



Submission to

**Legislative Assembly
Standing Committee on Public Works**

**INQUIRY INTO
SPORTSGROUND MANAGEMENT IN NSW**

The content of this submission has been provided through the ongoing efforts of individual members and corporate members of Parks & Leisure Australia from many different sources. I present this submission on behalf of the members of Parks & Leisure Australia.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Inquiry into Sportsground Management NSW – August 2006

Parks and Leisure Australia welcome this inquiry and are grateful for the invitation to communicate our member's professional concerns regarding sportsground management in NSW.

For your records it is appropriate to first explain who Parks & Leisure Australia is and what role PLA has been playing in regard to this issue both in NSW, in different states and at a National level. PLA will not be commenting on all areas covered by the inquiry as there are organisations and individuals better qualified in these areas.

Parks and Leisure Australia

Parks and Leisure Australia (PLA) is a national organisation which promotes co-operation and mutual assistance between persons and organisations associated with public parks, botanic gardens and open space environments; recreation and leisure facilities and services.

Parks and Leisure Australia (PLA) has been in existence for over 70 years and is the key professional Association which provides a broad range of services to members across the parks and leisure industry. Membership ranges across staff and management of parks, gardens, sport, aquatic, rehabilitation; aged hostels and recreation centres, at local and state government levels, students from tertiary institutions, academics, private consultants, private operators of facilities and many more. Our membership comes from all States of Australia and overseas. We act as an advocate and representative body of the Australian parks and leisure profession to all levels of government and business instrumentalities.

PLA involvement with this current Issue

For the professionals working in the Parks & Leisure Industry on a daily bases the issue of capacity and sustainability of sports grounds commenced some time back.

This is a national issue that is now being concentrated in both NSW and Victoria with much interest in other growing states.

The issue of sports ground capacity and sustainability was first formally identified by Parks and Leisure Australia at its 2003 National Conference in Perth. Speakers from a metropolitan municipality identified a range of issues affecting supply and demand of sports fields within their local government area at this conference. They also identified a number of initiatives that they have implemented in order to maximise the amount of sporting opportunities available, without compromising current usage and the quality of their sporting facilities. Their presentation struck a cord with many other parks and leisure industry professionals from all over Australia, who were also experiencing similar issues with overuse and lack of available sports grounds.

*(Capacity and Sustainability of Sports Grounds Scoping Project
Parks and Leisure Australia - November 2005)*

In early 2004 NSW Department Infrastructure & Natural Resources (DIPNR) was rolling out the framework for the Sydney Metropolitan Growth Strategy. It also happened to coincide with many seminars and talks with the International Year of the Built Environment.

As part of the Sydney metro strategy the NSW Department of Planning (then DIPNR) Metropolitan Open Space Team (MOST) needed to collect information for input into the Strategy on open space and other recreation needs.

The objectives of MOST include developing

- A strategic context for regional open space acquisitions
- Broad strategies for park and facilities development and
- Directions for funding programs including the metro greenspace program and Greening Western Sydney.

MOST set about undertaking a Sydney wide regional recreation demand and opportunity analysis, a very ambitious project and strongly welcomed and supported by PLA.

This initiative had three elements

1. Assessing the demographics of the city and trends in demographic characteristics
2. Conducting parks visitation patterns and use trends, and
3. Assessing regional recreation demands and opportunities for each of the (4) metropolitan planning regions. Central Coast
Western Sydney
Northern Sydney
Southern Sydney

The project basically had two objectives; the first was to get a clearer picture, a prioritised view of demand and opportunities for regional recreation and where appropriate metropolitan recreation and in the process create a communication forum at regional level.

The whole process had various elements with one having particular influence and that was looking at

- the implications for future provision,
- the need to identify changing influences and
- to assess the future provision initiatives including factors influencing demand, trends in recreation participation and implication to recreation demand and open space provision.

Obviously a wide range of people contributed in the preparation of these studies interesting enough a large number where PLA members representing their respective organisations.

