

Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Works

Inquiry into Sportsground Management in NSW

Wentworth Shire Council Submission

## **Background**

Wentworth is considered the gateway to Outback NSW, and is situated on the junction of the Murray and Darling Rivers in southwestern New South Wales. Mildura, situated on the Victorian side of the Murray, is the nearest commercial centre of any size. Mildura and Wentworth are also marketed under the banner of "Murray Outback " and "Sunraysia".

Wentworth Shire covers an area of 2,616,926 hectares (26,000 sq km) and has a population of approximately 8,000 people. The southern boundary (along the Murray River) has the greatest population density in the townships of Wentworth, Dareton, Buronga and Gol Gol. Wentworth is situated 1,075 km from Sydney, 585 km from Melbourne and 420 km from Adelaide and is located within New South Wales, on the border of Victoria.

Wentworth's climate is semi-temperate. Highest maximum temperature officially recorded was 48°C on January 10, 1939. Lowest minimum was -5°C in June 1907. Summer average is 31°C and Winter average is 16.7°C.

Tourism is strong within the Mildura/Wentworth region. Each year there are more than 300,000 visitors to the junction of Australia's two greatest rivers. More than 50 motels, in excess of 30 caravan parks and over 100 houseboats provide the visitor many different accommodation options. The quality of Club and sporting facilities is a reflection of the contribution the gambling tourist made.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR INQUIRY**

### **Adequacy of provision of sportsgrounds in key demand areas.**

Increasing urban development and changing demographics shift the demand for community based sporting facilities in different regions. The Committee will examine how state and local government planning mechanisms are dealing with these changes. The Committee is interested in what criteria should determine the provision of sports facilities and how the viability of sportsgrounds should be evaluated in terms of broader policy objectives such as health outcomes, open space, and community cohesion.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

This Council has not historically undertaken any strategic tasks that focus on the future of social infrastructure. Further, there have been no reporting mechanisms that enable Council to closely monitor the appropriateness or viability of existing sporting and recreational facilities. As is common with

most strategic planning, an issue arises before Council considers the need for monitoring. Urban growth is one such example.

It is assumed in the following statements that local government as a planning authority is in the best position to deal with the monitoring of communities needs and set objectives for long term planning and implementation of strategies to address communities' issues.

All Councils play a vital role in implementing the NSW Government's social justice strategy to achieve equality, access, participation, and rights for all community members. Each Council must submit a social/community plan, at least every five years, to meet the needs of residents in their area including those who may be disadvantaged in some way.

Council's face a lot of resourcing pressures to meet legislative (plan making) requirements in addition to other plan making that is considered essential for the Council's functioning and service delivery.

In addition, Council's obligations under the Planning and Assessment Act 1979 provide an opportunity for Council to include detailed (social) planning issues into their plan making.

It would seem logical as a starting point to **develop either or both** of these functions to include a more detailed analysis of sports facilities.

### **What criteria should determine the provision of sports facilities?**

Criteria should include

- Demand And Supply both locally and regionally for various types of facilities and activities (as opposed to a simple population based assessment).
- Ability for Councils to receive funding for establishment and or ongoing maintenance of facilities.
- Ability for Council to manage the facility (both financially and environmentally).
- Local conditions that make facilities attractive for 'outside' clubs and teams.
- Ability for facility to be multi functional.
- Ability for facility to be water sensitive.
- Location of facility.

### **Current requirement for updating and refurbishment of sportsgrounds and supporting infrastructure.**

Improvement and maintenance costs of sportsgrounds infrastructure such as lighting, amenities blocks and car parks are increasing and replacement of items can be a large capital cost. Capital improvements are funded by councils and through capital assistance programs from the state government

such as the Department of Sport and Recreation. The Committee will examine the provision of funding for facilities in addressing priority community concerns.

### **ADMINISTRATION**

Lack of resources has hampered Council's ability to attract funds to assist in the maintenance, updating and refurbishment of our sportsgrounds. Recently The Gol Gol Hawks engaged a consultant to submit an application for an extension to the clubrooms located at the Alcheringa Oval. The application was successful. Council provides funding in each year's capital works budget for maintenance upgrading and refurbishment of sporting facilities.

### **How the viability of sportsgrounds should be evaluated in terms of broader policy objectives such as health outcomes, open space, and community cohesion?**

Ironically, the best (but certainly not the simplest) is to have robust monitoring combined with an ongoing commitment to community engagement.

