



**GOSFORD CITY SPORTS
COUNCIL INCORPORATED**

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11 August 2006

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

Dear Committee Members,

RE: NSW Legislative Assembly – Standing Committee on Public Works

Thank you for the opportunity to make comment on this matter before the Committee.

- Adequacy of provision of quality sportsground to meet community needs across NSW;**
To-day in the Gosford LGA we have 34 sporting grounds under the control and management of Gosford City Council. This insufficient to meet the needs of the sporting community.

Of these

- One (1) ground is a regional event facility and managed by a Council 355 Committee
- Two (2) grounds are managed either by licence or a 355 Committee.
- Three (3) grounds have no amenities.
- Four (4) grounds are old tip sites and requires enormous amount of maintenance.
- Four (4) grounds are flood retention basins and their use is subject to weather.
- Five (5) grounds are situated in flood prone areas and their use is subject to weather.
- Seven (7) grounds are small and are suitable only for juniors to play on.

This leaves eight (8) Council grounds that are not impacted by maintenance cost, size or management issues.

A small number of school playing fields (5) are used by the sporting community. At present Gosford Council and the Education Department are working on an agreement for the improvement and use of sporting fields attached to Erina High School. We hope, when this agreement is finalised that this will be start of other schools joining with council to provide the much needed sportsground to the community.

There is one private sporting facility within the Gosford LGA.

The State Government has a sporting complex within Mt Penang Parklands, Festival Development Corporation. There is a large area here that could be developed into sporting fields, but due to the lack monies it is left idle.

The Gosford Local Government area is growing fast. The following information was sourced from 'The Central Coast - A Better Business Environment – 2005 Investment Prospectus' it showed the Gosford LGA population as

| | | | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------------|---------|---------|
| 1986 | 1991 | 1996 | 2001 | Projections | 2011 | 2021 |
| 109,278 | 128,956 | 144,840 | 154,654 | | 174,200 | 181,800 |

The infrastructure to meet this growing population lags far behind, since 1986 we have had only three (3) new sporting grounds established. Two are in a flood prone areas and one is a retention basin.

Another ground is awaiting development, but is delayed in the first instance to environmental issues and now due to the lack of funds available to complete the facility.

In November 2001, the State Government through the Department of Sport & Recreation undertook a review of sport and recreation facilities on the Central Coast. They commissioned Suter and Associates Leisure and Tourism Planners with Thompson Tregear Leisure Management Consultants to undertake the review titled '*The Central Coast Regional Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy*'. We would recommend to the committee that they obtain a copy of the review as it documents the needs of the Gosford Local Government area.

The Central Coast Regional Coordination Management Group (RCMG) is responsible for the implementation of the review recommendations.

The projects completed within the Gosford City LGA to date have not helped to increase the number of sportsgrounds or to improve the amenities. The projects include:

- Peninsula Leisure Centre
- Plum Park redevelopment
- Surf Lifesaving Clubs redevelopments

The Plum Park redevelopment is on private land, and the grant received from the NSW Government (\$300,000) was to cover change rooms and car park redevelopment.

In Gosford City we lack space to build new sportsgrounds. The areas that have been identified for sportsgrounds have been held up due to environmental issues and this has impacted of the project costs.

The current water crisis is creating concern within the sporting community, as our sports field (except for our regional event facility – Grahame Park) majority of our grounds only receive rain watering. A hand full has water available from bores, but as the water table drops this will also diminish.

Should the drought continue the fields will deteriorate and become unplayable due to the condition of the fields our public liability insurances could be/will be cancelled due to the injuries that could be sustained.

There will be a need for extra funding in the future to repair damage created by the drought and our members and Council will be unable to meet these extra costs.

2. Cost and revenue arrangements including capital upgrades

Council advises their budget for the maintenance on the sportsgrounds is \$800,000 per year and they wish to recoup from the sporting bodies (users) 15% of this figure, i.e. \$120,000

From the information available to us, it indicates Council Fees are recovering in excess of this figure from the sporting community.

Our codes indicate that their members are finding it hard to meet the increase fees.

As a community we should be encouraging people of all ages to participate in sport and recreational pursuits for health reasons alone. Our nation has a high percentage of obesity, especially in our children.

Parents with two or three children find it extremely difficult to meet the increasing costs of playing sport. We know that the ground fees are only a small part of the total fees paid but to some families this small part it what says yes or no to the children and/or parents playing sport.

Sporting codes that use sports grounds can be identified and therefore are easy targets to charge.

As ratepayers we are already paying for the maintenance of the sports fields in our rates. We also pay for other leisure activities for the community within rates, which not all of us use.

The field based sporting community is also contributing to the capital upgrades to facilities, by contributing funds they raise themselves, through grants available through Sport & Rec, and from their own governing bodies.