The project consultants gathered every piece of documentation from all participating stakeholders. That included over 40 councils, numerous State departments and key stakeholders. What they gathered was a vast wealth of information but, - each one was different, even if they where for sports strategy's or leisure needs plan's they had similar processes but could not be directly compared and therefore held little regional value only local value.

This particular project in Sydney had energised the local leisure professionals and at the conclusion of the study PLA facilitated a seminar on the **'Future of Recreation in Sydney.'** To work through the issues raised in the study's that had industry ramification but for various reasons could not be taken further by DIPNR as it fell outside the study brief.

It was at these seminars that the recreation professionals (PLA members) were beginning to show some local concern. It was noted that we are all very busy doing our little bit we are learning from each other we are sharing but we could do so much better if we applied some standard practices to our individual applications.

A series of recommendations was agreed by the profession following the seminar and are included in the outcomes section of this submission.

From the **'Future of Recreation in Sydney Seminar August 2004'** communication had then been sent by PLA to;

- NSW Department Planning,
- NSW Department Sport & Recreation and relevant NSW Ministers.
- Federal Minister Sport
- Australian Institute of Sport (AIS)
- Standing Committee on Recreation & Sport (SCORS)

This communication from PLA was highlighting the facts that each and every stakeholder wanted to realise a positive outcome for National and State programs of healthy and Active Communities but little effort has gone into understanding whether we can cater for change in lifestyle activity at a local level.

From this correspondence PLA was invite to present at the **SCORS Community Facilities forum in Melbourne in March/April 2005.** This forum was represented by officers from each State Sport & Recreation Departments. Further professional discussion followed at the PLA National Conference in Hobart October 2005 with the topic gaining press interest from ABC National radio and from Hobart TV with follow up stories once again in Sydney daily papers.

A paper was then prepared by resource officers supporting the **Sport and Recreation Ministers Council (SRMC 35-4.8) Open Space Planning and Provision.**

PLA has made a presentation to **Federal Government Committee on Small Business Tourism Arts & Sport in February 2006** raising the challenges we all face.

Most recently PLA in association with NSW Department Sport & Recreation facilitated a combined workshop on **Sportsfields – Planning for New Growth May 2006.** From this workshop a combined approach to find solutions to the challenges we face have been support by PLA, Local Government and sporting association representatives.

Copies of all publications from each of the above committees, workshops, and project are attached as well as recommendations as developed have been incorporated into this submission.

SPORTSGROUND MANAGEMENT IN NSW

Parks & Leisure Australia Submission

Aim of the Inquiry.

The aim of the inquiry is to assess current and projected community demand for sportsground facilities and the adequacy of current measures to allow equitable access, to manage environmental pressures and to ensure maintenance and public safety.

Introduction.

Sport or the provision and consumption of active lifestyles is not owned or controlled by one particular group or profession or level of government. We all rely on each other, doing the right thing supplying our part of the service.

*While our “present” practices can perhaps be deemed to be “satisfactory”, satisfactory is actually no longer good enough. And if we don’t address the issues which **need** to be addressed **now**, the future is going to be even **less** satisfactory.*

Dr Ken Marriott paper PLA Future of Recreation in Sydney - Aug 2005

Factors Driving Demand.

Higher Urban Density

Over time as we know the traditional quarter acre house block has evolved into medium density development and with some state metro growth strategies this will evolve further into higher density urban development. Outcome; More numbers in existing areas.

Government Policy

Over successive years government (Both Federal & State) have spent hundreds of millions of dollars to change people’s lifestyles from passive to more active. Generally this is in response to the potential of an exploding health crisis. Outcome; More people more active.

