

**Submission
No 79**

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

Organisation: North Parramatta Residents Action Group (NPRAG)

Date Received: 16 January 2022



16 January 2022

NPRAG SUBMISSION TO SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE GREATER SYDNEY
PARKLANDS TRUST BILL 2021

North Parramatta Residents Action Group (NPRAG) was incorporated in 2015 with associations aim being the following :

To promote the preservation of Parramatta's publicly owned parklands and public landscapes in order to enhance the historical, cultural, economic and social capital of our city, while showcasing it to the world. These will be pursued via these objectives:

- protect and enhance the historic buildings and sites of the Parramatta local government area*
- Work to protect sites of Australian historical significance and those listed as World Heritage sites*
- Oppose the over development of Cumberland Hospital and Parramatta Park precincts*
- Support retention and public ownership of existing active and passive recreation sites including Parramatta Pool.*
- Ensure that heritage conservation takes priority over developer profits*
- Promote transparent and consultative planning processes.*

North Parramatta Residents Action Group (NPRAG) are members of Alliance for Public Parklands since its inception in February 2021. We have worked constructively with the former Minister for Planning & Public Spaces Rob Stokes and his staff for 12 months attempting to imbed principles for the future protection of Greater Sydney and in particular western Sydney's public parklands.

PARRAMATTA PARK

Parramatta Park today occupies the former Governor Macquarie's domain, it contains Unesco World Heritage listed Old Government house and Dodds Farm, without the success of the new colony would have surely failed but its now celebrated by CommBank Stadium lurching over it.

The transition of Parramatta Park from the Governors Domain to public park, occurred as the result of a popular movement by local citizens, who lobbied in 1847 for access to the domain for "exercise and recreation in open grounds and pure air". Ten years later in 1857 over 245 acres was dedicated to Parramatta Park with the Act stating that a minimum 200 acres must remain free from sale for the health and recreation of the inhabitants of Parramatta

Between 1952 and 1975 alone a total of forty three acres of the Park was leased for use by licensed clubs and sporting groups, as well as the lease of Old Government House and grounds, first to Kings School and then to the National Trust.

The most political and acrimonious excisions occurred in the early 1980 and again in 2017 with the building of football stadiums. Waiting in the wings is a 200 room hotel the Parramatta Eels club is applying to build on land leased from the Parramatta Park Trust as a car park. This development has been deemed state significance and although Heritage NSW has totally objected to its approval due to its multiple historic site lines it will disturb - the Parramatta Park Trust has stayed disturbingly silent.

Despite the history of neglect, excision and exploitation, the landscape of Parramatta Park has become an integral part of it's community. The "people's park" has deep meaning for the community of Parramatta and as a place of recreation and play it has engendered a strong emotional attachment and sense of place.

Parramatta park is a part of the Burramatta territory of the Darug people; it has remnants of the Cumberland Plain Woodland. Its colonial heritage is celebrated with a UNESCO World Heritage listing as part of the Australian Convict sites – yet it is being squeezed with constant threat between the growing development of Parramatta and Westmead. With long leases given over successive state governments we have lost approximately 18-20 hectares of park that the public will never have returned as open parklands. Parramatta Eels club car park, Parramatta Football Stadium, Parramatta RSL, Parramatta hard rail line, Parramatta High School, (yet to be built Parramatta Aquatic centre replacing the Parramatta Pool demolished in 2017 by State Government).

The community in Parramatta don't trust the government to manage our parklands and heritage. It's a constant battle for the community to fight for its public land and public pools and as is widely publicized our heritage is under constant threat. There is no transparency, there is no honest engagement - so **The trust is gone.**

With Parramatta housing targets imposed by the state government set to increase by 72,000 and Parramatta Park already heaving under pressures of population in high density living. It's imperative that we grab before it's too late the chance to add to our parklands not remove lands or the provision to allow it whether it's for lease or surrender.

We have little faith in the Minister and his department's "best practice community consultation". Constructive feedback and objections from the community, including NPRAG, have not yielded any positive impact on the Minister's plans but on the contrary have produced unpleasant surprises. Instead, the community including councils in the local government areas where these 5 iconic parklands reside have been ambushed by the proposed Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Bill 2021 which is not reflective of the Whitepaper presented to the public.

The Bill emphasises 'activation' rather than protection of the parklands and reduces community input on parkland management to a mere tick-box exercise with community trustee boards wholly under the control of the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust board.

