

**Submission
No 156**

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

Name: Dr Neil Runcie

Date Received: 10 January 2022

*Stanton Hall,
Centennial Park, NSW, 2021*

5/1/2022

*The Secretary,
NSW Legislative Council Committee
(reviewing propose legislation for five Sydney Parks)
Parliament House,
Macquarie Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000*

HEREWITH ARE THREE INTERCONNECTED SUBMISSIONS FOR YOUR COMMITTEE.

PLEASE ADVISE IF THE COMMITTEE WISHES TO INTERVIEW ME OR WISHES ELABORATION OF ANY POINTS.

THANK YOU

Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Committee reviewing proposed legislation for the creation of a new Agency and Trust to administer five Sydney Parks

By Dr Neil Runcie,
Foundation President, Save the Parks Campaign (est 1971)
(*Abbreviated c/v attached)*

Preamble: The Save the Parks Campaign was heavily involved in the defence of the Centennial Parklands from 1971 for 30 years till 2001. Originally there were approximately 750 members I recall and seven active resident action groups including the Centennial Park Residents Association, The Paddington Society, The Queen Street and West Woollahra Association, Planning for People (Surry Hills), The Bronte and Tamarama Advancement Society, Coogee and Randwick Residents Association, a Woollahra Resident Action Group. Initial concern was to achieve the relocation of the Moore Park / Centennial Park Olympics Complex to Homebush and the establishment of a Trust to protect and administer Centennial Park as a Great Park.

What is the purpose of the proposed legislation?

Firstly, it is to ratify changes that the Minister has already made without proper Parliamentary or public approval.

Secondly, it is claimed to be a means of achieving economies of scale.

Thirdly, it is a means of facilitating the creation of Great Parks in Sydney

Fourthly, it is a means of achieving the greening of Sydney recommended by the Greater Sydney Commission by consolidating the administration of only certain Great Parks but not others.

Fifthly, it incorporates the results of public consultation.

If this is a fair summary of the Minister's intentions it is grounds for grave concern on each count. Moreover, there is concern that the proposed legislation is NOT a democratic vehicle for achieving the open space objective of the greening of Sydney.

Initially, what prompted the Minister's concerns?

What was wrong with the previous arrangements?

With respect to the Centennial Parklands the "previous arrangements" may be briefly sketched as follows. The Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust (CP&MPT) was responsible originally for administering the historically preserved Centennial Park created by Sir Henry Parks (and Governor Lord Carrington) to celebrate the first centenary of British settlement. The Park was administered on delegation from the Premier. However a Ministerial attempt to establish an Olympic Complex in Centennial Park/Moore Park in 1971 led to a public outcry headed by the Save the Parks Campaign and metropolitan Councils.

Subsequently, Homebush was endorsed as the preferred site for the Olympics and the CP&MPT was created with a Community Consultative Committee (CCC) all aimed to protect the parklands. The latter was a result of the Public Participation in Planning Movement that aimed at more democratic and better informed planning solutions.

Moore Park, Queens Park and the previous RAS lands in Moore Park (part of the old Sydney Common) were subsequently added to the responsibilities of the CP&MPT. These lands incorporated a major part of Governor Lachlan Macquarie's Sydney Common. More recently the critical role of the Sydney Botanic Gardens in the founding and design of Centennial Park was finally acknowledged in a joint administration. Unfortunately the Minister's current proposals destroy that historic link. Strangely and without proper consultation some Callan Park lands were added very recently.

The failures of the CP&MPT were many.

Firstly, apart from several notable exceptions the appointments to the Trust were from the corporate sector with little initial knowledge of park history, of park management and of the relevant disciplines. This meant that the agenda of meetings was controlled by the administration and the Director in particular. This meant that the agenda of Trust meetings was heavily filtered.

Secondly, the same problem existed with the CCC. It was stacked with people of little knowledge of the parklands and its problems and with other restraints. In general the agenda was supplied by the Director and staff.

Thirdly, there was a bias against professional and academic representation.

Fourthly, local representation on the CP&MPT and on the CCC was minimal and not necessarily representative.