Sports Participation

Australian Sports Commission (ASC) has had a targeted sports program with a target of increase sports participation by 1,000,000 participants. Sports funding is linked to an incentive to get more members. Sport has opened up new markets with current figures showing the fastest growing areas of participation are over 35’s and women/girls. Outcome; More people more active

Growth in Sport

Besides the ASC, each sport has established growth strategies and marketing campaigns to maximise their exposure and therefore increase participation numbers. An example of this has been the World Cup Rugby held in Sydney – where Rugby followed up with heavy investment after this event to increase local club level numbers. Several other very obvious sports is the AFL Sydney Swans Premiership win, the up and coming Ashes Cricket Tour and the flow on effect of the Socceroos performance at the World Cup. All sports are indicating a growth in numbers and searching for space. Outcome; More people more active

New Participants

With healthy and active lifestyle agendas appearing everywhere we have a broader industry being established behind this active push. McDonalds has reacted to the 'Upsize Me' movie produced by Morgan Spurlock and introduced a healthy range of choice and I believe even Ronald McDonald has undergone a rebrand to reposition McDonalds into the growing takeaway health food market segment currently estimated at \$4 billion dollars. These background lifestyle changes have led to a reinforcement of the benefits of active lifestyles.

• Adequacy of provision of sportsgrounds in key demand areas

Current Planning & Provision

The provision and planning for open space (sports fields) is undertaken by Local Government under the broad principles of relevant State planning policies and legislation at a particular point in time.

Early provisions of open space were based on different approaches of the times. Planning was very much a standard of provision and dates back to 1900's England

Across Australia there are different approaches in how open space is acquired, how it is improved, how it is maintained, how it is managed and how it is used and this changes constantly. For instance in May 2005 NSW introduced legislative changes which expanded the way that section 94 may be collected and applied. These changes have the potential to create a more flexible application and their success should be seen overtime.

Recent discussions with key stakeholders confirm there is pressure on open space provision in their respective states and that current planning processes and statutory provisions are either not being fully supported or are ineffective in meeting current demand.

Parks & Leisure Australia has been expressing concern to relevant groups (State & Federal) indicating that the current provision levels for active open space are insufficient to meet the increased demand resulting from urban density policies and government initiatives to increase physical activity.

PLA suggest that government investments in increasing physical activity may be undermined if a collaborative and coordinated approach to open space provision is not put into effect across all levels. (SRMC 35-4.8)

At present each Local Government (LG) commits their resources to open space provision and sports development to differing degrees. Some LG's employ full-time staff to fulfil these roles, others part-time and/or portions of existing full time roles.

Currently each LG attempts to address issues individually, either through direct service provision or in collaboration with other agencies. This result in different bodies (LG's) duplicating systems, processes, information, communication, training, resources, initiatives and expertise required to address open space and sports development needs.

These different applications also cause confusion for sporting clubs that participate in cross-municipal border competitions and inefficiencies and disparities in the level of support available to clubs depending on where they reside.

I am sure you will find this problem communicated in any sports submission received by the inquiry.

The pressures we face with sport ground capacities and sustainability are not because someone failed to plan adequately or failed to do something, the problems have evolved because Australian cities and towns are growing our lifestyles are changing and our historical land use planning does no longer match with current community needs/expectations.

• Current requirement for updating and refurbishment of sportsgrounds and supporting infrastructure

As the inquiry has indicated the capital improvements to sports facilities are funded by councils and through capital assistance programs from the state government such as the Department of Sport and Recreation.

When considering the upgrade and improvement of sporting infrastructure we have to consider how the open space was acquired in the first instance. Again historical practices have not helped our industry with our current challenges.

Traditionally Open Space had been set aside as redundant land (unsuitable for other purposes), it was land in a flood plain, it was former land fill sites, or reclaimed areas.

Existing active open space can be improved through a variety of techniques which in turn will increase carrying capacity and overall supply. However existing capital assistance is not directed to increasing carrying capacity and in most cases is insufficient and poorly targeted.

Grant funding and its administration in NSW has not been strategic in nature and has been used more as a generalised handout. The following table indicates the size of the NSW funding pool as compared to other states and territories.

