

**Your Reference:**  
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Mr Kevin Greene MP  
Chairman, Inquiry Into Sportsground Management in NSW  
Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Works  
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Dear Mr Greene

**SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO SPORTSGROUND MANAGEMENT IN NSW -  
HORNSBY SHIRE COUNCIL**

Thank you for your invitation to Council to make a submission to the Inquiry. Council believes that the inquiry is timely as Council has been grappling with issues of sportsground management in recent times. In particular, Council has adopted a *Sports Facility Strategy* (SFS) (copy can be supplied on request) that attempts to resolve some of the issues of current management and future planning of sportsgrounds in Hornsby Shire.

**1.0 Executive Summary**

**Participation**

- Council demand for sportsground facilities in Hornsby Shire is high as a result of participation rates that are higher than the national average.
- There is a risk that population increase resulting from urban consolidation policy could result in long-term unmet demand for sportsground facilities.
- Council is trying to meet this demand through increasing both the quantum of sportsground facilities and the capacity of existing sportsgrounds.

**Constraints to delivery**

- Council's ability to provide further sportsgrounds is hampered by the high cost of land and the shortage of suitable land in the areas of highest need.

- Insurance and risk management are further costs to sportsground management that must be borne by Councils.
- Council's ability to raise funding for sportsground development and maintenance is restricted by State Government rate pegging and the strict provisions imposed on infrastructure funding under Section 94 of the *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act*.
- There is a variety of responsibility for sportsground facility management that tends to act against efficiency of provision, and State Government policy and service delivery is not coordinated in a way that maximises sportsground facility management.
- Council recognises that it must enter into partnerships with schools to develop their sportsgrounds for community use.
- State Government grants such as the Capital Assistance Program and the Regional Sports Facilities Program are manifestly inadequate to be of serious assistance in providing sports facilities.

#### **Measurements**

- Council believes it is not possible to develop universal criteria for measuring the adequacy of sportsgrounds, believing that it is necessary instead for Councils to survey the changing needs of their communities and fluctuating participation levels over a range of sports, and adjust facility provision accordingly.

#### **Environmental matters**

- Although the management of environmental issues is a cost to Council, it is seen as an essential responsibility.
- Traffic, noise and impacts on neighbourhoods from sportsgrounds are an increasing reason for objection to sportsground development from neighbours.

The following sets out Council's experience as relevant to the factors put forward in the Standing Committee's Inquiry:

#### **2.0 Adequacy of Provision of Quality Sportsgrounds to meet Community Needs**

Council's SFS built upon a 2002 Leisure Strategic Plan (LSP) for Hornsby Shire showing that, due in part to Hornsby Shire's sports participation rates being above the NSW average, there is a shortage of sportsgrounds for some sports, particularly soccer, netball, horseriding and cricket. Many sportsgrounds were found to be used at well over full carrying capacity. This has led to the deterioration of the quality of some sportsground surfaces, a fact noted by several of the sports organisations surveyed for the SFS. These organisations also reported that in some cases, facilities made available by Council were inadequate to meet demand for competition and training venues.

In developing the SFS, Council has been aware of the very high cost of acquiring and developing land for new sportsgrounds. Nevertheless, at least 3 new sportsgrounds are proposed by the SFS, together with improvements to existing facilities to increase their quality and utility.

The SFS determined that new land would be acquired in the rural area of Hornsby Shire, and a 4 hectare parcel of land was subsequently purchased in Galston in 2005 at a cost of \$3,300,000, with a further \$2,200,000 required to develop the facility to useable standards.

The cost of acquiring such an area of land within the urban areas of Hornsby Shire would be many times greater than land in the rural area and its affordability a major obstacle for Council, even if it were possible to find such suitable land. Instead, Council is seeking to enter into agreements with local schools to develop their sportsgrounds to a level where the community could use the facilities for competition and training outside of school hours.

Council's submission will further discuss issues of funding and affordability in a subsequent section.

### **Determining adequacy levels**

Council's SFS and the preceding LSP both made reference to national participation rates in recreation and sport activities by all Australians and for NSW in particular. The LSP made comparisons of participation rates for Hornsby Shire compared to the NSW average, but did not make any recommendations for new criteria by which to measure the adequacy of sportsgrounds and other recreation facilities.

