



**NSW GOVERNMENT
RESPONSE**

TO THE

**PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO
SPORTSGROUND MANAGEMENT IN NSW**

June 2007

INTRODUCTION

On 7 June 2006, the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Works resolved to inquire into the availability and core objectives for the management of sportsgrounds in NSW.

The aim of the inquiry was to assess current and projected community demand for sportsground facilities and the adequacy of current measures to allow equitable access, to manage environmental pressures and to ensure maintenance and public safety.

The NSW Government welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Inquiry's final report, dated 16 November 2006.

RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 Council Provisions of Sportsgrounds

The Committee recommends that each council, in conjunction with sporting clubs/associations in its area, should develop a strategic plan of management, demonstrating partnership arrangements with other clubs to manage increasing demand on facilities and acknowledge shifting sporting requirements across the community. In addition, the Committee recommends that councils, when conducting negotiations with sporting organisations in relation to hiring sportsgrounds, adopt consistent and transparent hiring policies reflecting current and projected demand based on sporting category.

Response and Action:

The Government supports the intent of the recommendation and notes that the preparation of a "strategic plan of management" for sporting facilities is already required by the *Local Government Act 1993* ("the Act").

Under the Act (Chapter 6, Part 1, Division 2), all councils must prepare plans of management for community land. Plans of management must:

- Be developed in consultation with the community;
- Identify the important features of the land (e.g. sportsground);
- Clarify how council will manage the land; and
- Indicate how the land may be used or developed.

The Act requires the categorisation of community land, which includes the category 'sportsground'. The Act lists core objectives in line with which the land must be managed. For land categorised as a 'sportsground' the core objectives are to:

- Encourage, promote and facilitate recreational pursuits in the community involved in organised and informal sporting activities and games, and
- Ensure that such activities are managed having regard to any adverse impact on nearby residences.

Councils are also required by the Act (Chapter 15, Part 10) to be transparent in setting fees and charges for the hiring of sportsgrounds. Councils must give public notice of fees. This is normally done through the development of the abovementioned annual draft management plan, which is exhibited publicly and provides an opportunity for community feedback. Members of the public, including sporting groups, can make submissions on the proposed fees and councils must consider these submissions. After the management plan commences, councils must also give public notice if they propose to change a fee or introduce a new fee.

The Department of Local Government's *Practice Note 1: Public Land Management* outlines the requirements of the Act and provides guidance to councils in relation to the management of public land.

The *State Plan – a new direction for NSW*, released by the Premier on 14 November 2006, supports a vision for NSW which will see more people using parks, sporting and recreation facilities, and participating in the arts and cultural activity (Priority E8). A key direction under the Plan is to develop a more strategic approach with local government to increase and improve their arts, cultural, sporting and recreational facilities.

The NSW Government will work to assist local governments to develop effective plans of management in consultation with sporting clubs and associations to promote sufficient and suitable facilities for people to participate in sporting activities.

Recommendation 2 Schools Provisions of Sportsgrounds

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training develops a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with local government, to facilitate joint arrangements between school principals and local councils in relation to the use of school grounds for community sporting activities. Such arrangements would have to take account of practical issues related to shared maintenance costs, security, safety and public liability. In addition, the MOU should stipulate that school principals ensure that grounds are made available for community use to the greatest extent possible, without detrimental impacts on the grounds themselves.

Response and Action:

The NSW Government is committed to encouraging greater community use and better management of Government school sporting facilities. The Government has recently revised its policy on the community use of school sporting facilities. This policy encourages:

- The fostering of agreements between schools and local councils for the joint use of school facilities outside of school hours; and

- Maintenance and improvement of school sporting facilities through capital upgrades and regular maintenance agreements with local councils.

The Government's policy on the community use of school playing fields facilitates the shared use of a unique resource, and strengthens the partnerships between schools and their local communities, including local councils.

It is important, however, that in approving the use of school facilities (including sportsgrounds), schools ensure that the organisation concerned and the proposed use of facilities by organisations is consistent with the values and goals of public education. In addition, community use must not interfere with a school's provision of quality teaching and learning programs.

Revised implementation procedures for the Government's policy on the community use of school playing fields are currently being developed by the Department of Education and Training in consultation with key stakeholders, including the Secondary Principals Council and the Primary Principals Association. It is envisaged that the revised procedures will be finalised during 2007.

