

**Submission
No 43**

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

Organisation: Centennial Parklands Residents Association

Date Received: 11 January 2022

The Centennial Park Residents Association submission on the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Bill 2021

Introduction

The Centennial Park Residents Association (CPRA) is the umbrella organisation of the street committees of the suburb of Centennial Park. Included in our charter is the preservation of our historic garden suburb and the protection of our surrounding parklands.

We have had regular contact with the Minister for Planning Minister Stokes and his policy advisor. We believe the Minister's original 50 year vision was noble and far reaching. His objectives were very similar to the objectives of our Association and that of other parkland protectors with whom we have constant contact. In fact, he was very much supportive of the guiding principles of the Alliance for Public Parklands which this Association is a member.

The Exposure Bill and the subsequent Bill introduced to Parliament markedly varies in detail to the principles which were agreed upon with the Minister.

Our concern centres around the consequences of this legislation. It is clear, on reading the Bill, that there is the potential to alienate and hence lose our parklands, be it through inappropriate partnerships or long leases. Missing in the legislation is a commitment for adequate Government funding for the Greater Sydney Parklands.

This submission deals mainly with its impacts on the Centennial Parklands.

It also deals with its long-term effects on the future of the Greater Sydney Parklands and other parklands that may be added.

We stress that comments on the administration of the GSP refer to future Ministers and future members of the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust and Boards. The 50 year Vision of Minister Stokes and his GSP Trust/Board though noble, may not be valid or noble in future years when a future government and a future Trust/Board is chosen.

Loss of Parklands

The CPRA has been active in trying to protect the parklands – specifically the Centennial Parklands - Centennial Park, Moore Park and Queens Park.

The Parklands have been under extreme pressure from both Government and private commercial enterprises. During the Light Rail construction, the Centennial Park Trust sadly did not adequately defend its lands.

There is a need for this legislation to ensure public open spaces are protected so that when a park board does not perform its duty the Bill will ensure parklands cannot be alienated. This Bill is a once in a lifetime opportunity to protect our parklands and our city for future generations.

The Eastern Suburbs Light Rail took vast amounts of parkland from the parkland estate with total disregard for good planning and total lack of consultation. An example of this was the change of the tram rail route running from Anzac Parade along Alison Rd towards Randwick.

The plan, accepted by government was to run the track on the southern side of Alison Rd directly into Randwick Racecourse. Sensible, as it directly deposited the racecourse patrons into their destination. (It should be remembered the AJC lobbied for the light rail) The AJC then decided it did not want the track running in their land and the route was changed to run through Centennial Park on the northern side of Alison Rd which took large areas of parkland and destroyed countless mature trees. A timeframe was established for comment. The decision was made one hour after the expiration of that time.

Moore Park East and Moore Park South East both lost valuable parkland and mature trees when the rail line was moved from the original established route further east into the parklands.

The protection of parklands is critical in any Legislation designed to protect and enhance NSW's parklands. There is little in this legislation to suggest our parklands would be protected in the future.

The Amendments introduced by the Member for Sydney, Alex Greenwich, and accepted by the Government, must be retained.

The removal of car parking on Moore Park East is critical for the overall plan of enhancing our parklands and as a welcoming parkland gateway to the sporting complexes of the Sydney Football Stadium and the Sydney Cricket Ground. It should be remembered the removal of cars from Moore Park East was agreed to by the SCGT when the SCGT sought to add two large car parks in front of the SFS.

The other amendment introduced by Mr Greenwich, and accepted by Government, was the return to a maximum of 50 year leases and the rejection of the principle of the 'unsolicited proposals'. This adds transparency to any commercial proposal for our parklands.

Leases on Parklands.

Our parklands have had large areas alienated from the public by the granting of long leases. These long leases over time effectively become viewed as private land hence making future additions to the existing leases less controversial. The Carsingha lease of the old Show Ground still has approximately 25 years to run. The unsolicited proposal by Carsingha for a 99 year lease plus the removal of the conditions of consent SEPP47 would effectively render the land freehold. We are grateful for the amendments proposed by Mr Greenwich, and accepted by the Government, that have removed this threat.

The proposed Legislation allows for the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust (GSPT) to grant leases of up to 25 years without Ministerial Approval. This, in a future GSPT, could lead to uncontrolled privatisation of our parklands. This has little to do with the granting of leases for coffee carts and cafes but allows for major developments to occur.

Of equal concern is the draft legislation that would give the Minister of the day the power to grant leases longer than 25 years to commercial interests. This Bill would concentrate too much power in the hands of any Minister, leaving our parks vulnerable to politics, lobby groups and associated developers.

Funding of the Parklands by Government.

There is no commitment nor requirement within the Bill for any Government funding. Our parklands, which are critical for the mental and physical wellbeing of our population should be Government funded as are other critical, essential services like schooling and health.

Today, with the increase in high rise living, our parklands are in even greater demand, as emphasised during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns. Our city is in desperate need of extra parklands. Better use of the existing parklands by thoughtful landscape architectural design and implementation could increase the usability of the parks without increasing their size. See Moore Park SE which is a park used for sport but unusable when sport is not played. Cleverly designed tree planting and seating could double its use by allowing the public to use it when not used for sport. This in turn would take pressure off Centennial Park. Within the Legislation is the power for the GSPT to acquire land. There is no financial modelling to guide us where these funds would originate. This leads to the fear of self-funding and therefore more commercialisation of our parklands.

The vesting of Callan Park into the Centennial Parklands

Callan Park was vested into Centennial park without fanfare nor consultation with either the Friends of Callan Park nor members of the Centennial Park community. Callan park has little ability to generate its own funds which leaves Centennial Parklands to fund Callan Park which means Centennial Parkland will need more commercialisation to cover these extra costs.

The GSPT's powers to compulsorily acquire private land.

This is of great concern. Compulsory acquisition is (and has been) a practice of Government, not a function of a Trust or Corporation. Such power has the potential to corrupt.

Each parkland entity should have its own separate board, separate management and its own dedicated Trust.

The Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust has been dismantled. So, too, the Parramatta Park Trust. Fernhill Estate and Callan Park do not have their own Trusts. The Western Sydney Parklands has its own Trust and its CEO is also the CEO of the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust. As proposed the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust will have control over all five parklands.

Each parkland is 'unique' The concept that one policy driver has the ability to truly understand each park's needs is flawed. It is the CPRA's view that each park should have its own dedicated Trust. Its members should be local people who have the expertise and experience needed to manage the very wide range of tasks needed in running a community park.

Conclusion.

The Parklands are our future. We believe the Minister's 50 year Vision could be the security our parklands need. However, there are many shortcomings, flaws and oversights in the legislation as presented. We prefer these to be corrected to truly reflect the Minister's original Vision. This Vision, for reasons not understood, is not reflected in the Legislation. The Legislation allows for alienation by stealth, privatisation and partnerships with private business. It vests too much power in the GSPT and the Minister of the day. It does not recommend nor seek Government funding for the parklands which leads one to believe self-funding and hence commercialisation of the parklands will be encouraged. The removal of local government input is disappointing. We want the legislation to succeed but serious amendments are necessary.

Julie Osborne

Peter Tzannes

Co-Chairs Centennial Park Residents Association