Fifthly, there was a complete failure by the CP&MPT and the administration to understand the Principles of Public Participation in decision making which amounts to an abandonment of democratic procedures and efficiency in gaining expert knowledge.

Sixthly, these failures are conspicuous in the administration of the EQ. Government Policy in establishing a film making complex (now Disney controlled, formerly Fox) and an EQ to complement the film studios. Admittedly AFTRS was established in the EQ but there was little appreciation of the innovative role that the Trust and the administration should play. This failure is economic, social and educational. The CP&MPT practice of calling for tenders from the private sector is a pathetic failure to accept the original NSW Government Policy or to be selective in implementing changes.

Seventhly, with several notable exceptions the CP&MPT has resisted seeking outside professional help. Attempts to get the Trust to repeat the once held excellent dozen public seminars on aspects of the Parklands have been resisted.

Eighthly, the CP&MPT was weak in dealing with the light rail invasion of the Parklands environment with adverse consequences for the Parklands and the local residential environment. The protest about the decision to move the light rail to the northern side of Alison Road was weak and followed a public meeting of anger at the decision. Note the Auditor General Comments on the Tibby Cotter Bridge and the Light Rail.

Ninthly, the CP&MPT was weak in dealing with SCG aggression leading to significant loss of open space and community facilities in the area.

Tenthly, the financial needs of the Trust were continuously listed as an explanation of commercialisation of Trust lands and failures (eg to address erosion in the SW corner of CP).

Does the proposed legislation address these and other failures?

NO!

Each of the proposed Great Parks under the proposed agency is unique with their own set of problems and demands from community groups as illustrated above. What is extraordinary is the bureaucratisation of decision making that is implicit and inevitable in the proposed permanent structure.

Conclusions:

1. Previous attempts to address the greening of Sydney have failed to lock in the vital role of local government. The proposed legislation repeats this error in a conspicuous way. *A technical service to local Government supplemented with grants is needed. Note the principles underlying the earlier Urban Parks Authority.*
2. *Local Government should not be left out of the administrative arrangements for each of the Great Parks.* For example the Centennial Parklands fall into three local government areas and are of immediate concern to residents in a fourth. Integrated urban planning is essential. Note for most of its life Moore Park was administered by the City Council.
3. The decision to leave certain parklands out of the proposal for an integrated administration points to an *implicit recognition that certain Great Parks have unique features requiring unique solutions.*
4. Open space is also a general requirement in all NSW urban centres.
5. *A technical and visionary input is required,* as provided by the Botanic Gardens at Mt Tomah and Mt Annan and frankly also at Centennial Park and elsewhere.
6. *An Urban Parks Authority as part of the National Parks and Wild Life Service should be revisited.*
7. *The Botanic Gardens, the Domain and the Centennial Parklands are all in close proximity and could be brought together again with revisions to the existing legislation to ensure greater independence.*
8. *Greater independence is necessary to halt the incessant aggressive behaviour of commercial enterprises (eg Gerry Harvey's Carsingha), government departments (eg Department of Transport) and statutory bodies (eg the SCG) in alienating Parklands.*
9. *Conflicts between the Minister and a Trust are best settled by referrals to Parliament as has worked so well with the RBA.*
10. *The Great Parks Movement and of the Garden Suburbs Movement of the nineteenth century are very relevant today in urban planning in Sydney.* The proposed legislation fails to capture the needs for democratic reform and the separate needs of each area as outlined earlier in the submissions at the Parliament House Forum on the Minister's first draft.

NR(23/12/2021)

Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Committee reviewing proposed legislation for the creation of a new Agency and Trust to administer five Sydney Parks: An Addendum

*By Dr Neil Runcie
Foundation President, Save the Parks Campaign (est 1971)*

(1) Resolving conflicts between the Trust and the Minister

If the Minister of the day has unfettered powers to direct a park trust this undermines the independence of the trust which is the purpose of its establishment by Parliament.

