

Submission
No 229

INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Agricultural Societies Council of NSW Ltd.

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Agricultural Societies Council of NSW Ltd (ASC) Submission: Crown Lands Legislation NSW White Paper

Summary

The primary concern of show societies across the State is control of their Showgrounds being passed to an organisation that does not have the long term future of Showgrounds as its core philosophy but rather sees Showgrounds as an economic windfall.

The ASC's preferred position would be to become the Crown reserve manager of all the active Showgrounds on Crown Land in NSW and accept responsibility for their ongoing management.

The ASC believes that it has the capacity to take on the major role of managing Showgrounds into the foreseeable future.

This approach would provide show societies with a stable base and a level of confidence in their tenure that would enable them to move forward.

The ASC would welcome the opportunity to discuss how best to move this proposal forward and further discuss those concerns or suggestions the Minister or the Department might have with a view of putting in place a mutually satisfactory arrangement.

Purpose:

To suggest options for the long term management of Showgrounds on Crown Land in NSW.

Aim:

To ensure that local communities continue to benefit from the traditions, values and enjoyment provided through the ability to access local show grounds, through the long term management and maintenance of Showgrounds by local incorporated show societies under the overall umbrella of the Agricultural Societies Council. This includes facilitating access by other new and traditional users such as Harness Racing Clubs, Men's Sheds, Kennel Clubs, casual campers, accommodation support for local festivals, poultry shows, breed cattle shows, pony club and horse events, gymnastics, tai kwon do, lapidary, china painting, art shows and the other many communities activities carried on showgrounds.

Background:

1. The ASC was originally established in 1929, over time developing agricultural shows in NSW. Agricultural shows are classic examples of the combination of business and pleasure. The stock, produce and machinery competitions are a constant inducement to improvement and provide a great deal of satisfaction to the community.
2. Today the ASC is a 'not for profit' entity, registered as a public company limited by guarantee on 19th May 2011. It does not issue shares to its members. Under its constitution the assets and income of the company shall be applied solely in furtherance of the objects of the company and no portion of the income or assets of the company may be paid or transferred, directly or indirectly to any member.

3. The ASC through show societies promotes excellence in agricultural and sustainability of food production into the future through its promotion and support of the many competitions that benchmark achievements and industry progress.
4. The ASC promotes the involvement of youth in shows by encouraging the holding of competitions for young people and fostering their participation in show societies and agricultural youth groups.
5. One of the ASC's top priorities is educating young people through livestock judging competitions held throughout NSW, culminating at the State Finals in Sydney each Easter.
6. These competitions introduce our young rural men and women to a vast range of experiences not normally available in their day to day lives.
7. Agricultural Shows are the only community activity that crosses all boundaries within the community, providing all sectors of the community with the opportunity to participate through entering the vast array of pavilion exhibits, dog, horse, sheep, cattle events, or simply enjoying the sights and sounds of the show and catching up with friends.
8. Showgrounds have significant heritage values having been used for Shows and a variety of other community activities for, in many cases, considerably longer than a century, and their current relevance increases as people pursue diversity in active recreational activity.

Options

There are three primary options

1. The NSW Government appoint the ASC as the Crown reserve manager for all active Showgrounds on Crown Land under a new piece of legislation which specifically relates to the ongoing use of Crown Land by traditional community users.
2. That the land associated with active Showgrounds currently operating on Crown Land be identified and transferred to the ASC under a ninety nine year lease system at peppercorn rent, for example \$1 per year if and when demanded.
3. Retain the current land tenure system for active showgrounds within the NSW Government under a new piece of legislation that specifically relates to the ongoing use of Crown Land by traditional community users.

Issues:

1. We agree with the Minister's statement that, "Every day, individuals and families right across NSW enjoy visiting the thousands of parks, beaches, waterways and sports grounds on Crown land.
2. Communities, businesses and farmers in our great State also rely on access to Crown land that is home to local clubs, community halls, showgrounds, racecourses, holiday parks, golf courses, farms, access roads and grazing paddocks."