Agency	Programs	Maximum Assistance	Value per annum	Population 2003	Allocation /pro-rata/population
Sport and Recreation Queensland	Major Facilities Program	\$1 million	\$10 million	3,730,000	\$5.36
Sport and Recreation Queensland	National Standards Facilities Program	No limit	\$10 million		
Office for Recreation and Sport (SA)	Community Recreation and Sports Facility Program	\$150,000	\$3.4 million	1,520,000	\$2.23
NSW Sport and Recreation	Regional Sports Facility Program	\$400,000	\$2.2 million	6,660,000	\$0.93
NSW Sport and Recreation	Capital Assistance Program	\$50,000	\$4 million		
Office of Sport and Recreation (Tas)	Facilities and Open Space Development Program	\$100,000	\$1.2 million	470,000	\$2.55
Department of Sport and Recreation (WA)	Community Sporting and Recreation Facilities Fund	\$1.5 million (over 3 years)	\$9 million	1,930,000	\$4.66
Office of Sport and Recreation (NT)	Facility Development Grants Program	\$150,000 (over 3 years)	\$1 million	197,000	\$5.07
Sport and Recreation Victoria	Community Facilities Funding Program Major Facilities Category	No limit	\$4 million	4,880,000	\$2.45
Sport and Recreation Victoria	Community Facilities Funding Program Better Pools Category	No limit	\$8 million		

PLA considers that NSW should be allocating between \$16,000,000 and \$24,000,000 (\$2.50 to \$4.00 per head of population) towards a targeted strategic improvement of sport & recreation facilities. The current guidelines and overall pool of funds is inadequate and clumsy in its application.

• *Appropriateness and fairness of council pricing principles for facilities*

There is no equity in the application of policy or procedures across Sydney. If it helps the inquiry there is no equity across the whole country when it comes to allocation of access or management of process.

Unfortunately Councils do 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.

However Councils like the State governments are not as strategic in the delivery of infrastructure as could be desired. Indications across the industry do indicate willingness and a slow migration towards standardisation of some practices. By not having a consistent approach leads to all sorts of hybrid arrangements. Let me draw a national example for the inquiry

Hockey is played in every state and the sport has certain requirements (i.e. turf pitch) each club/association that has a turf facility would have a different story to how they have their facility and how it was funded. Some facilities received full funding and members have no ongoing fees

allocated for replacement, some received low interest loans, some clubs took out a full commercial loan (most probably with members having a mortgage over their house to secure the loan). That is a typical example within a sport; we then have variations across different sports. It would appear sport is still very much subject to who you know rather than capital improvement requests being based on needs or merit or aligned to a broader regional facilities plan.

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

The media has highlighted on occasion the progressive deterioration of sportsgrounds the rise in injury and the perceived fighting between codes for limited open space access.

The inquiry has expressed the reasons or contributing factors for the deterioration of the standard of Sydney's sports grounds PLA agrees with these comments and shall address these issues;

1. Overuse – to address this we must either increase supply or decrease demand.

This is a reasonable straight forward concept however implementation has been problematic. With the higher density housing strategy being pursued in most capital cities the availability of land to match population increases is in short supply.

Parks & Leisure Australia as indicated in the early part of this report has been working with the broader industry partners in trying to identify some logical steps to address this challenge. One area that is seriously lacking is knowledge on our current supply and then matching this with our current and projected demand.

Discussions have been held with NSW Departments of Planning and NSW Sport & Recreation with sports (FFA/NRL/AFL/ACB) to develop a joint proposal to develop an electronic inventory (GIS base) to map all active open space areas in Sydney metro as stage one. The next stage is the development of a data collection model to be ran at the local level where local governments collect sports membership data and log into the GIS also. The collective group see this as a 'must have' as at this current stage without this base data we do not know our current capacities and therefore cannot predict future needs with any certainty.

There are also other opportunities which need to be pursued with a little more vigour and focus. Over many years the concept of multiuse of school sites has been discussed to the point of exhaustion. In some localities there are terrific dual usage arrangements in other locals there are still unrealised opportunities. A focused concerted effort needs to be made to turn all schools playing fields over to their local government for community use outside of school hours (i.e. 3.30pm until 9pm and weekends).

