

**Submission  
No 208**

## **INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Name:** Ms Anni Haque

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## The Hon. Paul Green MLC,

Parliament House,  
Macquarie Street,  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Green

### Crown Land Submission

I have been a resident of Sydney for 34 years and a citizen of Australia for 24 years. I love our city, our state and our country. Personally I am for progress, for development that will serve our citizens into the future. Yet like many I do not believe it has to come at the expense of our environmental heritage and unnecessary acquisition of open and recreational spaces. We need development that values open space, community space, green space and wildlife habitat and we can achieve this. This requires smart thinking beyond the average, smart planning and the smartest of solutions. Some of the transport infrastructure projects currently being built in Sydney in my view do not meet this criteria.

In summary I believe that sustainable development that provides optimum return on investment must first look to protect crown lands for the benefit of the public's holistic needs. We must do this on behalf of future generations.

To address the terms of reference:

Sydney-siders, and indeed all people in NSW, will increasingly rely on Crown lands for sporting and recreational activities. Further, Crown lands will serve an even more important purpose in preserving and protecting local natural habitats.

We would like to offer the following input on each of the four points of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

*(a) the extent of Crown land and the benefits of active use and management of that land to New South Wales*

We believe that when addressing this issue, the Inquiry should keep in mind that currently Crown land is owned **by the NSW government on behalf of the people of NSW**. Consequently decisions regarding the use of Crown land should be made with the goal of maximising the public benefit. Specifically, we advocate:

- Consideration of environmental, cultural, social and heritage values when reviewing the benefits of active use and management of Crown land.
- Encouragement of wide public use and enjoyment of the land when practicable. In our view, this means allowing organisations that run community facilities on Crown land to enjoy nominal rates of rent so they can continue to guarantee affordable access to their venues. We believe that organisations operating community-oriented facilities on Crown land should also access to government grants and favourable rate loan programs for maintenance and improvements in order to minimise the pressure to over-commercialise.

We don't necessarily disagree with devolving responsibility for appropriate Crown land to local councils providing adequate funding is provided for their maintenance and appropriate mechanisms are put in

place to prevent change-of-use, lease or sale without widespread, meaningful community consultation and input.

*(b) the adequacy of community input and consultation regarding the commercial use and disposal of Crown land*

No doubt members of this Inquiry are aware of widespread public concern and even anger over the lack of real community input and consultation with regard to a host of recent development and infrastructure projects in Sydney and beyond.

We believe that the state government should do everything possible to encourage transparent, meaningful community consultation and input, especially with regard to the commercial use and disposal of Crown land. Specifically, we advocate:

- Not assigning a commercial or market value to Crown land in order to assess the 'opportunity cost', or reduction in value, of reserving it for community use? We believe that this type of assessment may inadvertently trap state governments into believing that holding onto Crown land is too expensive? In all likelihood assigning a market value to Crown land won't take into account how the preservation of green space or accessible community facilities on Crown land improve the value of surrounding properties and the neighbourhood in general. For example, if a bowling club on Crown land is sold for conversion into housing, the surrounding properties and beyond lose access to green space and recreational venues. Consequently the loss of these valuable amenities may actually lead to a decline in value of properties in area - likely resulting in less revenue over the long term from land taxes, rates and stamp duty.

Further, assigning a proper market value to Crown land is problematic because of the considerable health and psychological benefits people derive from green spaces and affordable, easily accessible recreational facilities on Crown lands. Limiting these types of opportunities by commercialising or selling off Crown land is likely to lead to a less productive workforce and higher health costs.

*(c) the most appropriate and effective measures for protecting Crown land so that it is preserved and enhanced for future generations.*

We believe that existing legislation regarding the protection of Crown land should be strengthened.

Social, cultural and environment concerns should always be placed above economic considerations. As noted above, assessing the commercial or economic value of Crown land is fraught with difficulties and may lead to shortsighted decision-making.

In our view, the principles for the management of Crown land, as set out in the Crown Land Act 1989, should be respected and if necessary strengthened. They include consideration of environmental protection, encouragement of public use and enjoyment, and a requirement that the natural resources of the land be conserved and sustained for future generations. Overall, we believe the legislation should propose ecological sustainable development with respect to all land and Crown lands in particular.

Importantly, Crown lands typically provide vital habitat linkages between conservation reserves. We believe that when planning new housing developments on green fields, for example, undeveloped land should be acquired or set aside as Crown lands in order to preserve local ecosystems.

We also believe that the government should provide adequate public funding to acquire, protect and maintain Crown land.

*(d) the extent of Aboriginal land claims over Crown lands and opportunities to increase Aboriginal involvement in the management of Crown land.*

We believe that mechanisms to discover or encourage Aboriginal Land Claims over Crown lands should be put in place. Aboriginal people have a special relationship with the land and their rights should be respected. We note that if Crown land is leased or disposed of, the rights of Aboriginal people to lodge a claim are necessarily diminished. For this reason, we believe that every effort should be made to preserve Crown land.

Yours Sincerely

Anni Haque