When NPRAG Secretary Suzette Meade met with Minister Rob Stokes as a member of the Alliance for Public Parklands, it was made clear to the group that the minister's opinion was that 'Trusts are old fashioned' when he was trying to explain why the current system was not favoured. Yet the very thing that has been proposed is a new bigger Trust that will override all the existing individual parklands trusts. Which is it? They are all fashionable or not - or is it only when the Trust suits the government's objectives that the Trust model is favoured?

Our position is clear: This Bill should be withdrawn and recast to emphasise the protection of the environment, heritage, biodiversity and public access and facilitate genuine community input over the management of each of the five foundation parklands.

In the case of Parramatta Park, this would require the reinstatement of the Parramatta Park Trustee Board with strong, local and accountable community representation on its board. Parramatta Park is a World heritage listed site and as such would strongly recommend that a representative of National Trust of Australia (NSW) and/or ICOMOS have a permanent seat on the board of the GSP Agency, not only with the UNESCO listing of Parramatta Park but the state heritage listed buildings on the other parks.

NPRAG also wish to state, again its strong recommendation that the entire Cumberland Hospital East Precinct of approximately 20 hectares, containing the National Heritage listed Parramatta Female Factory and over 70 state heritage buildings in a significant botanical precinct be added to the Parramatta Park Trust to increase the size of the brutally divested Parramatta Park grounds.

The creation of a botanic garden which Parramatta as a city lacks adding more passive green space for our burgeoning high-density population.

(This proposal was submitted by NPRAG as part of the Committee for Sydney and NSW Government Public Spaces Ideas Competition in 2020 – <https://sydney.org.au/psic/entry/cumberland-botanic-gardens/>)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In October 2021 six councils contacted the then Planning Minister, Rob Stokes asking for extensions to the GSPT Draft Exposure Bill submission period as many felt they had not received adequate information and time or were totally unaware of it and its implications to their communities and the public lands. Some had not even been aware of the Whitepaper.

They are:

Inner West Council
Liverpool Council
Penrith Council
Parramatta Council
Waverley Council
Woollahra Council

They all moved unanimous motions for additional time and more information especially regarding the lack of community representation and power as well as the centralised power of long leases sitting with the one minister of the day. (Attached are some of the notices of motions from councils regarding these requests which were denied by Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, Rob Stokes.)

It is our strong opinion that the State Government Public Spaces Minister purposely rushed this legislation with not only insufficient genuine consultation and transparency with the public who are the custodians of these parklands; but purposely wanted this put through without meaningful consultation with local governments areas that rely on these green public spaces and in some cases the councils are the consent authorities on these public lands.

When we attended the Ministerial Round table in July 2020 we asked the Minister for Public Spaces what the rush was between public consultation, public submission period and the draft legislation being written as we thought it was totally inadequate. The Minister replied he wanted to get the legislation through before the September 4 local government elections.....you need to ask why ?

NPRAG arranged a meeting with Lord Mayor Councillor Steven Issa, and Councillor Donna Davis in October 2021 when the Draft legislation was made public along with relevant council staff to discuss our concerns with more of Parramatta Park being able to be surrendered to another state government department for development under the draft bill. They advised that they were not intending to make a submission to the draft legislation as they simply did not have the time and assumed it was similar to the white paper. This was the same story with other councils we spoke to and almost all requested formally for the Minister for Planning to extend the consultation period by 2-4 weeks so that councillors and council staff could be well informed and in turn the residents of these local government areas.

The Local Government elections were postponed to December 4th due to the Covid 19 lockdown in NSW but this meant that these councils were in caretaker mode from **November 5th 2021** until newly elected councils were sworn in on January 10th and no business papers with new business till after the January 16th deadline for this upper house inquiry. So therefore no way for new councils to sign off on a position to make a submission to this inquiry highlighting their concerns.

The same concerns that were ignored during the public consultation period of the Draft legislation.

NPRAG members believe that the best way to translate what we believe to be Minister Stokes worthy principles into reality is to entrust each of our parks to its own discrete Trust. We recommend a federated, community model, not a top-down umbrella trust model. The membership of these individual Trusts would combine local community members, First Nations representation and experts in heritage, biodiversity and park management and a representative of the local Council.

This model of making the parks pay for their existence is flawed. Our public green spaces must be funded by the government, the same government that readily hands over 100s of millions to fund stadia to be built in these parklands.

We must have a genuine body that understands how Parramatta Parks historic, indigeneous, natural and contemporary values contribute to Parramatta's identity. If the park's contribution to Parramattas' identity is not well understood then these values will continue to be compromised by incremental loss that we have already suffered so much.

We note NPRAG are founding member of Alliance for Public Parklands and fully endorses their submission made to the Select Committee on the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Bill 2021

Signed

Suzette Meade – Secretary

On behalf of NPRAG