

SUBMISSION TO NSW STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS
“SPORTSGROUND MANAGEMENT IN NSW”
(GT1945-7)

The Local Government area of Greater Taree covers 3,733 square kilometres, stretching from Johns River in the north to Wang Wauk in the south and up to 100 kilometres to the western hinterland. The area takes in a 50 kilometre coastal strip from Hallidays Point in the south to Crowdy Bay in the north.

Council currently manages in excess of 1,000 hectares of public open space. The current area classified as formalised sporting venues is 65 hectares.

★ **Adequacy of Provision of Sportsgrounds in Key Demand Areas**

Over time, sporting infrastructure in Greater Taree City Council has generally developed around the main population centres of Taree and Wingham and the inland villages of Tinonee and Lansdowne.

However, over the last decade the high population growth areas have been the coastal centres of Hallidays Point, Old Bar and Harrington.

Whilst population in the inland centres has increased steadily, the coastal centres have experienced dramatic and sustained population increases.

Accordingly, Council has been experiencing considerable pressure from these coastal communities where demand for sports fields has exponentially increased.

The increase in population has resulted in the availability of additional S94 funds, however the current flow of S94 is still insufficient to fully compensate for the high cost of sports field establishment.

Council's current sport related policies reflect equity of use for all organised and non-organised recreational users. However, at present quality access for all users does not universally occur due to deficiencies in opportunity for some user groups as a result of demand exceeding the availability of venues.

Council's current policies clearly reflect high levels of sport participation. These policies confirm Council's commitment to the positive health and community outcomes that sporting participation provides, however greater opportunity through more facilities would enhance these outcomes.

★ **Current Requirement for Updating and Refurbishment of Sportsgrounds and Supporting Infrastructure**

Whilst Council is in the process of considering proposals for new sports facilities in high growth areas, the maintenance and replacement of existing aged facilities has historically been under funded. The long term low level of recurrent funding does in turn result in accelerated depreciation of the existing aged facilities.

Capital assistance allocations for this purpose have typically been at very low levels in the Greater Taree City Council area. At the same time Council has a moderate shortfall in critical sporting venues, and a chronic shortage of suitably floodlit venues for competition fixtures.

The concentration of night fixtures on the limited number of adequately floodlit grounds has resulted in their over use and the inevitable decline in the quality of the sport surface.

As a guide to Council's ability to fund capital sport and recreation improvements, the average budget allocation for this purpose over the previous six (6) budgets (including 2006/2007) is \$91,000 per annum, of which \$39,000 per annum has been S94 funding. These amounts have not been solely sport related, but include all recreational programs except public swimming pools.

★ **Appropriateness and Fairness of Council Pricing Principles for Facilities**

Despite Council's limited ability to provide the necessary level of recurrent and capital expenditure for its sport, recreational and leisure programs, Council's current pricing policy dictates that no fees or charges are levied for use of public recreational facilities (except swimming pools, leased sites and one primitive camp site). The current pricing policy only allows for the recovery, at cost, of electricity consumed for the purpose of sports field floodlighting, and sports field line marking services provided by Council staff. Some sporting clubs do donate materials and volunteer labour when Council undertakes the annual sports field renovation program in early Spring. The provision of support by sports clubs is ad-hoc and variable in nature.

Generally speaking, the current pricing policy supports and gives impetus to the current use policy, which reflects equity of use for all users.

Unfortunately these policies in combination have resulted in the over use of limited sport facilities, the potential for regular season overlap, and a general (but not universal) user disrespect for public sports fields and facilities. Very few fields are not used for both Summer and Winter sport, so it is very rare for any public sports fields to be given rest and recuperation time.

★ **Environmental Issues, Including Water Conservation and Grounds Maintenance**

Sports fields in the Greater Taree City Council area have been generally in a deteriorated state (relative to optimum condition) for a number of years, due to the tendency for the Spring/Summer growing periods to be characterised by drought conditions. Of the past ten (10) growing seasons only two (2) have seen anywhere near the average rainfall readings for Spring and Summer. Ground recovery has not occurred primarily due to the lack of rainfall. Council currently has no sports fields with reticulated irrigation installed. The lack of moisture in the ground in Spring has resulted in limited renovation programs over a number of years. Ground aeration programs are ineffective due to the limited penetration into the dry field surfaces.

Council has participated in limited grey water re-use schemes with the local water/sewer authority (MidCoast Water), however the initial installations were unsuccessful due to the poor quality of workmanship by MidCoast Water contractors that installed the below ground delivery system.

Council continues to investigate opportunity for both water conservation and re-use schemes.

★ **Residential Amenity, Public Liability and Security Issues**

Whilst Council is fortunate that many of its most prominent sporting venues are located away from high density residential precincts, where there has been conflict, the issues of major importance to residents are traffic and parking, floodlight spill/reflection and noise. These issues are not considered to be major problems for Greater Taree City Council given the situation with current sports field distribution.

Council has taken a risk management approach to public liability issues in parks and reserves. Internally, Council's Parks and Recreation Section has developed an inspection policy which allows for one (1) formal and documented inspection once per year and regular, but informal, inspections on a regular basis which are recorded by field staff during the course of undertaking programmed maintenance.

Further to the inspection policy Council requires sports clubs, associations and hirers of recreational facilities to undertake and document risk assessments in respect of the relevant Council facility prior to each period of use. These risk assessments are broadly based around those undertaken by Council operational staff for construction and maintenance activities, with the worst case being that the use of the facility may not proceed if an identified risk or hazard cannot be adequately rectified.

Council has taken this co-operative approach with sports clubs due to the reality that ultimately, the relevant authority cannot delegate its duty of care or transfer its liability to another party.

PUBWORKS - Inquiry into Sportsground Management in NSW

From: "Wayne Hull" <Wayne.Hull@gtcc.nsw.gov.au>
To: <pubworks@parliament.nsw.gov.au>
Date: 4/08/2006 8:56 AM
Subject: Inquiry into Sportsground Management in NSW
CC: "Records - Trim Request Inbox" <RecM@gtcc.nsw.gov.au>

Kylie,

I refer to the correspondence of 7 July 2006 requesting submissions to the Standing Committee on Public Works in respect of the above mentioned inquiry.

Please find attached Council's submission. Any further inquiries or requests for additional information may be referred to the undersigned.

Regards <<Submission to NSW Standing Committee on Public Works.doc>>

Wayne Hull
Supervisor Parks & Reserves

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