



SHOROC

Shore Regional Organisation of Councils

*Incorporating Manly, Mosman,
Pittwater & Warringah Councils*

11 August 2006

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

SHOROC SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO SPORTSGROUND MANAGEMENT IN NSW

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Sportsground Management in NSW as part of this Inquiry.

SHOROC, representing Mosman, Manly, Warringah and Pittwater Councils, recognises the importance of recreational open space to the community and we are working cooperatively and strategically in the planning, development and maintenance of the region's sporting facilities. To this end we have commissioned Thompson Tregear Pty. Ltd., Leisure Management Consultants, to undertake a regional sportsground analysis and we are awaiting presentation of the final report on 24 August 2006.

In respect of this Inquiry, we wish to respond to the following factors that the Committee will examine.

1. Adequacy of provision of quality sportsgrounds to meet community needs

Sport has seen an increase in user expectations over recent years with an increasing demand for improved quality of sportsgrounds and facilities. This demand and ageing infrastructure is a significant strain on Councils resources.

In the SHOROC region approximately 119 full-size playing fields are currently available for summer and winter sporting use across the region. In addition, there are a further 51 fields in the Warringah Council area of less than full-size, most of which are used for junior sports.

We are aware that there is no common planning standard for the provision of sports facilities, nor a planning policy for sportsfields based on population indicators.

SHOROC is awaiting the findings of the Tregear Report to assist in the calculation of the provision rate for the region's playing fields, which will provide a point of reference for comparison with other relevant regions. This will assist us in tracking changes over time in the intensity of use of playing fields and comparison to the quality of sportsfield maintenance. This information will also assist us in determining the adequacy of provision of sportsgrounds to meet community needs in our region.

A challenge for Councils is that while increasing residential densities, driven by State Government policies, allow collection of Section 94 funds, there are few opportunities to acquire new land large enough for sportsgrounds. It needs to be recognised also that while much sport is played locally some codes are more regionally based and meeting sporting needs can be a contributor to traffic generation and lead to conflict where users are perceived as being from outside the local area.

2. Cost and revenue arrangements including capital upgrades

An in-house review conducted by member Councils revealed:

- significant capital expenditure on sports fields, varying widely from year-to-year depending on development priorities;
- significant recurrent maintenance costs;
- wide variations between member Councils of the fees charged for use of sports fields;
- revenue derived from user fees represents a very low proportion of recurrent costs (especially when compared to information sourced from neighbouring Councils).

Councils allocate significant budgets to recurrent costs associated with the provision of sportsfields and recover only a small fraction of those costs in user charges. The average annual cost recovery on maintenance in the Manly, Warringah and Pittwater area is 3.4% compared to approximately 15% in Mosman. A review of other local government areas in Sydney and Melbourne identified the target cost recovery on user charges for maintenance ranged between 11% and 40%.

In addition to net recurrent costs, Councils allocate significant budgets for capital works associated with the development, upgrading and refurbishment of facilities.

The initial findings of the regional sportsground analysis has revealed that in general terms, Councils in Sydney have *ad hoc* approaches to the setting of fees for use of sportsfields. These are commonly based on historic practices, loosely adjusted for inflation, but without reference to the recurrent costs of

provision. However, unlike the Manly, Warringah and Pittwater Councils, most apply some form of usage fee to both seasonal and casual users. Some Councils also apply nominal usage fees to schools.

Regular users of sportsfields in Manly, Warringah and Pittwater pay no hire fees for use of their respective facilities. Their only contribution are levies of \$3.00 per registered player per season that are applied to capital works programs.

Warringah Council has introduced a Sportsfield Rectification Program, whereby a levy is applied to all ratepayers in Warringah (special variation of 2% of the General Rate) for the rectification of sportsgrounds in Warringah. This fund is primarily targeted to the many grounds developed on filled sites with a legacy of instability and settlement.

Upgrading traditional systems to allow cost recovery for energy usage at sportsgrounds may require significant capital costs to provide adequate lighting (some fields share lights) and separation of systems to allow accurate billing (often one system serves more than one field and sometimes the system might be split along different sides of fields each serving all the fields). The use of new technology will facilitate the operation and security of the upgraded systems but the basic infrastructure costs remain.