3. The community relies on access to showground land, and without this access show societies throughout NSW would be unable to operate. While we appreciate that the new Crown Lands legislation intends to simplify and streamline the current regulatory arrangements, the lack of certainty for showgrounds throughout NSW is a significant concern to the show movement.
4. Our primary concern is control of Showgrounds being passed to an organisation that does not have the long term future of Showgrounds as its core philosophy.
5. Local Government has a potential conflict of interest between maintaining the Showground as an active community asset and the temptation to provide accessible real estate for sub-division and development.
6. As the peak body representing show societies in NSW, the ASC is seeking to develop a solution in cooperation with the NSW Government that develops a land tenure system for active Showgrounds in NSW that provides a level of security of tenure over the Showgrounds. This will provide greater certainty for the ongoing use of Showgrounds and their facilities by the community and the containment of the costs of operating such facilities.
7. The ASC is firmly of the view that Showgrounds are a common use community asset and as a manager any management strategy for Showgrounds would aim at attracting a range of community organisations. This strategy would incorporate the use of the existing facilities and develop new and additional facilities and uses.
8. While this approach has not always been adopted by Showground Trusts, it is fundamental to developing a vibrant community asset that has the ability to generate an ongoing financial base capable of supporting local community activities and events.
9. The Parkes Showground for example has facilities for the Kennel Club, the Men's Shed, the Harness Racing Club, the Trotting Owners and Trainers as well as the traditional Show Society facilities. The facilities also attract cattle breed shows, swap meetings, casual camping and other community events and activities.
10. The ASC will develop and introduce a leasing system over the Showgrounds and invite the primary local incorporated body to take on the role as local manager with a structure appropriate for local needs and the ability to generate licences for other Showground users.
11. This process will be supported by the existing 28 regionally appointed ASC Directors, representing 14 Groups of Shows across NSW, who can provide support and monitor arrangements at the local level.
12. Management plans will be developed by each local manager in conjunction with the ASC that recognise all the Showground users and provides users with the opportunity to input into the long term direction of the Showground through an appointed user group.
13. These plans will recognise the need to generate sufficient income to meet the day to day running and maintenance cost of the grounds and charges such as electricity, water and sewerage rates.
14. All licences will be consistent with the management plan developed by the ASC in conjunction with the local managers to ensure consistent application of the governing principles of Showground management.

15. The ASC will charge all primary leaseholders an amount that enables the ASC to develop a Showground management resource within the ASC.
16. Where leaseholders are unable to meet their obligations under the lease conditions the ASC will use its best endeavours to assist in overcoming the problems before any consideration of determining the lease.
17. To ensure any developments on Showgrounds are consistent with state and local council requirements developments on Showgrounds will be subject to the normal local council development approvals other than those normal low impact activities such as maintenance, electricity supply upgrades, stock yards, and parking provisions etc.
18. The question of commercial returns for the State Government on community run and managed assets is one that must be addressed before any long term arrangements can be put in place. The ASC is firmly of the view that the traditional use of Showgrounds, their maintenance and upkeep by show societies and the fact that they are where they are needs to be considered in forming a view about commercial returns. Clearly if the lands had not been set aside for the purpose of Showgrounds these lands would have been developed in most cases over 100 years ago. Showgrounds should be maintained as a "Community Green Space".
19. Showgrounds like surf clubs and golf courses, have enabled the community to enjoy activities that, without these lands, would not have been possible. In the case of showgrounds, this access has provided the community a positive externality for one hundred years that cannot be measured in dollars and cents. It has provided generations of Australians with the opportunity to showcase their livestock and produce, has provided entertainment for our youth and taught them about our history and heritage. For many Australians visiting a rural show is the only taste of farm life they will ever experience. The ASC believes that you cannot put a price on the experience of visiting your country show.
20. For these reasons the ASC is firmly of the view that the Public Trading Enterprise model is inappropriate for showgrounds.
21. Clearly the user pays principle is appropriate in the case of direct consumables, such as water, sewerage and electricity, costs for which all show societies budget.

Conclusion

1. The ASC through show societies promotes excellence in agricultural and sustainability of food production into the future through its promotion and support of the many competitions that benchmark achievements and industry progress.
2. The ASC's preferred position would be to become the Crown reserve manager of all the active Showgrounds in NSW and accept responsibility for their ongoing management.
3. The ASC's primary concern is control of Showgrounds being passed to an organisation that does not have the long term future of Showgrounds as its core philosophy.
4. The ASC's management strategy for Showgrounds would develop a vibrant community asset that has the ability to generate an ongoing financial base capable of supporting local community activities and events.
5. The ASC is firmly of the view that the Public Trading Enterprise model is inappropriate for showgrounds.
6. The ASC welcomes the Government's recognition of the importance of the Public Reserves Management Fund and supports the Government's decision to continue this method of funding into the future.
7. The ASC strongly recommends the continuation of the Crown Lands Fire and Damage Insurance package under any new legislative and administrative arrangements.
8. The ASC would strongly advocate against any system that sought to introduce local council land rates and taxes either of which could undermine the long term financial viability of show societies.
9. The ASC would welcome the opportunity to discuss how best to move this proposal forward and further discuss those concerns or suggestions the Minister or the Department might have with a view to putting in place a mutually satisfactory arrangement.

David Peters
President