PLA are mindful that there are a number of issues that need to be addressed for this to happen, PLA has commenced discussions with various parties to get this moving. Support from this inquiry would be very beneficial to the industry's cause.

2. Reduced carrying capacity of existing supply

2.1. Lack of water and drought

The extended drought conditions and the arbitrary water restrictions imposed on the green industries have had considerable impact on the sustainability of sports grounds.

Water restrictions imposed on sports grounds had been decided with no formal assessment or industry involvement.

In response to the arbitrary restrictions being imposed across the green industry an umbrella group representing urban water users including the Australian Golf Course Superintendents, Nursery and Garden Industry Australia, Parks and Leisure Australia, the Australian Institute for Horticulture, the Australian Landscape Industries Association and the Turf Producers Australia come together and formed the Lifestyle Horticulture Council. The LHC represents an industry sector with a total value across Australia of at least \$9.39 billion per annum and employing about 110,000 persons.

The LHC and its members have the relevant industry expertise for improving efficient water use practices and are therefore well qualified to present information about urban outdoor water conservation practice and to provide options to Government for long term outdoor urban water conservation measures. Further information about the Lifestyle Horticulture Sector (LHS) is contained in the attached independent consultants report.

The Lifestyle Horticulture Council accept that from time to time temporary water restrictions may be required in responses to drought conditions or emergency supply problems and is willing to contribute to community wide water savings during such times.

In addition the industry supports the development and promotion of 'permanent conservation measures' that allow for responsible parks and garden water use and which are based on accepted horticultural best practice. With demand for water increasing with our population growth it is time to conserve this valuable resource. The entire community needs to better understand wise water usage both at home, at work and at play.

Education is the key to achieving real behavioural changes and therefore successfully saving water. Professionals in the industry and even home gardeners have demonstrated that they are keen to play their part in the conservation of water although most also believe that conservation must be undertaken in a balanced manner by the whole community. (Brownlee M & Stephens J, 2004). The broader green industry and home gardeners are being treated as easy targets as they can be "seen" using water.

There are many water users whose operations that are hidden behind closed doors and whose water use is not currently restricted or even targeted by education programs. Many items which we consume day to day use high amounts of water in their preparations (Archer, Hodges, & LeHunt, 1993), for example:

- It takes 41 500 litres to produce a kilo of meat

- It takes 500 litres to produce one orange
- It takes 1 340 000 litres to produce 1 tonne of aluminium
- It takes 50 litres to produce a copy of Saturday's newspaper
- It takes about 5000 litres of water to create one kilogram of rice.
- It takes 4 litres to produce a bottle of beer

The immediate implementation of water restrictions placed on the green industries had a substantial economic impact, not so much in Local Government circles but in small business and across the garden and nursery business. It is only of recent times that sports fields are now showing the stresses associated with a lack of access to water. It is also believed that only now is the National Water Commission suggesting that;

“....state governments are required to undertake legislative impact assessments prior to introducing new legislation and hope this applies to the access to water for the survival of playing fields.”

There is a point in time that sport will stop if current water restrictions are not reassessed to match facility safety needs and to preserve community assets.

2.2 Reduced maintenance

Maintenance of sports grounds have also been significantly adjusted in the current conditions. Open space maintenance follows a set pattern when all ingredients are available. When water is limited then coring and fertilising is wasted and is stopped. When we take these activities out of the formula we commence a slowing or decline in standards.

Add increased usage and we speed up the decline to a point where comes July/August each year we have no grass left and nothing will grow until the growing season September/October.

Attempts should be made to align grass growth with water access and only use water during the none growing season (April to early August) for soften grounds 24/48 hours prior to games.

The current restrictions of Mondays 5am – 10am and 5pm – 7pm have no benefit from horticultural bases for the grass or the sport or for softening grounds.

• Residential amenity, public liability and security issues

The Inquiry has rightly identified that one of the consequences of increased use of sporting facilities is the associated noise, traffic and pedestrian activity generated. Many Councils attempt to achieve a balance and PLA considers that some usage practices and facility standards must be established and then included as exempt and complying as part of the relevant planning codes.