These issues are being addressed in the regional sportsground analysis.

3. Environmental concerns associated with sportsground management

Adequate water supply is an ongoing challenge and the provision of safe playing fields during drought conditions is dependent upon access to water. Local government would appreciate more assistance and advice on stormwater capture/retention/treatment and sewer mining. A special fund could be created for such schemes to facilitate reduced use of potable water. An appropriate agency (such as Sydney Water) could also be responsible for building diversified small-scale treatment systems to promote use for non-potable purposes.

Other government requirements (EPA, Health, etc) can conflict with opportunities to reuse some sportsground sites and for reuse of water for maintenance.

Councils and some larger water users, such as golf clubs, have begun to use bore water for irrigation but there are no comprehensive regional studies as to the sustainability of these supplies.

These issues need to be addressed more strategically in partnership with key agencies.

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

The Tregear Report will comment on the effectiveness of Councils processes in managing sportsgrounds in the SHOROC region. In general terms, Council administration and accounting systems do not facilitate the ready retrieval of data essential to the effective measurement and review of financial performance of individual sports fields. This will need to be addressed so that Councils are able to exercise effective budget controls.

Access to school grounds seems to be dependent on individual school principals rather than a consistent policy by the Department of Education. Councils are reluctant to provide any capital improvements without security of tenure, and agreements are usually based on Council providing some maintenance of the fields.

Councils audits of use of playing fields has shown wide variation in use both between and within codes, and between fields of a similar type. The process of allocation to user groups by a regional sporting union on behalf of Manly, Warringah and Pittwater Councils is being considered as part of the Tregear Consultancy.

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

These areas need to be explored as part of a strategic approach to providing equitable access to regional recreational facilities, particularly targeting disadvantaged groups in our community. Many of Councils' older facilities are not designed to meet modern standards for access, and a lack of indoor facilities can limit opportunities for athletes with a disability. Disabled athletes also report a lack of funding for support organisations and areas such as the Northern Beaches find it difficult to attract coaches and other resources.

Warringah Council's recent strategic plan development showed significant concern in the community that general community users are consulted about the management of sportsgrounds and that particular user groups should not have exclusive use of facilities.

Warringah Council surveys have always shown that the casual activities, such as walking, have the highest participation rates. It is clear that while there is a strong support for sporting clubs and activities it should not be at the expense of the broader community benefits.

The report of health statistics has always shown some sports as being more likely to result in injury than others. It appears that the dramatic increase in participation in soccer, by both males and females, is due in part to perceptions that it is lower risk than some of the body contact sports. This can be linked to the issues associated with liability discussed below.

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

These impacts are addressed at a strategic planning level by establishing a sportsground hierarchy based, in part, on residential amenity and other impact management. Development proposals that do not comply with the hierarchy will be scrutinised during the approvals process to ensure that the community benefits justify the failure to comply with the hierarchy.

It needs to be recognised that sportsgrounds have the potential, through larger multi-use complexes, to provide a broader range of services for the community and the planning and development processes need to allow this where there are clear benefits.

7. Affect of litigation and insurance costs on financial viability

The lack of standards for sportsground conditions for management decision-making has implications for risk management. This is an area where the sporting associations need to be represented as restrictive management could close many fields, and changes of practice for improved safety gear might alleviate the risk. Some changes, such as protective clothing and mouth guards, have become standard and a broader approach to risk management should be considered.

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

SHOROC contributed to the *Assessing recreation demand and opportunities - Northern Sydney Region (2004)* prepared on behalf of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources. This provides a good overview of the recreational requirements of residents in our region.

In planning for the provision of open space, we need to consider emerging new sports and changes in participation, reflecting both our changing demographics and an increasing awareness of health and well-being, as well as traditional sports, in managing the needs for active and passive recreational users.

In Conclusion

SHOROC Councils have adopted a collaborative and strategic approach to sportsground planning and management. We await the recommendations of the Tregear Report to guide the sustainable provision of sportsground facilities in this region.

Please don't hesitate to contact Ms Margie Brown, SHOROC Executive Director, if we can be of further assistance in this Inquiry.

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