Following a submission from Gosford Sports Council a Recreation Assistance Program Grant system was established by Gosford City Council. They set aside each year \$40,000 for grants for the sporting recreation community to access. The grants are on a dollar for dollar basis.

This year 26 applications were received, of these 16 were from sports that use sporting grounds. The total costs of these projects were \$52,647.30 and 10 were approved for \$20,089.25. The other 10 applications covered other recreational projects, the total costs of these projects was \$180,648.57, with 7 projects approved for \$19,910.75.

Gosford City Council's Capital Works Program for 2006/07 – 2009/10 has the following sportsground projects listed

| | | | |
|-------------|--|--|---------|
| Project 243 | Replacement of Turf Wickets | \$80,000 | 2009/10 |
| Project 247 | Adcock Park Netball Courts Resurfacing | \$300,000+\$100,000 Sport & Rec Grant | 2008/09 |
| | Adcock Park Netball Courts Resurfacing | \$300,000+\$100,000 Sport & Rec Grant | 2009/10 |
| Project 252 | Installation of Bore Pumps to 8 Sportsgrounds and subsequent Reduction in town water usage | \$100,000 Fed Grant | 2006/07 |

3. **Environmental concerns associated with sportsground management;**
Environmental issues are not only concerns for Council with sportsground management but with their development.

Council is currently developing a new recreation area at Kincumber on leased land from St Vincent's De Paul. In planning for this facility Council had allocated in excess of \$2 million to complete the project. Investigation and correction of environmental issues in relation to the development of the facility reduced the funding budget to over half which now has left the remaining projects of the development unfunded. These projects include the development of the playing fields, installation of a multi purpose hardcourt and installation of a skate park. In its current condition the development is only utilised for Tennis as this is the only section that has been completed (with the exception of a tennis club house).

Council is currently trying to fund or investigate funding opportunities to at least finish the playing fields so that the facility can be utilised for its original intentions.

Environmental concerns also impact on the maintenance and redevelopment of sportsgrounds and add considerably to the budgets required to undertake these projects. Endangered ecological communities, flora and fauna are increasingly being identified within close proximity to sportsgrounds which then places restrictions on the usage and maintenance of the areas. With our sportsgrounds already over run and our staff already stretched in fulfilling its maintenance requirements, these issues place further stress on the situations.

Increasing restrictions on Occupational Health and Safety requirements also place increased pressure on staff and budgets through changing maintenance practices and equipment utilised to complete the maintenance.

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

The administration of sports grounds can be defined as follows:-

Gosford Council: Has a very good defined policy for access to facilities for all sectors of the community.

Schools: In our LGA we know of only five (5) schools that allow the sporting community the use their fields.
It has been very noticeable, especially in the last few years; schools will use council's grounds instead of their own so not to cause damage to their grounds.

Private Operators: Only allow their own body to use their facilities. We have also noted on occasion they have not let other clubs within their code to use their facilities.
They too have closed their facilities on occasion and used council grounds so not to cause damage to their grounds.
This is very disappointing considering grant monies they receive from local, state and federal governments to improve their facilities.

5. Impact on health outcomes and social cohesion, particularly in disadvantaged communities;
Within our area with do have a percentage of low income and unemployed families that are facing increasing costs each day to their budgets (i.e. interest rates, petrol costs, insurance increases, rate increases etc.)

As mentioned earlier the costs associated with playing sport and, in particular, field based sports is becoming out of the reach of these families. As budgets diminish they slowly eliminated items from their budgets. One of the first things to go is sporting activities for their family, due to the other associated costs (i.e. travel expenses).

Obesity and diabetes is fast becoming a problem in our communities. As a community we should be encouraging people of all ages to participate in sport and recreational pursuits for health reasons alone.

Providing alternative and informal recreation facilities that are free of charge and open to the community, such as Skate Parks and BMX tracks, often raises opposition within the community as they are perceived as creating anti social environments and encouraging youths to congregate. Council has installed, and continues to plan to install, a number of these facilities and then becomes heavily involved in positive public promotion of these facilities through the delivery of skate programs and community forums / activities to assist in maintaining a positive environment for the area.

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

We have limited public transport available in our LGA and this is a major issue, particularly for young families and older adults who may not have access to a motor vehicle.

There is a very poor private bus service that places a strong emphasis on viable bus routes and services.

As a majority of our sportsgrounds are located in out of the way places from public transports, the use of motor vehicles to access sporting venues is high. This does have an impact on residential amenity, especially on weekends.

Council's planning of sportsgrounds must ensure that residential amenity is not affected by their development. For this reason, the large majority of fields are developed in non residential or secluded areas.

7. Affect of litigation and insurance costs on financial viability; and

Over the years our members have reported to us on the effects of litigation on their sports and the effect this has had with increased insurance costs.