Parks are still open to the public at any time. Parks should be considered the same as water access it is there for all. Parks are not private pieces of land and in the majority of cases organised sport can be managed to include local amenity concerns.

Parks & Leisure Australia Conclusions

A professional paper presented by PLA life member Dr Ken Marriott at 'The Future of Recreation in Sydney August 2004' best provides a strong platform and starting point for further investigation and ongoing consideration.

"Unfortunately economic rationalisation strategies has generally contributed to the under-resourcing of local sport and recreation by virtually all levels of governments, lack of skills or number of staff needed to implement appropriate actions

Much of the current recreation planning which occurs has a strong focus on single facility provision and as such is not recreation planning in the true sense... but rather, facility or project planning. This focus comes as a consequence of demands from individual sports.

Further, the focus on facilities as the end point of the provision process means that quite inadequate attention being given to programming, servicing, educating, promoting and marketing

As part of the above, there is a continuing dominance of one or more of engineers, town planners and landscape planners on recreation issues in many Councils. Well-meaning though these people are, they do not have a leisure or community focus and therefore tend to often use grossly outdated planning tools

The lack of agreement on, or consistency of, approaches to planning such that most plans prepared for individual Councils are inconsistent across municipal boundaries

The failure of state agencies in a number of States to lead, support, facilitate or even advocate recreation planning. In many states, there is a glaring failure of both Federal and State agencies to develop liaison mechanisms with local government, with professional associations and with individual professionals. Further, rather than taking a comprehensive planning approach wherein a hierarchy of initiatives could be developed, State agencies all too often focus on single projects without reference to wider needs and implications

The inability –or perhaps, failure-- of professional bodies, (PLA included), to make a stand and take a position on many recreation planning and provision issues

The failure of virtually all leisure professionals to get out and talk to and define ways of working with other professions.

The consistent failure of professional and academic researchers and journals to address issues of recreation planning and the continuing failure of much leisure research to explore the planning and provision implications of that research

The weak standing of recreation planning courses in our universities –within the degrees they are run in; within the universities overall and within the wider professional world. The progressive downgrading of courses through their inclusion in tourism, business and other similar departments

PLA Recommendations

Liaison between Federal, State and Local Government; State Sporting Associations; Education Department; Universities and Insurance Companies

- Based on our research, it appears that whilst many agencies are dealing with issues related to increasing participation (sport participation and or health); lack of grounds for clubs to play on; or overused grounds, there has to date been limited liaison between all of the relevant organisations involved in leisure provision. Lack of communication can lead to misunderstandings and different organisations developing different expectations of each other and of the issues in question. Therefore there is a clear need to bring all of the “players” together on a regular basis to discuss leisure issues such as sports ground capacity and sustainability and to develop collaborative and shared directions for future initiatives. PLA believe we must explore opportunities for improved, coordinated, delivery of services to address the generic open space and active living issues across all Government Areas.
- Greater commitment from all parties to more resources/money to strengthen recreation planning to ensure good outcomes
- Professional liaison and support mechanisms for individuals and groups wishing to pursue recreation planning provision.

Industry Wide Research and Development into Sports Ground Capacity and Sustainability

- A key component of this initiative would be the development of a centralised collation agency for data research, covering areas such as open space, usage, standards, maintenance, environmental sustainability, carrying capacity and technological developments such as synthetic surfaces. To date there has been very little research in this area by professional and academic researchers and journals and a failure of much research to address the planning and provision implications of sports ground’s capacity and sustainability. Stronger data collection is needed by the industry to assist with standardisation and comparison.

Focus on Sub-regional and Regional Planning

- Most planning related to leisure provision in NSW happens at a local government level. Due to both the specified needs of each local government authority and the different approaches undertaken by internal or external planners, it is very difficult to make any comparisons or identify trends impacting upon sports ground management and other

aspects of leisure planning. Other factors such as lack of understanding of the value of planning; under-resourcing of planning funds; lack of skills in planning by staff members; and insufficient resources to implement recommendations or appropriate actions all impact upon the success or otherwise of planning initiatives. A much greater focus on sub-regional and regional planning integrated with other relevant agencies needs to be undertaken to ensure that limited resources are used most effectively; consistent information is gathered; and so that the best outcomes can be achieved. Furthermore, additional resources may need to be considered by all levels of government for leisure planning.