Hornsby Council carries out an annual Community Survey to gauge attitudes towards the full range of Council's services. The Community Survey asks respondents to rate the importance of sportsgrounds and other parks to the community as well as the level of satisfaction with Council's level of provision of them. This survey has been conducted since 2000 with the results consistently showing a high importance rating for the provision of new sportsgrounds and other parks. Paradoxically the survey also shows a comparatively high level of satisfaction with the level of provision. However, Council's survey of sports organisations shows dissatisfaction with the level of provision of sportsgrounds, supported by a review of the history of allocation of sportsgrounds to sports organisations showing use levels at full capacity. This would appear to demonstrate the unreliability of using surveyed attitudes of the general community towards the issue of sportsground provision as a guide to whether the levels of such provision are satisfactory or not.

Another difficulty in determining the levels of adequacy of sportsground provision is that rates of participation of various sports fluctuate according to fashion and changing attitudes and demographics. For example, participation in Rugby League at junior level has been in long term decline and participation in AFL has fluctuated around a moderate level in Hornsby Shire. Soccer participation has risen steadily in recent years, especially female participation and Netball participation has remained high. Rates of participation in all organised sports are lower than those in non-organised recreation such as walking and walking the dog.

In addition, there is a tendency for 'season creep' where sports that have traditionally been played in a 6-month season are seeking sportsgrounds to conduct additional, off-season competitions and want to commence training earlier, encroaching into their traditional off-season. Newer sports such as Oztag also require sportsgrounds. These pressures place more demands on sportsgrounds, more wear, and less time for sportsground maintenance between seasons.

In establishing universal criteria for determining the adequacy of sportsground provision, Council is of the view that it is not possible to establish such criteria. Instead, evaluations of

adequacy are best made by each Council surveying its residents and the sports organisations it makes provision for, as well as by monitoring use of existing sportsgrounds.

### **3.0 Current Requirement for Updating and Refurbishment of Sportsgrounds and Supporting Infrastructure**

This submission has discussed above Hornsby Council's SFS and its objectives to establish new sportsgrounds. Apart from acquiring and developing a new sportsground in Council's rural area at a cost of \$5.5 million, it proposed to develop existing school facilities at a cost of around \$1.5 million. Many existing sportsgrounds require upgrading of existing facilities in the interests of prudent asset management or to bring the facilities to a level that matches the community's expectations. This may include a new amenities buildings (which can cost in excess of \$500,000); levelling and returfing of a sportsground surface (between \$100,000 and \$200,000); providing new floodlighting (\$40,000-\$100,000); automatic irrigation (\$30,000-\$60,000); stormwater recycling systems (can be in excess of \$100,000); car park resurfacing (\$50,000-\$200,000); and many smaller cost items.

### **4.0 Cost & Revenue Arrangements including Capital Upgrades**

Council's sportsground operating costs are made up mostly of labour and plant hire costs. Maintenance of sportsgrounds is relatively labour intensive, and a mixture of in-house and outsourced services is used. Materials and consumables are the other major cost.

Costs per hectare of sportsground maintenance are increased in an environment where the shortfall of facilities increases the intensity of use and wear on the grounds.

Council charges user fees to the sports organisations and the income recovers approximately 25% of the cost of maintenance. Most schools in Hornsby Shire make regular use of Council's sportsgrounds and, for the most part, they pay no hire fee for this use. Council's hire fees are amongst the highest in the region and Council is conscious of not setting fees at such a level that it becomes a barrier to community participation in sport.

Council has limited funding sources from which to fund the construction of new sportsgrounds or the upgrade of existing facilities. The magnitude of general (or rate) funds is limited through successive State Government policy to cap rates income and imposition of a special rate would be subject to the approval of the Minister for Local Government.

Development Contributions levied under Section 94 of the *NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* must meet the needs of additional population arising from new development and must not be used to address pre-existing shortfalls in the supply of facilities. It can be expected that as a result of urban consolidation within Hornsby Shire, demand for sportsgrounds will rise in the established urban areas of Hornsby Shire. Options to address this need would be very limited unless land with established housing is purchased. The cost of such land acquisition will be at a premium, and it would be a test of the development industry's tolerance of development contributions to require all or most of the cost of such acquisition to be funded from this source.

Unless this issue is satisfactorily resolved, the risk of a future shortfall in sports facilities arising from urban consolidation policies will be high.

Land under Council's control and surplus to requirements is required by the *Local Government Act* to be categorised as Community Land that in general terms should not be

sold or otherwise disposed. This restricts the ability of local government authorities to have the freedom to manage its open space and sportsground inventory to best meet identified community needs.