Recommendation 3 Private Schools Sportsground Access

The Committee recommends that councils, as part of their strategic plan of management and in consultation with sporting organisations, investigate options to increase the availability of sportsgrounds by negotiating with private schools and other institutions.

Response and Action:

This is a matter for individual councils.

Recommendation 4 Special Needs Planning

The Committee recommends that local council strategic management plans take account of the specific requirements of groups with special needs, including disability and socially disadvantaged groups in determining access to sportsgrounds in their local area. This policy should be developed in consultation with community and sporting groups and based on available demographic and sporting activity data, reflecting current and future demand.

Response and Action:

The Government supports the recommendation that councils should consider the requirements of groups with special needs when preparing plans of management for sportsgrounds.

The *Local Government Act 1993* [s8 (1)], specifies that a council's charter is "to provide...after due consultation, adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities for the community." The *Local Government (General) Regulation 2005* specifically requires councils to develop a social/community plan at least every 5 years that examines and prioritises the needs of the local community, including specific 'target groups' that may face disadvantage. The requirements of groups with special needs are identified through research, including demographic analyses, and community consultation.

The Department of Local Government has two resources to assist councils in their evaluation of the requirements of groups with special needs within the community. The first is the *Social and Community Planning and Reporting Guidelines*, which assist councils to prepare their social/community plan. The second is *Creating Active Communities: Physical Activity Guidelines for Local Councils*, which encourages councils to consider the physical activity requirements of groups with special needs and assists them to promote physical activity in the community.

Recommendation 5 Increased State Funding

The Committee does not consider current levels of funding provided by the Department of Sport and Recreation under the Capital Assistance and Regional Sports Facilities Programs to be adequate for meeting the programs' objectives. For this reason, the Committee recommends that funding for the Capital Assistance Program be increased to \$8m per annum over the next 2 years and that funding for the Regional Sports Facilities Program be increased to reach \$16m per annum over the next 4 years.

Response and Action:

The resourcing of the Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation's grants programs are reviewed every year in the context of developing the State Budget.

The NSW Government has already contributed significantly to the development and upgrade of sporting facilities across the State. For example, over the period 2000-01 to 2005-06, \$42.8 million has been expended under the Capital Assistance and Regional Sports Facilities Programs. The Capital Assistance Program has funded 2,362 projects over this period, whilst the Regional Sports Facilities Program has provided funding for 153 projects.

To date in 2006-07, \$4 million has been allocated to 348 projects under the Capital Assistance Program (up from \$3.8 million in 2005-06) and \$3.9 million has been allocated to 32 projects under the Regional Sports Facilities Program (up from \$3.3 million in 2005-06).

In the 2007-08 Budget, the Government committed \$20.4 million in payments from the Sport and Recreation Fund for the operation of sporting associations, sports development grants and sporting facility capital grants (including the Capital Assistance Program and the Regional Sports Facilities Program). The

Government also committed a further \$8 million recurrent funding and \$50 million capital funding for the *School Sport* initiative. The *School Sport* program is aimed at providing and improving sporting facilities and equipment in government schools.

The Government also recognises the valuable financial contribution made by sporting groups and other community partners in the development of sport and recreational facilities. The Government will continue to assess ways to support the development and upgrade of sporting facilities in the context of its ongoing policy and budgetary deliberations.

Recommendation 6 Increased Federal Funding

The Committee recommends that the Federal government make available annual funding of \$150m, based on a maximum of \$1m per Federal electorate, for sporting facilities applications to develop new grounds or to improve existing facilities for groups and organisations with unmet needs.

Response and Action:

This is a matter for the Commonwealth Government. However, the NSW Government would welcome any increased funding from the Federal Government to develop new sportsgrounds and improve existing sportsground facilities.

Recommendation 7 Sportsground Irrigation

Given the expressed support for alternative sources of irrigation and the current investigations undertaken as part of the NSW Water Savings Action Plans, the Committee recommends that the NSW Government examine, as a matter of priority, the potential for alternative irrigation methods and optimal watering time cycles to improve conditions at sportsgrounds.

Response and Action:

The Government supports strategies developed by local Councils that encourage sustainable management practices for sportsgrounds and enable grounds to meet the requirements of the sporting community. The management of sportsgrounds presents particular challenges in the areas of water use, waste management, and the use of chemicals such as pesticides.

