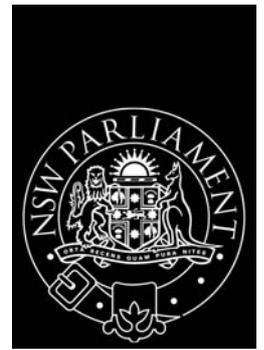


LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Standing Committee on Public Works
INQUIRY INTO SPORTSGROUND MANAGEMENT IN NSW

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Terms of Reference

The Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Works is undertaking an inquiry into the availability and core objectives for management of community land designated as sportsgrounds.

The aim of the inquiry is 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.

In particular, the Committee will examine the following factors:

1. Adequacy of provision of quality sportsgrounds to meet community needs across NSW;
2. Cost and revenue arrangements including capital upgrades;
3. Environmental concerns associated with sportsground management;
4. Effectiveness of current administration of sportsgrounds by various providers including councils, state government (including schools) and private operators;
5. Impact on health outcomes and social cohesion, particularly in disadvantaged communities;
6. Traffic, noise and other direct impacts on residential amenity;
7. Affect of litigation and insurance costs on financial viability; and
8. Access to open space for active and passive recreational users.

Chairman's Foreword

Physical health and well being are good insurance policies for a productive and rewarding life. As individuals, we must accept responsibility for maintaining a level of physical activity appropriate for our age and fitness level. Participation in sport and recreational exercise also builds community cohesion and social capital.

Sporting organisations and governments provide the essential infrastructure for sporting and recreational activities. They have a joint responsibility to ensure that opportunities for active engagement in sport and leisure can take place. This Inquiry examines one aspect of the provision of such venues and facilities, namely the management of sportsgrounds in New South Wales.

While sportsgrounds at the local community level are, in the main, managed by local councils, all tiers of government have a responsibility to establish coordinated policies to ensure an adequate supply and equitable access to available grounds now and into the future. This Report makes observations and a series of recommendations to improve the current undersupply and inadequate maintenance of sportsgrounds in this State.

The Report also looks at the role of sporting organisations in sharing the responsibility for keeping grounds in good condition and limiting unwanted impacts on adjoining residents. In addition, options for increasing availability of grounds by gaining better access to funds, examining other ways of sharing joint facilities and improving planning decisions are canvassed as part of an overarching framework for management.

I believe that the recommendations in this Report will assist to improve our community's capacity to manage sportsgrounds effectively.

Even though this Inquiry was undertaken in a relatively short space of time, having commenced in July this year, it attracted substantial contributions from many local councils, various sporting bodies, State government departments, community members and individuals. On behalf of the Committee I would like to thank all those who made submissions to the Inquiry.

I would also like to thank Penrith and Liverpool Councils for hosting our inspections in September 2006 and for participating in extensive discussions regarding the facilities in their local area. This greatly assisted the Committee in gaining a practical appreciation of the state of the grounds under their control. These included Jamison Park and the Mark Leece Soccer Facility, St Clair and Rosedale Oval and Hammondville Park.

I am pleased to present this Report and thank my fellow Committee Members and the Committee Secretariat for their contributions.



Kevin Greene MP
Chair

List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CAP	Capital Assistance Program
DEC	Department of Environment and Conservation
DET	Department of Education and Training
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
RSFP	Regional Sports Facilities Program
RTA	Roads and Traffic Authority
SEPP	State Environmental Planning Policy
SHOROC	Shore Regional Organisation of Councils
SRMC	Sport and Recreation Ministers' Council
WSROC	Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils

Executive Summary

Evidence gathered during the course of this Inquiry demonstrates that continuing and future access to sustainable sportsgrounds and open space recreation facilities is under threat in New South Wales. Uncoordinated planning, disparate management practices and a lack of consistent data collection are compounding an already precarious situation and preventing active community sporting participation.

