

Submission from Kempsey Shire Council

Ref: 178 (325065)
KLB:klb
21 August 2006

The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir

RE: INQUIRY INTO SPORTSGROUND MANAGEMENT IN NEW SOUTH WALES INVITATION TO MAKE A SUBMISSION

Thank you for your letter received at Council on 10 July 2006. I apologise for the delay in responding.

1.The Shire of Kempsey has twelve locations for sporting fields with eleven currently developed and maintained. Four are within the town of Kempsey, the remaining seven in various coastal and hinterland villages. Based on current and projected population data and usage records, this number is more than adequate to service the needs of the various communities throughout the Shire. Council maintains these locations as multi-purpose fields and facilities.

2.The cost to maintain Council's sporting fields was \$240,000 in the 2005/2006 financial year. This included mowing, fencing, lights, goalposts, irrigation and line marking. The cost to maintain the buildings associated with the fields was \$16,300 however this allocation was inadequate to achieve any more than response to vandalism and risk. Cleaning of the buildings, mainly toilets, cost \$41,162.

Expenditure on Capital works was \$170,000 last financial year however this included projects carried forward from previous financial years.

Currently Council does not require user groups to pay for the use of any fields.

After initial line marking by Council at the beginning of the season users are expected to line mark fields, using equipment loaned from Council and paint paid for by the user groups.

User groups are encouraged and assisted in applying for grants for capital improvements. Regular users are expected to keep clean change rooms, shower areas, canteens and storage areas. All users are required to collect litter from the fields and surrounds at the end of each use. The cost to pick up litter from the grounds of sporting fields was \$24,000 last financial year.

There is considerable difficulty in identifying windows of opportunity between Winter and Summer seasons to rehabilitate grounds and considerable time and effort is expended negotiating suitable periods for this type of work.

In regard to revenue arrangements this Council determined that profit making organizations should be charged a fee for one-off events. The reality is that no group has been charged for usage of the grounds in the financial year 2005/06.

Fees for the use of lights were adopted by Council however appropriate systems to quantify usage and invoice groups are not in place at this time. The current system is effective if one group only uses the lights over any billing period. If more than one group uses the lights it is not a cost effective exercise to calculate invoice amounts.

3. Whilst dry periods and heavy usage impact on sporting fields in the Kempsey Shire the worst outcomes are where irrigation system defects have not been reported by user groups during extended periods of dry weather and heavy use.

4. Implementation of new booking procedures and record keeping systems are hampered by the reluctance of some groups to accept these administrative changes. Many schools use Council managed fields regularly and do not book them 'in case' a fee is required, as was the case some years ago.

5. Council strives to ensure fields are available for all users including new groups and sporting clubs. It is particularly evident in outlying villages that the sporting fields are appreciated as an open space for formal and informal sport and these areas are also utilised for non-sporting community events. The use of the associated buildings, particularly canteens and storage rooms cause the most difficult problems to resolve. The reluctance of user groups to book fields outside their own local area reinforces the inequitable usage of some of Council's fields.

6. The direct impacts of use of Council's sporting fields reported by residents tend to be related to spectators remaining after competitions have finished. These impacts include noise, anti-social behaviour, broken glass and other litter. Parking and traffic have not been identified as an issue at this time as the Shire rarely hosts large sporting events.

7. All users of sporting fields in Kempsey are requested to have their own public liability cover. As a prerequisite of any sport taking to a playing field it is up to the person officiating to carry out an assessment of the playing surface for suitability both for safety and playing conditions.

Signage has been placed on sporting fields within the shire advising of prohibited activities at these areas.

To date Council has had only one claim relating to a sporting facility and that was from a member of a user group.

The cost of Public Liability Insurance has not risen due to or as a result of any sporting field incident.

The cost of rectifying damage through vandalism on sporting fields is increasing.

Council is looking at formalizing and revising agreements with seasonal user groups and ensuring one-off users are informed of any restrictions and their responsibilities at the time of booking.

Yours faithfully

Kim Buckingham
OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION COORDINATOR