The NSW Government supports such strategies by:

- Supporting water savings and the use of reclaimed water (treated sewage effluent and captured stormwater) for irrigation of sportsgrounds; and
- Encouraging the community, including sportsgrounds operators, to adhere to considerations of waste reduction, recycling and responsible disposal.

A number of local government authorities have successfully obtained grant funding from the NSW Government to support the development of alternative water sources for sportsground irrigation. Examples include:

- The provision of a grant of \$1.2 million to North Sydney Council for the North Sydney Stormwater Reuse Project, which is to capture storm water run-off from the Warringah Expressway and the surrounding urban catchments. North Sydney Council and Cammeray Golf Club are expected to capture 90 million litres of water a year. The captured stormwater will be treated before being used for irrigation of the adjacent golf course and Cammeray Oval soccer field. As well as saving water, the project is projected to save North Sydney Council \$40,000 a year; and
- \$45,000 to Wollondilly Shire Council for the Tahmoor Sportsground Groundwater Bore. Preliminary investigations into the viability of a groundwater bore at Tahmoor Sportsground showed that enough quality water could be sourced to irrigate the three sports fields. This project will involve installing a submersible pump, storage tank and surface pump with additional piping to bring the water to the soccer fields and cricket pitch during periods of low rainfall. This project will save 5 million litres of drinking water a year.

The Department of Water and Energy (DWE) actively encourages alternative irrigation methods and research into optimal irrigation practices through its Water Savings Fund. To date, more than \$8 million has been provided by the Department for recycled water schemes to irrigate sporting grounds. The Water Savings Fund has also provided grants to investigate optimal irrigation practices for sporting grounds, including research into evaporation rates of water on different landscapes, new watering regimes and water efficient techniques.

The NSW Government has recently committed to the creation of a \$310 million Climate Change Fund. The *Energy and Utilities Administration Amendment (Climate Change Fund) Bill 2007* creates the Fund and was introduced into the Legislative Assembly on 19 June 2007. The Climate Change Fund will replace and extend the Water Savings Fund and Energy Savings Fund. The new Fund will include a \$100 million Recycling and Storm Water Harvesting Program, a \$30 million Public Facilities Fund to help schools, hospitals and playing fields save energy and water, and a \$20 million program to provide all NSW schools with a rainwater tank for non-drinking purposes.

The prolonged drought has had a significant impact on school sports grounds. Principals, who are also the site manager of their schools, are managing this situation and consulting with their Regional Asset Management Units.

A number of schools have been successful in securing grants to upgrade their sportsgrounds through the State Government's *Joint Funding Program*, which provides for capital works projects in schools under cost-sharing arrangements with the school community. Schools have also secured grants through the Commonwealth Government's *Investing in Our Schools Program*.

The Department of Education and Training is also giving priority to improving environmental sustainability in NSW schools, with a particular focus on water conservation. A quarter of all schools now have School Environment Management Plans and support will continue to be given to Principals in the development of these plans.

NSW is also working with the Commonwealth on the development and application of national recycling guidelines to ensure appropriate management of the health and environmental risks of utilising treated sewage and stormwater for irrigation of playing fields.

Recommendation 8 Improved Playing Surfaces

The Committee recommends that the NSW Government, as part of its water conservation strategies, provide funding to investigate alternative turfgrass options for sportsgrounds in order to optimise playing conditions and potentially reduce watering and maintenance costs.

Response and Action:

The Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) is working with councils and other organisations to demonstrate and evaluate the benefits of using recycled organics or "compost" for improving the quality and safety of sporting grounds, playing fields and open spaces.

Trials undertaken with Penrith City Council have shown that the use of recycled organics in soils for sports field construction and as regular topdressing of existing sports turf surfaces can substantially improve turf cover, reduce water requirements and provide a softer and safer surface for play.

Projects that investigate alternative turfgrass options for sportsgrounds in order to optimise playing conditions and potentially reduce watering and maintenance costs will be eligible for funding under the new Climate Change Fund.

Recommendation 9 Reduced Playing Seasons

The Committee recommends that councils, as a condition of hire of sportsgrounds and facilities, require sporting organisations to agree to schedule their seasonal use of grounds so as to enable grounds to be rested for a minimum of two weeks.

