

**Warringah
Council**

25 August 2006

Ms Carolynne James
Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms James

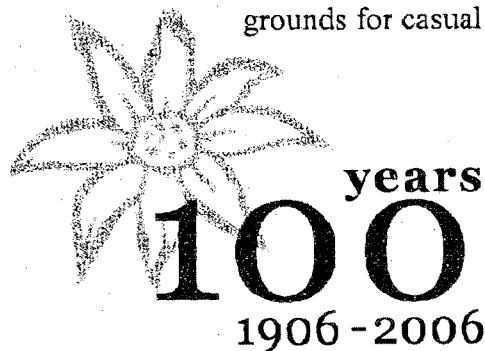
Re: Parliamentary Inquiry into Sportsground Management

I am writing to provide a submission to the Inquiry. I apologise for the late reply as our first priority was to support the submission by SHOROC (incorporating Mosman, Manly, Warringah, and Pittwater councils), which you received last week. Comments have been provided in relation to the headings listed.

Adequacy of provision of sports grounds in key demand areas

Warringah Council owns or manages approximately 50 sports ground sites (including school facilities), containing approximately 127 sporting fields and over 70 netball and basketball courts. The number of sporting fields is based on the maximum configuration during the winter season and can vary depending on demand.

Warringah, as with many urban councils, has identified shortfalls in the provision of sports grounds, particularly with the emergence of newer sports and the greater participation of women in sport. Additionally there appears to have been a significant increase in the rate of return to active sport by both male and female participants aged above 18 years. The pressures are emphasised particularly where sporting infrastructure is well established providing for a rapid uptake in use of facilities by the arrival of increased participation. The success of programs promoting recreation and healthy activities has encouraged both demand for organised sports and the informal use of grounds for casual and informal recreation.



Warringah has attempted to address this in recent years by attempting to better utilise existing fields and seeking to gain new fields. Council has invested considerable time in trying to find a new regional home for netball and the constraints of cost and land availability continue to frustrate this process. The grant programs available for such activities are often limited to small amounts that do not readily support the provision of regional facilities and do not encourage Councils to work together. The standard source of funding through Section 94 funding supports embellishments to facilitate greater utilisation but, given the limitations above, seldom provide for new fields.

It is also important to create facilities that are as multi-functional as possible. With limited space and high demand, this principle must continue to underpin government policy. The days where single clubs could gain leases over building and fields, often built with Council and the state government support, and potentially lock out other users can no longer be accepted given the constraints of ground availability and public funding.

Warringah Council also has sound working relationships with local schools and the use of their fields on a cooperative basis. These fields can often play a vital role in the local sports ground network and this could be considered and investigated by the Committee. As a non-owner of these playing fields used by the community, Council is reluctant to commit strategically in the provision of resources to enhance the adequacy or capacity of these sites other than agreed maintenance and as such this limits how they can be used to meet current and future needs

Current requirement for updating and refurbishment of sports grounds and supporting infrastructure

Many existing facilities within Warringah fail to meet current community expectations in regards to sports ground facilities. As previously mentioned this particularly relates to new and emerging sports and those with high female participation particularly at those sites where construction of amenities precedes the rapid emergence of female participation of traditionally male sports.

Council audits of use of the playing fields has shown wide variation in use both between and within codes, and between fields of a similar type. The northern beaches councils (Manly Warringah and Pittwater) allow a sporting union to manage allocations to user groups. Whilst this model is considered a positive and inclusive approach towards management of community facilities, it is apparent that this approach needs to be reviewed to improve the efficiency and sustainability of facility allocation. This is being considered as part of the SHOROC Report and was identified as an action in Warringah Council's *Sports in Warringah Strategy*.

Many of Councils' older facilities are not designed to meet modern standards for access, and a lack of indoor facilities can limit opportunities for athletes with a disability. Disabled athletes also report a lack of funding for support organisations and areas such as the northern beaches find it difficult to get coaches and other resources.

The continued development and promotion of sport by both National and State Government will not be sustainable at a local level because the local providers of facilities, playing fields and parks cannot match the funding required

Appropriateness and fairness of council pricing principles for facilities

Regular users of sportsfields in Manly, Warringah and Pittwater pay no hire fees for use of their respective facilities. Their only contribution are levies of \$3.00 per registered player per season that are applied to capital works programs.

Warringah Council has introduced a Sportsfield Rectification Program, whereby a levy is applied to all ratepayers in Warringah (special variation of 2% of the General Rate) for the rectification of sportsgrounds in Warringah. This fund is primarily targeted to the many grounds developed on filled sites with a legacy of instability and settlement.

