

Reference: 26  
John Zannes (02) 6729 3013

16th August 2006

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

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Inquiry into Sportsground Management in NSW**

Gwydir Shire Council has two (2) major towns and a number of active villages within the shire area with sportsgrounds. The major towns include Bingara and Warialda which both have a population of around 1,300 with the other smaller active communities of Upper Horton, Gravesend, Croppa Creek, Crooble, Coolatai and North Star. At present Council does not have a fee schedule or management policies for the use of the sporting facilities, they are primarily run by Sports Councils or Sporting Committees and Council undertakes the general maintenance of these facilities. The following points details Council's response to the particular points of interest.

#### **1. Adequacy of provision of quality sportsgrounds to meet community needs across NSW**

The current number of sports grounds within these communities meets the current needs but the infrastructure within these facilities are in need of capital upgrade to bring them up to an appropriate standard that can be easily serviced and maintained. A detailed analysis has not been done on the required capital upgrade but it could be in excess of two (2) million dollars.

The committee should not only consider population and the total number of persons who use facilities as smaller rural communities such as Gwydir Shire Council does not have the numbers of a Tamworth, Newcastle or Sydney, but consideration to size of facilities and the percentage of population using these facilities should be a consideration in determining ranking. Promoting fitness and exercise through providing recreational facilities is more important in the country areas to promote healthier communities as the number and access to health care professionals is limited. Having a healthier community brings a cost saving in treating and transporting those in need of treatment due to an

unhealthy lifestyle of no exercise related conditions. Other considerations should be that there is an avenue to support small local communities in providing gym facilities operating expenses / upgrades to residents who have to travel any more than fifty (50) kilometres to these facilities in an effort to supplement the sporting ground activities.

The rural setting of the Gwydir Shire Council lends itself to an open space environment and the Council has capitalised on this by providing a number of sporting facilities within the community and parks and playgrounds that are situated in the residential areas of the town/s with the majority of urban residents within one (1) kilometre of these facilities.

The organised sporting activities held at these locations provide the framework for community cohesion which is developed and assists the community in making it a better place to live by providing a supporting environment that would not normally have developed.

## **2. Cost and revenue arrangements including capital upgrades.**

Generally the cost and revenue arrangements with the capital upgrades are usually initiated by the community users of the facilities and with some minor assistance from Council where possible. The individual communities usually have fund raisers and rely on grant funding for repairs, maintenance and capital upgrades. In recent times Council has assisted the smaller communities with some capital upgrades to initiate community actively but this is unsustainable for Council on a continuing basis. This often results in any capital upgrades being funded from within the community over a long period of time to raise enough funds for the upgrade, often when the upgrades are need years before the funding targets are achieved.

## **3. Environmental concerns associated with sportsground management**

The environmental concerns include the weather, the drop in volunteer numbers and the number of young people (18-40yrs) within the communities involved on committees. As the Gwydir Shire Council is a rural farming area, a lot of the wealth within the community is reliant on rainfall enabling the rich farmland to be grazed and cropped, Gwydir is fortunate in that it receives enough rainfall for general grazing and for winter and summer cropping, when not in drought. There are generally sufficient participants for organised activities but for some reason there has been not the commitment for volunteers to administer these activities, there is no one reason that has been identified but some suggestions are, there are too many sporting choices (families spreading too thinly), persons do not want the responsibility of running activities in case of a personal financial claim, both parents working and not having time to devote to children then was in the past.

In relation to the deterioration of the surface sporting grounds it is of a minor concern for the community as the supply of water for watering the sports fields is sufficient, the cost of supplying this water is of concern as the future real cost of water is unknown at present.

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

The effectiveness of the current administration of sportsgrounds by various groups is currently very good with coordination of activities done very professionally. This is also a credit to the volunteers who are on these committees but is also vulnerable if key persons stand down from these committees and quite often may take some time before another enthusiastic person/s take on the volunteer people position.

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

The importance of the sporting facilities within these communities can not be underestimated as often it provides the only physical exercise and social cohesion within the communities. For example in the smaller active communities it provides an opportunity for these communities to get together and support each other and provides a basis for an extended network of friends and support which are things that contribute to making a community liveable. The health outcome for the community is also important and these facilities provide for all ages from a number of different organised activities. The sporting facilities within Gwydir Shire Council are an important aspect of life as it provides a framework for activity and social interaction which makes this community a place you want to live.

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

There is very little ongoing impacts of traffic and noise on residential amenity that has been brought to Council's attention. There are once a year events that may cause some minor concern to the residential amenity for example the annual show and similar events but these are only represent a small portion of the year.

**7 Affect of litigation and insurance costs on financial viability**

This has had a major impact and may have contributed to the high cost of participating in sports and the willingness of volunteers to take on committee roles and organise sporting competitions and events. For example there is a need for new and existing committee members to have detail information on the requirements and the responsibilities that each committee has in performing there roles in relation to the steps and procedures to have in place to minimise litigation. Council assists some organisations as needed with event applications because of a lack of

knowledge and process of what is required by legislation and this is seen as an ongoing problem as committee members change and the relevant information is not passed on from committee to committee.

At present there are no formal agreements with sporting organisations with what and what are prohibited activities and who is ultimately responsible for the ground surface. If this liability is totally transferred to the sporting bodies it maybe financially impossible for these sporting bodies to function. The outcome of the investigations into the formal agreements will be a valued resource for Council where any potential future liability against a person, sporting organisation or Council could financially ruin or hinder an organisation.

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

Access to these open spaces for active and passive recreational users is readily available and a booking system is in place for activities for both Bingara and Warialda. The smaller communities have a more of an ad hoc system where verbal information is exchanged and events are on a more regular cycle common known by the corresponding residents.

Council would like to thank the NSW Standing Committee on Public Works for the inquiry into sportsground management in NSW as the outcomes and future planning for rural communities with limited resources is beneficial to rural communities which are vital to the Australian way of life. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact the Council.

Yours faithfully



Max Eastcott  
General Manager