

POWER LUNCH

Building relationships between the worlds of polo and politics has become essential for solving the visa crisis and saving English polo.

Polo and politics mixed last Sunday during the Outsourcing Royal Windsor Cup final at Guards Polo Club, an event attended by Her Majesty. For the sport to survive the visa crisis, it has been essential to build good relations with Ministers and MPs. As such connections are not usually the preserve of people working in polo, the help was called in of FIP Legal Counsel, Robert de By, who as an international lawyer is a veteran of high-level negotiations with governments. For the last three years, he has negotiated with the UK government and obtained immigration and visa concessions that allow overseas grooms and players, among whom many Argentines, to work in English polo. Last Sunday's lunch at Guards Polo Club attended by some of the country's top politicians, has become essential in reinforcing the political network that has saved English polo from the visa crisis.

Explains Robert de By about Immigration Minister Caroline Nokes: "She is an extremely professional and effective Immigration Minister and understands the serious problems the sport is facing." Other prominent politicians enjoying the day at Guards, among several MP's, were Phillip



Hammond (as Chancellor the second most powerful person in the UK government) and John Whittingdale (former Secretary for Culture, Media & Sport). The latter is also chairman of the so-called All Party Parliamentary Group for Polo, in which a number of both Tory and Labour MPs help promote polo within Whitehall. To that end APPG Secretary, Siobhan Barney, also plays a major role in the nearly daily contacts between the polo world and politicians.

The lunch at Guards has now become an integral part of these FIP-led efforts, in close cooperation with the HPA's Executive David Woodd and Chairman Stephen Hutchison. For most in polo, this work is invisible, as it generally takes place behind the scenes. As Guard's Chairman, Brian Stein, explains: "Robert and Siobhan are most helpful in engaging with Cabinet Ministers regarding the visa crisis." Adds Neil Hobday, Guards' CEO: "Robert is a good friend, he has provided high level advice, and has been achieving great outcomes for overseas players and grooms and therefore polo in the UK."