In addition to a chronic shortage of sporting venues in many local government areas, existing sportsgrounds are subjected to increasing user pressures, resulting in degraded playing surfaces aggravated by the prolonged drought. This leads to a lack of opportunity for training, an inability to accommodate emerging sports and a failure to put into practice Federal and State government campaign strategies to improve general community health and well being.

This report identifies many of the associated components of this problem. These include: current levels of demand and the provision of sportsgrounds; local management and access policies; existing funding and revenue sources; community and environmental issues; and initiatives to improve and integrate planning strategies at all levels of government.

One of the core issues underpinning the precarious state of sportsgrounds in NSW is the failure to anticipate and plan for changes. Such changes include greater community participation in active recreation, population shifts from rural to urban areas, increased housing density and environmental consequences of increased use of facilities.

The Committee has concluded that because the current distribution of sportsgrounds in NSW has evolved historically, there is a lack of consistency in the provision of facilities across council areas. This means that planning for sportsgrounds in the future requires a more strategic focus than in the past.

Competing land use pressures and contemporary housing trends mean that existing open space is under increasing demand. If current trends continue, new sportsground infrastructure must be created. This is explored in Chapter 5 of the report.

Historically, communities have a mix of small passive open spaces in residential areas and larger spaces, including sportsgrounds, suitable for active sports use. The Committee sees opportunities, in some circumstances, to rationalise this supply to provide larger areas which are more multifunctional. Such a decision and financial burden should not be left solely to local councils but must be assisted and supported by State government. The Committee considers that the Department of Planning scope options and develop a framework for the purchase and provision of new land parcels for sportsgrounds in areas of acute need.

The Committee therefore 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. (Recommendation 11)

Furthermore, sportsground planning in new release areas should be a critical component of initial planning and integrated with other public amenity facilities. The Committee, to this end, 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 services, taking account of residential amenity considerations and environmental issues, including water retention and sustainable environmental factors. (Recommendation 12)

Ad hoc government arrangements in the past have substantially contributed to the poor situation faced by communities today in the management and provision of sportsgrounds. Given the social and health benefits to the community that are clearly linked to sporting participation, the Committee believes that a more permanent management and coordination infrastructure should be established. The Committee therefore recommends a State coordination program and a linked national coordination program to improve outcomes. This should have several strands.

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. (Recommendation 13)

There is also 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 State level. This network would assist in the determination of appropriate standards for use of grounds and facilities in the State. (Recommendation 14)

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. (Recommendation 15)

In relation to existing facilities, the major provider of sportsgrounds for community use is local government. The Committee has made a number of recommendations in Chapter 2 to assist local councils in improving their management practices and policy frameworks to ensure fairer and more equitable allocation of available venues and resources. This will require councils to standardise arrangements with each sporting association in their region.

The Committee recommends that each council, in conjunction with sporting clubs/associations in its area should develop a strategic plan of management. The plan should include 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. (Recommendation 1)

A further related issue is the sporting community's access to and relationships with other possible sportsground providers (including non council providers). Councils should be encouraged to integrate the use of other sportsgrounds in their area, such as those on school grounds, to meet increased community demand. The State government must facilitate this arrangement.

Hence 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. (Recommendation 2)

The Committee also 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 educational institutions. (Recommendation 3)

Another issue related to access concerns the growing needs of particular sportsground user groups, particularly disadvantaged community members. The Committee has been told that these groups need special consideration and hence 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. (Recommendation 4)

The provision of adequate funding for maintenance and upgrading of facilities is another driver for improving the conditions of grounds and is explored in Chapter 3. The imposition of hire fees and charges is an inadequate mechanism to meet this need, based on inconsistencies and philosophical differences in approach by councils about the extent to which ratepayers should have to pay for facilities in their local area.