State Government Grants have been quite restricted for several years now. Council was informed by the Department of Sport & Recreation in 2006 that most grants awarded under the Capital Assistance Grant Program would be for \$10,000 or less. As can be seen from the amounts mentioned above for sportsground development, such sums are completely inadequate to fund major works on sportsgrounds. Even more restricted is the Government's Regional Facility Scheme, also administered by the Department, that according to Hornsby Council's information totals around \$2.5 million statewide. Such a sum is inadequate for the funding of even one regional facility in the State each year. Greenspace grants provided from the Department of Planning tend to be directed by that Department towards developing open space facilities for non-sports purposes.

Few Commonwealth Government grants are available to councils for sports facility funding. An exception is the Community Water grants that can be made available for sportsground-related irrigation and water recycling projects.

All of Hornsby Council's sportsground hirers are amateur, not-for-profit organisations. Most are also small organisations with low membership and financial turnover. A very small number of these organisations have a comparatively large membership capable of funding relatively major sports, although some have done so either in partnership with Council or in fully funding a facility on Council land.

In summary, Council has found that there are shortfalls in the supply of sports facilities in Hornsby Shire and is moving to address the shortfalls through the construction of new facilities and improvements to existing facilities to increase their capacity. However, Council is handicapped in achieving this aim by legislative restrictions to raising funds from its own sources and the paucity of State and Federal grant funding that may be available.

#### **4.0 Environmental Concerns Associated with Sportsground Management**

Hornsby Shire is known as the 'Bushland Shire' and many of its sportsgrounds have been established in clearings in bushland fringing most suburbs. Nearby local streams feed into the Hawkesbury or Lane Cove rivers. It is no longer Council policy to clear bushland for the establishment of sportsgrounds. Instead, natural ecosystems are to be protected under Council policy. A challenge for sportsground management is to ensure that impacts to these important ecosystems are minimised. Apart from abandoning future bushland clearing to enlarge existing sportsgrounds, Council has carried out works to minimise the transport of fertilisers and chemicals in stormwater from sportsgrounds to natural ecosystems.

Weed control at these sites is an important activity. This must be carefully managed so that there is minimal risk of environmental pollution or public health concerns from weed control operations. Recent changes to the NSW Pesticides Act introduced tighter procedures to protect public health where pesticides may otherwise place at risk the public at large. While proper and necessary, these stricter requirements have increased the costs of pesticide application and hence the cost of sportsground management.

Water conservation is an important feature of Council's corporate objectives, and several sportsgrounds have had stormwater recycling systems fitted. The imposition of water restrictions by Sydney Water, while understandable, is placing stresses on sportsgrounds in

the current drought. Council's resources to provide significant on site water storage and recycling systems for irrigation are limited however Council is attempting to progress such systems. To do otherwise could in effect reduce the useability of our sportsgrounds due to lower than average rainfalls forecast by some as a result of global climate change.

Effective environmental management associated with sportsground management is a responsibility that Council takes seriously and treats as a priority. However, it does lead to an increase in the cost of sportsground management.

## **5.0 Effectiveness of Current Administration of Sportsgrounds by Various Providers**

The range of provider arrangements for sportsground management is a function of economics surrounding various sports and facility types.

Hornsby Council is easily the largest supplier of sportsground facilities in the Shire. As mentioned above, the cost recovered is only about 25% on most types of Council's sportsground facilities. Venues for court sports such as tennis and netball, indoor sports centres and aquatic centres can show an operating profit.

School sportsgrounds are mostly small and of poor quality where public schools are concerned. Private school facilities are of much higher quality but are mostly for the exclusive use of the school. Council is seeking to establish a partnership with some public sector schools to develop their sportsgrounds for community use to meet needs surplus to the capacity of the Council owned facilities. Public sector schools and to a lesser extent private schools use Council sportsgrounds to meet surplus demand for school sport.

Clearly, the disparity of quality between school sportsground facilities in the public and private sector is a reflection of the differing funding and fee arrangements within each sector, while the more exclusive use of the private school sector sportsgrounds is a function of the expanded sports programs offered in private schools.

Some other sports facilities in Hornsby Shire are operated by not-for-profit community groups that own or control their own facilities. These include golf courses, lawn bowls greens, croquet greens, basketball courts and lawn tennis courts. Some of these facilities operate on Crown Land and others on land owned by sports organisations. Some support their operations with a licensed club and some, particularly bowling clubs, are suffering declining participation rates and are barely viable. Indeed 2 bowling clubs have closed in Hornsby Shire in recent times and the future of the land is uncertain.

There are a number of private sector sports facilities operated within the Shire, predominantly gymnasiums, but also swim coaching centres, indoor cricket and soccer centres, equestrian training, paintball sites and golf practice centres.

There is no single rationale as to why some sports facilities are provided and subsidised by Council, others operate on public land and others still as businesses on private land. Clearly, private sector operations commence where there is a gap in Council supply and sufficient demand to allow a profit generating fee structure. The sector most deprived is the public school sportsground, followed by bowling clubs.