The locals are the best barometers of what does and doesn't 'work' in their communities. The issue being raised here is rather complex and appears to approach the concept of social capital and how a community builds such capital.

Social capital is a complex concept and is affected by the features of the places in which people live. People develop perceptions of the importance of having places to go in the community, how the socio cultural make up of communities affects participation and the ways in which their communities are changing.

There is lots of evidence to suggest that there is clearly a dynamic between social interactions and physical structures; in particular, aspects of urban landscape are seen to both facilitate and hinder opportunities for participation in activities that would benefit the health of residents in that area.

There are links between urban infrastructure and levels of participation. Higher levels of social and civic participation takes place in areas where people hold positive views of their environments, where environments were green, had open spaces and considerable opportunity structures.

**Given this, it is important for Councils to undertake three main tasks:**

- 1. Ask the community what their views about sportsgrounds are (in the context of their ability to contribute to social capital)?**
- 2. Commit to ongoing engagement of the community to allow continued and evolutionary monitoring of changes.**

**3. Commit to ongoing engagement of the community on ALL planning issues (social and land use planning) to build local knowledge on whether or not such facilities are indeed assisting the broader policy objectives.**

Since social capital is such an important issue, Council should be mandated to undertake tasks that enable them to have a clear and well represented view of community needs now and into the future.

This Council has taken a 'traditional' view that 'well being' of Council was aligned to financial 'health', but it is so much more. The three spheres that need to be considered are the community, the environment, and the economy whilst also paying attention to the links between these spheres.

In this context, the viability of sportsgrounds should be evaluated in terms of broader policy objectives such as health outcomes, open space, and community cohesion as follows:

- Council in consultation with the community needs to agree on the basis by which they measure and evaluate the viability of the sportsgrounds through surveys, workshops, community information exchange days, etc
- Using the community-based measures Council can 'time track' results and then 'use' them to provide data for future planning and strategies.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

Council has recently appointed an administration officer to develop systems and reporting mechanisms relating to the Crown Reserves, which Council manages. All of Council's sporting complexes are located on Crown Reserves.

### **Appropriateness and fairness of council pricing principles for facilities.**

Councils have to balance the recovery of some costs from sporting organisations using sporting facilities against the objective of providing equitable and accessible facilities for the community as a whole, including groups with special needs. In addition, consideration should be given to the efficient allocation of access between groups to preserve time for sportsground rehabilitation and to provide additional capacity for ad hoc requirements. As the policies and administrative practices for usage charging vary between Councils, state government and private providers, the Committee will review different access and pricing policies.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

Council is mindful of the financial constraints that local sporting groups work under and work with the Department of Natural Resources to ensure that the costs to user groups are affordable. There is however minimum amounts that

DNR assign for lease of their reserves. A list of current lease charges to sporting groups is attached as Appendix A.

### **Environmental issues, including water conservation and grounds maintenance**

*A recent concern raised in the media is the progressive deterioration of sportsgrounds caused by lack of water and reduced maintenance and exacerbated by overuse. The Committee will examine how these issues can be addressed through environmental management and engineering strategies such as improved drainage and stormwater systems.*

The cost of watering Council's recreation reserves is very high, however at this stage the sportsgrounds are maintained to a high standard. It is noted that in this Shire, Council is responsible for the maintenance of the water system, which provides dual water (one filtered, one raw water for garden use).

### **Residential amenity, public liability and security issues**

*One of the consequences of increased use of sporting facilities is the associated noise, traffic and pedestrian activity generated. The Committee will examine how councils are attempting to balance community concerns about noise and amenity arising from sportsground use. Another concern is the increasing cost of public liability insurance for councils resulting from incidents occurring at sports grounds. There is a tendency to seek formal use agreements with organisations and groups to provide legal protection from claims or, alternatively, prohibit certain activities on council facilities. The Committee will examine these impacts and how they might be better managed in the future.*

Wentworth Shire Council has low ratepayer base combined with the huge geographic area.

All of this Council's sporting grounds are on Crown Land Recreation Reserves.