Response and Action:

The Government supports strategies developed by local Councils that encourage sustainable management practices for sportsgrounds. The Government also encourages councils, in partnership with their communities, to develop allocation schedules that provide an opportunity to rest grounds for defined periods in order to maintain surface quality.

Recommendation 10 Improved Sportsground Lighting

The Committee recommends that grounds designated by councils as requiring lighting and used for club competition and match practice should be lit to a minimum of 100 Lux, as mandated in Australian Standard: AS 2560.2.3 -2002.

In addition, standards should include ratings for maximum glare to minimise residential impact and horizontal illumination to encourage even use of the playing surface of the sportsground.

Response and Action:

The Government supports the development of floodlit sportsgrounds facilities that meet the Australian Standard for club competition, match practice and training, and encourages councils, within their available resources and where practical, to support a program to ensure compliance with the standard.

The Government provides financial support for such development through the Capital Assistance Program and Regional Sports Facilities Program managed by NSW Sport and Recreation. These programs provide an opportunity for the Government, councils and community sporting organisations to enter into a facility development partnership.

Recommendation 11 Land Acquisition Policies

The Committee recommends that the Department of Planning examine the feasibility of purchasing and allocating land for redevelopment for the exclusive use of community sportsgrounds, in areas where there is a documented shortage of such grounds. Such land should provide sufficient space for two playing fields and should take precedence over the development of smaller parcels of land adding to the currently fragmented supply of pocket parks in local neighbourhood areas.

Response and Action:

The Department of Planning has a role in the acquisition and planning of regional open space. These lands are identified in consultation with local government through planning schemes dating back to the County of Cumberland Scheme.

The Sydney Region Development Fund (SRDF) was established to purchase regional open space, including land for special uses, open space corridors, regional open space, transport corridors, regional centres, employment and education.

The Department of Planning has invested in open space land acquisition in major Western Sydney Corridors to provide regional recreation resources. As an example, the Western Sydney Parklands is a 5,280 hectare open space and recreation corridor linking the North West and South West release areas. The current plans for the Parklands locate active sporting facilities around existing sporting nodes, such as at Blacktown Olympic Park.

The Department of Planning, the Department of Local Government and local councils will continue to work together to investigate funding options to improve existing open space. Funding sources for community sportsgrounds could include Section 94 development contributions, Council General Revenue, contributions from sporting codes, Australian Sports Foundation and NSW Sport and Recreation grants.

The Government will continue to investigate innovative and efficient joint use of Government property, including the potential for joint use of open space and recreation facilities in schools, hospitals, universities and community centres.

Recommendation 12 Greenfields Planning Policies

The Committee also recommends that the Department of Planning, as part of its process of determining land use in new release areas, should ensure that active sportsgrounds are provided to meet documented and projected levels of demand. Such grounds should be situated in suitable areas with access to transport service, taking account of residential amenity considerations and environmental issues, including water retention and suitable environmental factors.

Response and Action:

The provision of open space has historically been through a needs-based approach. This is consistent with existing guidelines, such as the Department of Planning's *Outdoor Recreation and Open Space Planning Guidelines for Local Government* (1992).

As part of the *Metropolitan Strategy*, the *Outdoor Recreation and Open Space Planning Guidelines for Local Government* will be updated by the Department of Planning in 2007, in consultation with local government, to ensure that they consider changing community needs and demographics. When completed, these updated guidelines will assist local government to assess whether current and planned open space will meet the future needs of the community.

The Guidelines will help to ensure that open space is considered in the development of new housing and in revisions of Local Environment Plans and developer contributions plans. They will include guidance on how to plan for multiple uses to get the maximum value from open space as communities change.

The Growth Centres Commission is responsible for the planning of the North West and South West growth centres in Sydney and will undertake detailed precinct planning in these areas.

Precinct planning is a new approach to greenfield land release that aims to facilitate the efficient and streamlined delivery of land for urban development and provide better outcomes through a strategic and coordinated approach to issues. A range of land uses to provide the right mix of houses, jobs, open and recreational space and green spaces is a major principle of planning for the growth centres.

The Commission produced the Growth Centres Development Code in October 2006 to inform precinct planning and provide the basis for planning and design of precincts and neighbourhoods. The Code outlines the urban design considerations that must be addressed in creating precinct based development control plans, including open space and active and passive recreational opportunities.

