

INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Stockton Bowling Club

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**Committee of Inquiry – Crown Lands
(General Purpose Standing C'Tee #6)
Legislative Council
NSW Parliament
Sydney 2000**

20th July 2016

Crown Lands - Stockton Bowling Club

Dear Honourable Members,

I am writing as CEO of Stockton Bowling Club (Newcastle). We are a small suburban Bowling Club on Crown Land on a lease in perpetuity (as a sporting body). Our relationship with Crown Lands has always been excellent in that there is minimum contact and we pay our rent as due. This relationship has been shared for over 102 years so far, and long may it continue.

Like many Clubs, and more especially, Bowling Clubs, we struggle with finding funds enough to maintain this fantastic community asset. An approximate cost of near \$150,000 needs to be found every year for the Club to provide the facilities that touches nearly all in our small community. We are not in any way a 'Pokie Palace' - with 31 gaming machines we hardly qualify and in the current economic climate, they are in decline anyway. But that is a separate issue for our Federal members.

We have been luckier than many Clubs with at least 10 Clubs in approx. 8 years closing their doors in our immediate Zone. Thankfully, due to a creative Board, good management and excellent staff we have beaten the trend and are still operational. Having said that, it looks we are in line for a loss this year. Fortunately our efforts in securing our future have been successful to a point but not enough to generate real substantial income to allow or even plan for growth.

Your Host on the Coast

Earlier this year the Club was approached by 'CommPlan' - a company that installs telecommunication towers for mobile phone reception. As a coastal Club it was an ideal location to boost signal from Stockton/Newcastle to the growing suburban communities to the north of our area, and as an added benefit to sailors in the 'Stockton Bight' in case of emergency. As a part of this discussion, CommPlan would replace one of our current light floodlight poles with one with a relay at no cost to the Club and pay an annual rent of (approx.) \$12,000. This represented a massive opportunity to the Club in gaining a revenue stream not related to Club activity and at no impact to facilities, or members but, in fact, adding to the communities wellbeing by increasing the mobile phone signal. This represented a genuine 'Win-Win'.

However, in discussion with 'CommPlan' it came to light that as we are on Crown Land there would be difficulties as CommPlan have had issues with this situation in the past in other locations they have been involved with. After much difficulty I got in contact with the appropriate department in Crown Lands and had a long discussion with them in regards to our situation. The crux of the issue is this: We cannot rent/sublet out Crown Land for a 'non sporting' reason. When our lease was drawn up, mobile phones did not exist so how can we provision for such events now? Is a box on a pole a nonsporting activity? Is the raising of funds to provide sporting related activities by putting a box on a pole an activity even? The light tower is already in situ – the relay happens to be an additional 'bolt on' to this, surely, that anyway that a community sporting entity can raise funds (in a non-invasive, non-damaging manner) has to be good for our Community as a whole. It certainly does not detract or cause any issue in any way, manner or form – other than on paper in Crown Lands offices. It is not an operating business – yes a rental income is paid, but for what exactly? A box on a pole.

Furthermore, in discussion with Crown Lands it was indicated that "if" we were successful in getting this through then our rent would increase by whatever amount we generated anyway! They would deem it as additional income and adjust our rent accordingly. The current system of revenue reviews/revaluation would not come in to play. As an example, we made (approx. – un audited) a \$41,000 loss this year, if we had gotten the \$12,000 'rent' we would still have

made a loss of \$21,000. Even if we had made \$41,000 PROFIT – we are a ‘not for profit’ body anyway so the ‘rental’ income would just be ploughed back into the community in the end. Is it fair to penalise the Community Asset further by topping up the rent due to the fact the Board were creative in sourcing funds? It would appear on the face of it that Crown Land whilst protecting the letter of the law does not enter into the spirit of assisting the community as a landlord.

I can have sympathy for the dilemma that faces Crown Land, but when dealing with ‘Community Assets’ that are a living breathing entity that is showing all good faith by operating with its ‘social license’ to the forefront of all it does - staunch bureaucracy is not a good response. As stated we are a ‘Not for Profit’ organisation, why not allow such harmless income streams as they, in real terms do no harm to the landlord and have fantastic community benefit by allowing a Club to raise much needed revenue to release back into its community. I realise that Crown Lands are tied by mistakes made in the past that are now haunting them but to have such ghosts affect reasonable requests going forward will only lead to more controversy. I would argue that income from the relay is no more different than the ‘mark up’ we place on selling beer or cordials in the bar. We are taking something that exists, altering it slightly and reselling it at a higher value so we can raise revenue to fund the Club facilities.

As a ‘tenant’ of Crown Lands, I wish to continue our 102 year relationship. I want Stockton Bowling Club to remain at the heart of the Stockton Community. I want to ensure we can continue to provide facilities for our diverse members. I need to have the ability to raise revenue ‘outside the box’ of normal methods that will not impact the community but add to it.

If further information is needed I am happy to assist the Inquiry anyway I can.

Yours Sincerely,

GORDON LAFFAN ACCM JP
CEO STOCKTON BOWLING CLUB