The problems that this Council faces include but are not limited to

- Administration reporting requirements to the Department of Natural Resources have made it necessary to create a position for the sole purpose of undertaking this work.
- Lease or licence agreements are required for each sporting body that uses a sporting facility. There are high costs associated with lease agreements for user groups, which include legal and survey plans costs. In most cases these groups are small, with low utilization figures and not a lot of funds. There is also an issue locally with engagement of surveyors as there is a severe shortage of surveyors in the area.
- Funding opportunities for sporting reserves are missed as insufficient resources are available to prepare submissions

- The costs to upkeep the sporting grounds are far in excess of income received. For example for financial year 04/05 the two main ovals, and two swimming pools had a combined income of \$5,400.24 and combined expenditure of \$259,253.83.
- Limited funds to contribute to capital works
- High costs to keep swimming pools open

Council positives include:-

- Cross border co-operation within the Sunraysia. Any ratepayer from each municipality Mildura or Wentworth Shire can become part of any sporting group and enjoy their facilities. As Mildura has a much higher rate base they have been able to fund raise locally and attract government funding. For example, to set up "Park for Play" which is part of a larger sporting ground and has play facilities for people of all abilities including dual slides so that a carer and a person with a disability can use the slides together.
- Proactive sporting groups who do not wait for Council to seek funding, but utilize a local consultant to successfully apply for funding to extend a football/netball clubrooms. Council does not have funding to engage consultants to either develop management plans or prepare funding applications

## APPENDIX A

### Current list of charges to sporting groups to use recreation facilities

Sporting Organisation	Amount	Description
Coomealla Wentworth Cricket Club	\$300.00	Rental of Dareton Oval for the 2004/2005 Season
Wentworth District Football Club	\$3500.00	Rental of Dareton oval for the 2005 Season
Wentworth Show Society	\$3382.50	Half Yearly Showgrounds User Fee
Dareton Kennel Club	\$165.00	Half Yearly Showgrounds User Fee
Wentworth Polo club	\$1100.00	Half Yearly Showgrounds User Fee
Vintage Machinery Soc	\$55.00	Half Yearly Showgrounds User Fee
Palomino Club	\$150.00	Half Yearly Showgrounds User Fee
Wentworth Show Society	\$3382.50	Half Yearly Showgrounds User Fee
Dareton Kennel Club	\$165.00	Half Yearly Showgrounds User Fee
Wentworth Polo club	\$1100.00	Half Yearly Showgrounds User Fee
Vintage Machinery Soc	\$55.00	Half Yearly Showgrounds User Fee
Wentworth Racing Club	\$1100.00	Half Yearly Showgrounds User Fee
Wentworth Sporting Complex	\$1150.26	Lease of golf Links & Sporting Complex (CPI Increase June 2009)
Coomealla Wentworth Cricket Club	\$650.00	Rental of Wentworth Oval for the 2004/2005 Season
Warriors Baseball Club	\$250.00	Use of Wentworth Oval
Wentworth Racing Club	\$1100.00	Half Yearly Showgrounds User Fee
Coomealla Club	\$110.00	Lease of Reserve Number 88251
Gol Gol Football Club	\$2500.00	Rental of Alcheringa Oval/Pavilion for the 2004 Season
Mildura Workingmans Cricket Club	\$1000.00	Rental of Alcheringa Oval 2004/2005
Mildrua Workingman Cricket Club	\$168.00	Contribution to clean Alcheringa Pavilion
Gol Gol Football Club	\$168.00	Contribution to clean Alcheringa Pavilion
Mildrua Workingman Cricket Club	\$168.00	Contribution to Cleaning of Alcheringa Pavilion

Gol Gol Football Club	\$168.00	Contribution to Cleaning of Alcheringa Pavilion
Mildrua Workingman Cricket Club	\$168.00	Contribution to clean Alcheringa Pavilion
Gol Gol Football Club	\$168.00	Contribution to clean Alcheringa Pavilion
Mildrua Workingman Cricket Club	\$168.00	Contribution cleaning Alcheringa Pavillion
Gol Gol Football Club	\$168.00	Contribution cleaning Alcheringa Pavillion

Council's swimming pools are outdoor and open seasonally.

The cost to Council for each pool each season is in excess of \$70,000 per annum, the charges for patrons are

Child at school or under 15	\$ 1.00
Adult	\$ 1.50
Season Ticket Child	\$20.00
Season Ticket Adult	\$25.00
Season Ticket Family	\$50.00
School Carnival	\$25.00