- Agreement as to the purposes of planning, the scope of the benefits to be delivered, the scope of the tools to use, the opportunities to be gained from liaison and coordination with other community services from health to transport and environment.

Review the Way in Which Sport is Delivered

- Clearly sports grounds are suffering from overuse by sports clubs and clearly there are not sufficient sports ground currently available in many areas to meet the growing demands of sport. One issue that needs further exploration is the way in which sport is delivered to the community. The following issues should be explored between managers and users of sports grounds in further detail:
 - Modifications to rules (which could reduce playing time, size of playing field, etc)
 - Changes to sports field size / reconfiguration of sports fields
 - Alterations to length of games
 - Alterations to the number of players per team
 - Alteration of sporting seasons, eg shortened, changed from winter to summer, etc
 - Different venues for training, eg road, gym, beach, school ground
 - Categorisation of sports grounds to educate public about standards
 - The need to “rest” grounds from overuse
 - Construction of synthetic surfaces
 - Restrict usage time

Development of Additional Fields

- One way to reduce the lack of sports grounds is to build new sports grounds; although that is easier said than done. The cost of developing new sports grounds can be prohibitive to some local government authorities and in some municipalities there simply is no land available for further developments. New land acquisition strategies; developer contributions and new funding options for sports grounds developments all need to be explored in further detail. Joint partnerships with organisations such as schools, universities and the private sector should also be explored.

Improved Leisure Planning, Education and Training

- In many circumstances the people involved in leisure provision at a local, state or federal level either do not have leisure related qualifications or lack specific leisure planning

experience. Some of these people are using outdated or inappropriate planning tools to guide their decision making and work plans. Furthermore, many leisure courses within the tertiary sector have been integrated into other areas such as tourism or business, at the expense of planning. Gaps have also been identified in the horticultural knowledge of those managing sports fields. Limited professional development opportunities and networking both within and between agencies has also limited the effectiveness of on the job leisure training. What is needed, therefore, is a greater emphasis on leisure planning in university courses, at conferences, in journals, in workshops / seminars and through local networks – directed towards everyone who has some involvement in leisure planning and service delivery.

- More industry support by all to: provide guidance; develop guidance materials; to facilitate skill sharing; to provide education for Councillors, other professions, the community; evaluating outcomes, these need to be adequately resourced and sponsored.

Conclusion

The issue of overuse of existing sports grounds and lack of available sports grounds in many parts of Sydney, and indeed Australia, is not going to go away on its own accord. People will continue to be drawn towards sport and recreation activities at sports fields in order to spend time with family and friends; to learn new skills; to improve their fitness levels; to enjoy the outdoors; and to connect to their community in which they belong. Similarly, government bodies and other agencies will continue to espouse the value of participation in physical activity by Victorians because of the widely recognised health, social, economic and environmental benefits that such participation can bring to the state. Clearly the physical activity participation message is being heard, but there will continue to be a real issue related to supply and demand of sports grounds in many areas unless something is done now.

What is needed, therefore, is strong industry leadership to identify the issues that have caused capacity and sustainability issues and then to identify strategies to reduce the problems associated with overuse and lack of suitable sporting grounds. Parks and Leisure Australia, as the leading professional body for people working in the parks and leisure industries, is ideally positioned, because of its broad membership base and extensive working knowledge of sports ground management and leisure planning, to take on this vitally important role.

Attachments

- Capacity and Sustainability of Sports Grounds Scoping Project, Parks and Leisure Australia, November 2005
- Copy of Report from Sport & Recreation Ministers Council (SRMC) 4.8 Open Space Planning & Provision.
- Sports Fields – Planning for New Growth Workshop May 2006– Discussion Paper.

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