The Committee considers that the lack of consistency in current council fees and charges imposed on sporting organisations can be improved. However, a provisioning system involving granting preferred hirer status to clubs contributing funds to grounds maintenance, could prevent access and user opportunities for emerging or growing sports which do not have long standing in the area. Some scope for standardised fees or minimal contribution charges

within a council area should be considered for equity reasons. At the same time, a regional or standard council fees structure across the State would not be appropriate, given the diversity of council constituencies.

The main conclusion from the evidence gathered is that fees and charges revenue obtained from sporting organisations is not a viable or adequate source of funds to cover the needs of sportsgrounds currently or in the future. Hence, State and Federal funding must be better accessed and to this end, the Committee suggests some reforms.

A source of great frustration for local councils is their inability to gain sufficient access to available grant funding to meet their requirements. In addition, there appears to be no justification for NSW to be the lowest per capita sports funded State in Australia. The Committee recommends enhancements to NSW Government funding to move NSW per capita resource distribution closer to the level in other jurisdictions.

A further issue is that fund “matching” appears to be a key structural component to various sources of funds made available by Government. In the case of State funding, the CAP and RSFP both require “dollar for dollar” contributions from the local council / sporting association. The Commonwealth funds similarly require “dollar for dollar” co – contributions” for any project undertaken.

Although matched funding does provide some benefits in increasing the total pool of funds, the difficulty with this approach is that those council areas and sports that are most disadvantaged are less able to generate their portion of contribution to get funding access. The Committee believes that decoupling of “matched” funding should be explored and initially suggests this be taken on at a Federal level.

The Committee further considers the benefits from enhanced sporting facilities and activities as a critical factor in terms of national health and community outcomes. Hence, in keeping with its national responsibilities, the Committee urges the Federal government to adopt a greater role in this area and has recommended a substantial enhancement to its existing commitments.

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. (Recommendation 5)

The Committee also 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. (Recommendation 6)

As levels of demand for venues and facilities increases, new challenges will be faced in providing sporting access to particular groups in the community, such as an active ageing population. Every increase in participation impacts on the surrounding community and the

local environment and these impacts must be anticipated and ameliorated. Chapter 4 develops these issues.

The most pressing concern arising from this Inquiry is the environmental management of sportsgrounds. Water is a critical factor in keeping grounds functioning. At the same time, the need for water conservation across the community is paramount. The Committee considers that the State government should provide practical and policy support to local government in order to identify the most efficient processes for water management. 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 surface conditions at sportsgrounds. (Recommendation 7)

The Committee also considers that local councils should not be left to independently determine best practice solutions for turf management and further 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. (Recommendation 8)

Responsibility for conservation must be shared across the community and, to this end, sporting organisations relying on and receiving direct benefits from their use of sportsgrounds must play a significant role. Therefore, the Committee urges local government to seek cooperative agreements with sporting associations, with built-in safeguards to enable better conservation of grounds. 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. (Recommendation 9)

While it is desirable to provide maximum sportsground access to meet increased community demand, the Committee believes that critical areas of safety should not be compromised. In particular, adequate lighting of fields should be provided. The Committee suggests that where lighting is provided, it should meet the minimum Australian standard. Where there are budget constraints, upgrading of existing lighting should take priority over the provision of new lighting.

The Committee also considers that flexible lighting placement should be employed to divert night activity to low wear areas of fields to reduce the acute wear and tear on high use areas of sportsgrounds.

Hence the Committee recommends that grounds designated by councils as requiring lighting and used for club competition and match practise 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. (Recommendation 10).

List of 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.

Recommendation 2: Schools Provision 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.

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 educational institutions.

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.

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.

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.

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 surface conditions at sportsgrounds.

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.

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.

Recommendation 10: Improved Sportsground Lighting

The Committee recommends that grounds designated by councils as requiring lighting and used for club competition and match practise 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.

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.

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 services, taking account of residential amenity considerations and environmental issues, including water retention and sustainable environmental factors.

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.

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 State level. This network would assist in the determination of appropriate standards for use of grounds and facilities in New South Wales.

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.