For land released outside of the North West and South West growth centres, the provision of open space must meet the sustainability criteria contained in the *Metropolitan Strategy*, which includes consideration of the accessibility of recreational services.

Recommendation 13 Industry Coordination

The NSW Regional Council of Parks and Leisure Australia has established a working group to improve sporting industry coordination at State level. This is supported as a useful mechanism to further enhance collaboration and create partnerships between sporting stakeholders in relation to sportsgrounds. The Committee recommends that the Department of Sport and Recreation provide seed funding of \$30,000 per year for two years to enable Parks and Leisure NSW to represent its membership in a professional manner and to provide useful input to government as part of a coordinated strategy for the improved management of sportsgrounds in NSW.

Response and Action:

The NSW Government's grants programs do not currently provide for funds to be granted to groups to represent their memberships. Funds are instead prioritised for allocation to the areas of facility development, event development and specific projects.

The Government nevertheless recognises the importance of sporting industry coordination and the development of partnerships between key stakeholders in relation to the management and development of sportsgrounds. As a conduit for the sporting and recreational industry, NSW Sport and Recreation will continue to contribute to working parties and joint projects with Parks and Leisure Australia (NSW).

Recommendation 14 Regional Planning Forums

There is a need to establish a permanent structure to address broader sportsground access and availability issues. For this reason, the Committee recommends that the Department of Sport and Recreation establish a network of regional planning forums involving relevant State government agencies, local councils, industry groups and peak sporting bodies to gather data and devise strategic plans for the management of sportsgrounds at a State level. This network would assist in the determination of appropriate standards for the use of grounds and facilities in New South Wales.

Response and Action:

Councils are largely autonomous and are best placed to develop responses to the needs of their individual communities. Sportsgrounds should be managed at a local rather than a State level, with councils able to determine appropriate standards for the use of grounds and facilities in consultation with their communities.

The NSW Government through the Department of Planning has developed a number of Regional Strategies to guide growth and development in high-growth coastal areas across NSW. The provision of sportsground facilities should be guided by the strategic planning context established by the Regional Strategies.

These strategies were developed in consultation with local government, State agencies and the community, and are recognised as long-term planning strategies under the *State Infrastructure Strategy*.

The Government notes that the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC) has proposed to undertake a review of sporting field management in the Southern Sydney region. The SSROC is an association of eleven local councils and provides a forum for councils to deal with issues they have in common, particularly those that cross council boundaries. The review project will:

- Identify appropriate sites for acquisition;

- Examine the logistics of establishing a regional facility/facilities on a newly acquired site or sites;
- Suggest an appropriate management structure for a regional facility should one be developed; and
- Collect and analyse data on facilities already available, participation and usage levels, population growth sites, identify gaps in current and future demand and supply.

The Regional Organisation of Councils across NSW may be a more appropriate mechanism to establish a network of regional planning forums.

Recommendation 15 National Working Group

At the Federal level, the Committee recommends that the Sport and Recreation Ministers' Council convene a working group to address issues raised in this Report and specifically examine the need for consistent data collection across Australia about current trends in sporting and leisure activity. This should complement current Federal initiatives in relation to obesity and health issues and acknowledge that education campaigns and programs designed to increase physical fitness must link to the provision of adequate resources to meet increased demand for open space and sporting facilities. It should also include consideration of the special needs of an ageing population and people with limited mobility, in order to ensure access and equity across communities.

Response and Action:

NSW Sport and Recreation will place this recommendation on the agenda of the national Standing Committee on Recreation and Sport (SCORS) and seek to have the matter raised at the Sport and Recreation Ministers Council.

The SCORS, which comprises the Chief Executive Officers from each State and Territory sport and recreation agency, as well as New Zealand, has already established a Strategic Research Group. The group works closely with the Australian Bureau of Statistics to identify data and research needs relating to sport and recreation so there can be a consistent data collection across Australia about current trends in sporting and leisure activity.

The SCORS funds the Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey, which collects information by State/Territory on participation in sport and physical activities for people aged 15 years and over in a 12 month period. The survey has been conducted since 2001, providing trend data on the frequency, duration, nature and type of activities undertaken in relation to organised and non-organised exercise, recreation and sport.