As stated previously, the SHOROC group of Councils has just undertaken its own investigation into such pricing principles. The report from the investigation is yet to be released by the member Councils, however upon its release it can be provided to the research officers assisting the Parliamentary Inquiry.

The report articulates clearly the need to clarify capital expenditure, maintenance and recurrent costs. These need to be separately determined to ensure that a sound management approach is applied. The report recognises that the standard approach of not charging all costs to organised sports is appropriate due to the broader community benefits associated with sportsgrounds. There are widely differing recovery targets by councils and the Inquiry could assist all councils by providing an economic and social basis for a benchmark for cost recovery.

In summary the SHOROC report has suggested a new formula for the collection of contributions from sports ground users to the recurrent costs and maintenance requests of users. It recognises that with growing demand and expectations users will need to contribute more in order to help meet such expectations.

Upgrading traditional systems to allow cost recovery for energy usage at sportsgrounds may require significant capital costs to provide adequate lighting (some fields share lights) and separation of systems to allow accurate billing (often one system serves more than one field and sometimes the system might be split along different sides of fields each serving all the fields). The use of new technology will facilitate the operation and security of the upgraded systems but the basic infrastructure costs remain.

Warringah has moved to address this in part through a new Infrastructure Levy for all ratepayers and the SHOROC investigation into sports grounds user charges. However, even with these resources Council has much more demand than it can meet, particularly given the replacement cost of these assets is much higher given community expectations and current design criteria. There also is likely to be more opportunities for councils to work more closely with the registered clubs organisations. These organisations provide invaluable support to sporting groups, however there is not often an informed approach to these relationships and funding can be ad hoc. Warringah believes that there are opportunities to use more effectively the support and knowledge of the registered clubs movement in supporting sports grounds.

Environmental issues, including water conservation and grounds maintenance

These are very important issues for Council and it is apparent that there is a close correlation between the environment, water conservation, grounds maintenance and the resulting impacts on the condition of playing fields. These issues have been addressed in part in Council's draft Water Savings Plan recently submitted to the Department of Energy, Utilities and Sustainability. Council has also been proactive in minimising water use through the use of water savings fixtures at our sports grounds and through investing in groundwater supplies. We are concerned however that the State Government ensures that the use of groundwater resources is done in a sustainable manner. It would be inappropriate to exchange one unsustainable source with another.

It should be pointed out that while stormwater use will be considered, Council also supports the treatment and use of sewage, as this is a regular supply source not subject to weather patterns, as stormwater is, and reduces the volumes of effluent releases into natural systems. Merit based decisions need to be made in comparing stormwater and sewage re-use and the Committee should consider both concurrently.

Council applies water and energy savings requirements to all new developments and routinely includes rainwater storage in new developments. The use of grey water from hand basins is being investigated for toilet flushing at amenities buildings.

Residential amenity, public liability and security issues

These issues are recurrent and ongoing for Councils. Residential amenity is considered at a broad level in the preparation of all open space plans. Detailed consideration is then also given in the development assessment process where this applies. Council is proposing to include a hierarchy of sportsgrounds with appropriate amenities and assets defined for each category of ground, based on level of use of the ground.

Of particular concern to Council is the issue of lighting. Lighting extends the availability of limited playing space and thus the nuisance associated with parking and participant and spectator noise. Council attempts to address this by ensuring lighting meets current Australian standards in relation to light spill and limiting the kinds of lighting (training or competition standard) in the sportsground hierarchy to limit the impacts. Interestingly, the major impact of night time use is often noise rather than light spill, and this can be dramatically greater under competition than training.

Increasingly security and vandalism is an issue having an increased cost implication for Council leading to an ongoing re-allocation of funding away from sportsfield facility improvements. In addition, expanding existing facilities to provide kiosks and equipment storage, commensurate with higher participation rates, increases the attraction for theft and vandalism.

Public liability remains an issue for Councils despite the reduction in litigation a softening of the insurance market after the introduction of the new public liability legislation in recent years

In the absence of agreed safety guidelines for playing surfaces Council requires that the use of fields for organised sport by members of the sporting union be conditional on the relevant association or club carrying its own public liability insurance, and games only proceeding where an appropriate risk assessment has been undertaken to determine that the field should be used. Goulburn has been reported as closing all playing fields whilst Ryde has also made field closures due to safety concerns from lack of watering and, while Warringah Council's fields have not reached this level, we are acutely aware of the combined effect of environmental conditions, water conservation and increased participation in the loss of grass cover over the winter season and the difficulties of maintaining good playing surfaces.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Blackadder
GENERAL MANAGER