

**Submission
No 8**

**INQUIRY INTO GREATER SYDNEY PARKLANDS TRUST
BILL 2021**

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This is my personal submission to the above inquiry into the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Bill (the Bill).

It is my strong view that this proposal to bring major Sydney parklands under the one management body through the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust (GSPT) is actually a strategy to reduce public involvement in the management of public parklands and reduce public access to areas where the public has previously had free access, and should therefore be rejected in its entirety.

The GSPT, as provided for in the Bill, represents the commercialisation of Sydney's major parklands and, because it will be a government corporation of sorts, it will have influence within government to navigate through government planning and environmental laws and regulations which private entities and public owners would otherwise be constrained by.

Further, if the egregious practices of the sorry Western Sydney Parklands Trust (WSPT) are to be repeated (and the proposed Bill permits this), the GSPT will be able to resume private land on the notion of the greater good for public parklands but such land will be later turned into a commercial bonanza through commercial, industrial or agricultural realisation – thereby stealing that which the private entity or private citizen might otherwise have pursued themselves.

The Bill also allows the GSPT to take over land within Greater Sydney which is presently managed, with limited resources, by the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service.

The concept of the GSPT (as we have already seen with the WSPT) is commercial empire building through the exigencies of government and is far removed from the original intentions when parklands such as Western Sydney Parklands, Parramatta Park, Centennial Park and Callan Park were established with intended public involvement and access.

Management of and access to major Sydney parklands by the public must be retained and with funding derived from the government funding pool – not from selling off assets.

I can only make reference to the horrible experience that has been the Western Sydney Parklands (WSP). WSP was pitched to us to be “the Lungs of Western Sydney” and “... never to be developed” and “... could be in fact the biggest and best urban park in the world” and “... the payoff for good planning, good rules-based planning, it means land is being set aside and not developed”, only for the former land owners to later find their land leased for financial benefit by the Board of WSPT – a Trust that was supposed to be funded from developing other land acquired by the government and not included in the boundary of the Parklands.

Existing Trusts identify more with the community yet they do this with insufficient funding from the government. They manage land that are of such importance in history and as landmarks in Greater Sydney that they need greater commitment of government toward disbursement of tax revenue to do this. But no, successive governments have starved these Trusts of funding. They are the public's land and, because of their history and function for the broader community, they are deserving of realistic funding from the government budget.

This Bill permits commercial interests to take over space that is the people's space and charge the people to enter that which has been their own, free access, space.

The public should not be robbed of their free space. Existing Trusts need to be adequately funded from the broader NSW tax revenue and appropriately legislated to provide the public with access to management of its own land.

A Greater Sydney Parklands Trust, propped up as it would be by selling off the assets is not necessary nor is it wanted.

Conclusion

As a result, I call for this Bill to be rejected in its entirety as I reject the concept of a broader Greater Sydney Parklands Trust. Instead, a “federation” model for major parkland management should be pursued, a model that provides for community volunteer involvement rather than turning it over to a corporate entity which is costly to run and needs to sell the assets to sustain itself.

This Bill is the work of a privileged few capitalising on the failure of government to recognise and fund the parks set aside by governments of the past for the free pleasure and recreation of the public. The land is our land, the public’s land, and it should NOT be given over to commercial and business friends at cost to the public.

Martin O'Reilly