The State Government has several general policy initiatives with coinciding objectives, but conflicting resource allocations. For example health policies encourage healthy, active lifestyles and a higher takeup of such lifestyles could be expected to have a positive effect on

health spending by the Government. Yet this is not reflected in adequate State Government investment in recreation facilities to help promote healthy lifestyles.

There may also be some benefit in a greater level of coordination of sportsground resources, operating at local government level involving councils and school facilities.

## **6.0 Impact on Health Outcomes & Social Cohesion**

Council is aware of a body of research that supports the health and social benefits of sport. Although Council has not carried out its own studies, the results of other research into the effects of sport show a reduction in alienation, loneliness and anti-social behaviour. Sport provides an opportunity for residents to meet others in their neighbourhood that they may not otherwise have met, either as a player or a parent/volunteer in a sports club.

Studies have shown that strenuous exercise through sport promotes cardiovascular health, reduces blood pressure and promotes longevity.

## **7.0 Traffic, Noise & Other Impacts on Residential Amenity**

Although most of Council's sportsgrounds are on the fringes of suburbs, there are still usually houses in close proximity. The cost of land means that it is often not possible to build in a large enough buffer zone adjacent sportsgrounds to ensure that there is no impact on residences. Reliance upon private motor vehicle transport to sportsgrounds requires that a large proportion of modern sportsgrounds must be given over to car parks. Sites must be chosen on or near main roads to avoid residential streets that may be unable to cope with increased traffic.

The use of sportsgrounds can be up to 7 days per week. Winter sports training can only be conducted on weeknights, bringing the ground into use up until 10pm for 3-5 nights per week. The potential traffic, noise and floodlight spill from these activities can lead residents to oppose proposals to introduce floodlights and night training to a sportsground. A recent such proposal at Dural, where there is a shortage of training facilities in the neighbourhood, was strongly opposed by neighbours. Council agreed that the sportsground was situated too close to houses to allow the proposal to proceed.

The impact of sportsgrounds on residential amenity is an issue. The tendency of neighbours to lobby for limits on sportsground development and use is also an issue that in established areas is increasingly difficult to address.

## **8.0 Affect of Litigation & Insurance costs on financial viability**

Council requires licensed users to carry public liability insurance. This requirement is believed to reduce Council's exposure to claims by injured players and minimises Council's public liability insurance premium. Nevertheless, Council is exposed to claims from injured non-licensed users of sportsgrounds, and may also still be named in claims from injured player members of licensed sports clubs. Council has a duty of care to maintain the sportsgrounds and present them for use in a safe condition. Given that the condition of grounds is greatly affected by climate and weather, this is a challenge for councils. The shortage of sportsgrounds leads to intense use and heavy wear on the available sportsgrounds, creating potentially dangerous conditions.

The cost of managing sportsgrounds to minimise injury and resulting claims has a significant impact on Council's financial viability.

#### **9.0 Access to Open Space for Active & Passive Recreation Users**

The general undersupply of sportsground facilities for competition and training purposes has been discussed in detail above. This undersupply leads to a situation where licenced users take most of the available times in demand, particularly in winter months with limited daylight and increased demand for training. This limits time outside of work or school hours where a sportsground may be available for non-organised sporting activity.

An increase in both the supply of sportsgrounds and the range of facilities at existing sportsgrounds can assist in reducing the disadvantage for users of sportsgrounds for passive activities. Council has developed walking/cycle paths, playgrounds, picnic facilities, skate facilities, kickwalls and similar facilities at sportsgrounds to increase the range of uses and increase the capacity of each sportsground to meet recreation and leisure needs.

An important issue related to access to sportsgrounds is gender equity of access. Most sports that rely on facilities provided by local government or State governments are dominated by male players. The proportion of female players in sports such as soccer and cricket has increased in recent years. However the shortage of sportsground facilities means that the facilities are used at capacity on Saturdays by male teams and the female competitions are therefore relegated to less favoured Sundays. The female teams are part of sports associations that run both female and male competition, and the associations regulate the competitions and decide competition draws.

Some sports such as netball, softball and horseriding are female dominated, while others such as athletics, basketball and tennis have high levels of female participation. Council has made efforts to ensure adequate provision of facilities for these sports however they remain in competition for scarce sportsground resources with other sports.

Council trusts that this information is of assistance to the Inquiry. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Manager, Parks & Landscape, Peter Kemp on telephone 9847 6792.

Yours sincerely



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Parks & Landscape