Our members have reported insurance costs rising as much as \$60,000 a year. This cost increase made it very difficult for the codes to remain financially viable.

One of the side effects of litigation and the viability of sports is the decreasing number of people volunteering their services for sports administration at club/association level.

The paper work has become onerous and the lack of free time to-day compared to 30 years ago is impacting on sporting bodies. Especially, when you compare working hours then to now. Litigation issues were hardly every heard off then, now is second nature for people to sue for any sort of injury sustained whilst playing sport.

Council has had limited litigation from injury through sportsground use or management but in this respect Council spends large amounts of time and money to ensure sportsgrounds and their associated amenities are safe for the community and user groups.

The threat of litigation also creates an environment where Council is hesitant to allow certain usage of the facilities as well as limiting usage on facilities to ensure that grounds cannot become dangerous or unsafe.

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

Active space:

Since the late 1960's Gosford City Sports Council has made recommendations to Gosford Council on the allocation of grounds. During the 70's and earlier 80's there was no problems.

The late 80's earlier 90's field based sports has increased enormously and ground allocation meetings began to get out of hand. In 1995/96 that a special subcommittee was formed that would make recommendations to Sports Council for the allocation of grounds.

A lot of time and effort was put into preparing a policy document. There were four main areas considered to formulate the policy.

1. Needs of codes (grounds tenure of same and needs competition and training)
2. Condition of grounds (including wear and tear)
3. Administration (including who is responsible for application, booking etc.)

4. Objections/Appeals

The needs and requirements of all codes were considered concerning the above four areas.

One major factor that did come into consideration was - all codes have different needs regarding their responsibility to their members under 'Duty of Care'.

This Duty of Care has different degrees as to "Care" in codes. In some codes the degree of "Care" is extremely high (for example in rugby league, rugby union, soccer and aussie rules) and the degree of "Care" slowly decreases from here for the other codes. This "Duty of Care" puts the onus on codes for certain procedures to be carried out during training to reduce the degree of injury players receive.

The other factor was the number of grounds available for allocation. Much time was spent trying to find a way to allow codes to develop. For a code to be able to develop they must know what grounds they have available for use from one season to another, without having to wait until approximately seven weeks before the commencement of their season.

Over the years codes have put a lot of money into the grounds. And it is not fair to any code that after putting money into a ground or facility they cannot use the ground due to it being allocated to another code.

On these two particular items the subcommittee requested a meeting with the Mayor, to discuss the problems. We were granted a meeting with the Mayor and put our problems to him. He was very generous in the time he gave to us and indicated he could see no problem on tenure of grounds, as long as we put confirmation of use each year into our policy.

Council was requested for a list of what monies codes had spent of grounds and facilities. The only information we could get was really what had been spent in the past 3- 5 years.

A draft policy was formulated covering all areas mentioned above. In formulating the policy great care was taken to ensure all areas of the document were equal to all codes. To stop any arguments regarding allocation of grounds, it was written into the document that what had been approved as ground allocations at the previous two allocation meetings were the basis for the tenure of grounds.

When the document was completed, a copy was given to Mayor and Council's Parks and Reserves staff for comment.

The then Chairman of the Allocation Sub-Committee, received a letter of congratulations from the Mayor, on the document and council staff requested some minor changes to the document and they were made.

Then came the time to place the document before Sports Council for approval. Every code was happy and unanimously endorsed the tenure of grounds. But when it got down to the nitty gritty of approving competition and training days, no common ground could be found. This was due to the codes looking at the document from their only individual wants, instead of looking at what was fair to all.

We had the situation of one code in particular wanting to commence their competition some 6 - 8 weeks before their season started. Another code didn't want training allocated on certain nights or grounds.

It did not matter how many times you explained to some codes that there are not enough grounds available to meet the needs of everyone. They would not listen and would not accept everyone has to work together.

Discussion and alterations to the document had reached a stage that there was not be a consensus of 2/3 rd's of the membership to pass a workable document. It was at this stage a motion was put to hand the draft policy onto council. The document was handed onto Council in December 1996.

There was a request from Gosford Council for the members of the Allocation Sub-Committee, along with the President of Sports Council, to attend a meeting on Tuesday 6 May 1997 to discuss the policy. At this meeting all aspects of the policy was discussed some minor alterations were made.

The policy has been in place every since and works very well. The Sports Council's Allocation Committee works closely with Council staff to ensure allocations are made in line with the policy document.

The policy document also gives comfort to clubs/associations that financially contribute to the infrastructure of a sportsground for the ongoing use of the venue.

Passive space

The community has unencumbered access to passive space within the LGA. The only time they have been denied access has been in an emergency situation (i.e. fires, floods).

Thank you for allowing us to comment, should you require and further information or documentation please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully,



Diane Dales
Secretary/Treasurer