAM: So you're saying it should have gone out on your sale, one of those platforms that the government uses to consult with the community? Yes.

CRAIG PICKERING: Yes, and as with a number of developments across the city, like the 38-storey Festival Plaza as well, and raising high levels of buildings to 15 storeys in the city, this government has just not consulted with anybody at all, legitimately. They haven't respected the community's point of view at all. They've just autocratically seized this land and now they're going to do this golf course with...

It's going to cost \$45 million and it's great to make money, but how many years is it going to take for us to get our money back?

NARELLE GRAHAM: Craig, thank you. I appreciate you making your point on ABC Radio Adelaide, South Australia and Broken Hill. We'll just return to Kevin Naughton, who's the president of the North Adelaide Golf Club. Can I first take you to that point of the replacement trees? And are you able to tell us any more about the nature of the replacement trees, Kevin?

KEVIN NAUGHTON: Yeah, some will be saplings and some will be mature trees. It depends where they are. If a tree is in a place where it might be difficult for it to sufficiently grow as a

sapling, then they'll go down the path of putting a more substantial and more mature tree there. The Premier outlined that.

Today, can I just touch on a couple of things that those previous callers mentioned? One, that this land has been seized for a golf course. It's been a golf course since 1890.

There were changes to it in 1905, 1960, 1997, 2003, 2017. This is a redevelopment of the course to a better environmental standard than what it already is. So the idea that it's been seized is just a nonsense. And this continuous term that I hear from opponents to this that that this is a course for rich people this is a course for public course players the people our registered players in the North Adelaide club come from all over the metropolitan area less than 10 percent have a postcode of in the city of Adelaide or in North Adelaide they come from all over the metropolitan area.

They range from landscape gardeners to paediatric nurses at the Women's and Children's Hospital to service station attendants. We've got police officers, we've got government officers, we've got self-employed people.

We've got everything in a very culturally diverse club. So the notion that this is some sort of rich person's golf club misunderstands what a public course club is. If you want to join a private club and pay for privacy and exclusivity, it's going to be expensive. Go and pay for that. But this is a public course and has been since 1890. It will continue to be affordable and accessible.

NARELLE GRAHAM: Kevin, thank you for making those points. The replanting, and I don't want to harp on about this, but the replanting of the trees, is that going to happen? Is that all going to happen at the golf course or is it in other parts of Adelaide as well?

KEVIN NAUGHTON: And the park plants. That's one for the botanists. But with that many trees on the course, one of those poplars, for example, fell over about 18 months ago. That hasn't been replaced yet because the poplar was probably in the wrong place. But, you know, some smarter planting and a more sensible approach to the balance of the botanical parts of this course will be great.

NARELLE GRAHAM:: Let's get the timeline. When will work start on this new course design and the revamp of the North Adelaide public golf course?

KEVIN NAUGHTON: So the course design is now final. The layout that you see is the final design. They're now in the process of putting together all the engineering specifications so that you can go out to tender and then contracts be signed and those sort of things. So if you put a reasonable timeline around that, I think the Premier said today he's expecting actual machinery and construction and redevelopment of the various holds to start around

sort of April, May, something like that. That would be reasonable. And once it starts, the change is pretty swift.

NARELLE GRAHAM: Is the course closed while the revamp happens?

KEVIN NAUGHTON: No, the current plan is to use parts of the north course, because there's two 18-holer courses there as it is, is to use the majority of the north course for regular competition and public access play to continue. And then when the main part of the south course is completed, then sort of rotate around that course.

NARELLE GRAHAM: Appreciate the update. Thank you. Kevin Naughton there, who is the president of the North Adelaide Golf Club. This is ABC Radio Adelaide, South Australia and Broken Hill.