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The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam,

INQUIRY INTO SPORTSGROUND MANAGEMENT IN NSW

On behalf of the Little Athletics Association of NSW, please accept the following submission in relation to the "Inquiry into Sportsground Management in NSW". As a community based organisation that operates across New South Wales, primarily utilising Council venues, the inquiry and any resultant outcomes is of great interest.

The specific factors, as highlighted in the call for submissions, are addresses individually below.

1. Adequacy of provision of quality sportsgrounds to meet community needs across NSW
Competition for access to quality sporting facilities, particularly in the population growth areas of the Sydney basin is a major issue for sports bodies and in some cases is leading to ground over use (with attendant maintenance and upkeep challenges.)

In older areas, many facilities are crying out for an injection of funds to ensure necessary upgrading to meet contemporary sporting standards for safe use etc. Too often the cost of maintaining facilities to an acceptable and safe standard is left to the volunteer community groups that utilise the venues.

The design and adequacy of many of the older facilities often cause conflicts with surrounding residential neighbours during their use, because they were originally developed for a less car dependent era and consequently have inadequate off-street parking provision. Additionally in many of these inner suburban areas sportsgrounds, the noise factor associated with the conduct of relevant junior and senior sporting events in higher density living areas, poses noise/amenity issues for the surrounding residents.

Unfortunately most junior/senior sporting bodies are involved in an annual competition for relatively under-supplied dedicated sporting facilities and compromises as to shared use/times of ground availability are an inevitable consequence.

2. Cost and revenue arrangements including capital upgrades
For not-for-profit lower profile sports, the requirement to match capital grants (Department of Sport and Recreation) for sports facilities on a dollar for dollar basis is a huge challenge. So too is the increasing cost pressures associated with public liability and other sports injury insurance cover.

Our own Association runs a small grants scheme to assist our 196 affiliated Centres with capital upgrades, but this is too small to aid major add-ons such as new storage/equipment and spectator facilities.

Generally very little funding is available from local councils for things such as improvements to amenities buildings etc. Sporting groups are often forced to save funds over many years to put towards capital projects. If a sport is required to change venues for whatever reason, these facilities, being on council ground, obviously remain the asset of the council and in turn are a lost asset for the group that funded them.

The ground hire charges imposed in some Council areas has become exorbitant and the participation of some young families has been affected by the increasing costs. Keeping junior sport as affordable as possible is certainly our objective, as this in turn increases participation and assists to counter many population health trends. This is however becoming increasingly difficult with the charges being imposed.

3. Environmental concerns associated with sportsground management

Environmental concerns about the use of hazardous chemicals in former ground marking arrangements, together with many Councils' withdrawal from that on-going task, have placed other volunteer organisational/cost pressures back to sporting organisations like ours, now required to mark grass tracks more frequently with non-hazardous marking products. As you will imagine, track and field marking is a major job, given the length and amount of marking required to delineate competition areas.

The fact that many grass facilities are also detention bases to mitigate downstream flooding in urban areas, whilst applauded as a residential amenity, can mean delays in ground access in periods after heavy rainfall as these grounds can take longer to dry out.

4. Effectiveness of current administration of sportsgrounds by various providers including councils, state government (including schools) and private operators

Most Councils have Sports Councils or Committees to try and give all local sporting bodies a say in ground allocations for the winter and summer sporting seasons. Like any such arrangements, some work well, others not so well. The different needs of different sports are something of an issue in shared use facilities, and whilst we are not opposed to the maximisation of facility usage (to the extent possible) it often involves some compromises between users.

5. Impact on health outcomes and social cohesion, particularly in disadvantaged communities

Rising costs of participation are an issue in disadvantaged areas with low income families often excluded on affordability grounds. Hence our concerns about rising costs of ground hire, costs shifting with many ground maintenance tasks progressively shifting to the sporting bodies as Councils try to limit their costs too!

Participation in organised sport is seen as a positive contributor to healthy lifestyle choices and it is our view that governments should be trying to facilitate higher participation levels by ensuring adequate provision and periodic re-investment to support quality sporting facilities and their retention.

6. Traffic, noise and other direct impacts on residential amenity

This is a particular issue in established areas and probably less of an issue in newer areas where better separation/parking provision can negate the impact on residential neighbours. Some capital re-investment in the older facilities could help reduce the impacts on surrounding neighbours through more noise sensitive design etc.

7. Affect of litigation and insurance costs on financial viability

We adopt a sound risk minimisation strategy to reduce this, but insurance/litigation issues are a factor impacting on affordable family access to junior sport which is not a good outcome when we are dealing with a significant and growing obesity population health problem. Keeping junior sport/senior sport as affordable as possible is one way to counter that population health trend.

We do recognise the governments legislative efforts have reduced the growth of insurance premium rises, coupled with our own risk management efforts.

Problems have also been experienced in the variance of indemnity and insurance requirements from one Council to the next. In some cases Councils have attempted to insert "Holds Harmless" clauses, placing the entire burden on the voluntary group utilising the facility.

8. Access to open space for active and passive recreational users

We recognise too the need for a balance in the supply of both active (e.g. sportsgrounds) and passive recreation spaces (non dedicated open space for walkers, exercise their dogs and those wanting to picnic etc.) The progressive provision of inner area bicycle/walkways and their inclusion in transport and other infrastructure planning is applauded as are the efforts to ensure regional and other parks to allow for more passive recreation is also a good move.

But the bottom line for us as an Association is continuing access to and inclusion in decisions by Councils with new residential release areas, to the provision of further dedicated athletics tracks so we can continue to grow and cater for families in these emerging areas as well as in areas of established population.

The above, whilst brief, broadly outlines the views of the Little Athletics Association of NSW in regards to the management of sportsgrounds, under the terms of the review. We appreciate the opportunity to put forward a submission and would be happy to expand upon the comments above, in the future if required to do so.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs. Kerry O'Keefe
Chief Executive Officer
Little Athletics Association of NSW Inc.