This situation arises in other contexts. For example, the Reserve Bank of Australia was established to conduct monetary policy in the best interests of the people of Australia independent of the Federal Treasurer and the Government of the day with Parliamentary scrutiny. The simple legislative device used is to require any conflict between the Treasurer and the RBA Board to be in writing and tabled on the floor of the House for a set number of days to give the Parliament time to decide the issue. This was and still is a successful attempt to remove a very important area of decision making from party politics and/or individual predispositions. In fact this tabling has never been necessary because of the consequent successful dialogues between the RBA and The Treasury.

In the case of the CP&MPT *responsibilities* a better public result could have emerged in decisions or lack thereof in recent years if the CP&MPT was truly independent. See below.

(2) The Aggression of Statutory Authorities

The Sydney Cricket Ground Trust for example has not respected the Parklands nor the community sporting facilities in its local environment. Consider the destructive fate of Cricket Ground No2, the Sports Ground, the proposed South Paddington Park and Community Centre (*a tragic loss*), the use of Moore Park as a car park for SCG functions. and the enormous Tibby Cotter Bridge partly designed to accommodate a SCG car parking overflow into Moore Park West.

The Tibby Cotter Bridge has adversely affected landscaping in Moore Park East and West. It is large and invasive and was not subject to cost benefit analysis or even prudent evaluation. It was paid for by NSW taxpayers not the SCG. See the critical reports of the Auditor General as well as community groups on this expensive project so close to another bridge over Anzac Parade. Again this was a conspicuous failure of the CP&MPT to act to protect the Parklands under their control and with an obligation to do so laid down by Parliamentary legislation. Indeed the Chairman at the time confessed to a Campaign Committee that he had not read the Auditor General's report some time later.

The attempt by the SCG to establish a stadium in Moore Park was opposed by public meetings and interestingly by the CP&MPT led by an academic colleague Professor John Niland (Chairman) who advised the Minister that the Trust would resign *en masse* if this SCG proposal was to proceed. This was a unique solution but did not result in a proper dialogue focussing on protection of the lands under the control of the CP&MPT.

However, the piecemeal attempts by the CP&MPT to defend the Parklands from SCG carparking are still in progress. A critical examination of the total situation is lacking. Indeed the SCG and the CP&MPT have not made serious attempts to solve the SCG carparking problem thereby violating a fundamental sound planning rule that traffic generators should provide for their own carparking. Piecemeal solutions at cost to the environment and NSW taxpayers have resulted. A leading example is the SE Light Rail that passes through the Parklands that is unlikely to improve the situation as much of the SCG traffic is from the west.

3. Cost Benefit Analysis and Parkland

I am a long time critic of the Light Rail proposal for the SE Sydney both in concept and design. Moreover, strong criticism from the Commonwealth Infrastructure Authority of this project led the Commonwealth declining financial assistance for the project in spite of some strong but misguided lobbying.

The Minister sent three officers to interview me at home in the planning stage. It was apparent very quickly that they did not understand cost benefit analysis as a tool in selecting investment projects. I was advised by the officers that the cost of using parkland (and streets) for the project was ignored because it was Crown land. Thus the parkland they claimed had no cost in cost benefit analysis.

The CP&MPT had not valued the community Parklands on opportunity cost plus principles. The CP&MPT was weak in defending the Parklands: note the light rail incursions into Moore Park West, East and SE (and Tay Reserve) as well as (i) C&SE Light Rail Offices and (ii) the use of construction sites for equipment in the Parklands as well as (iii) the sale of CP&MPT Land adjoining Randwick Racecourse to the light rail body at a low valuation. The so called *business case* also benefitted from this Departmental stance and even there the calculations used to justify the expenditure were rubbery and totally misleading as subsequent *cost escalations* confirm. See the report of the Auditor General.

The CP&MPT was under pressure **not** to protect the parkland in this case of recent government policy and there was a failure to apply proper cost benefit analysis that the *Treasury has increasingly recognized as necessary in all Departments. Appointments to the Trust should not be at a Minister's whim and proper Parliamentary scrutiny is again called for with appointments and with appropriate scrutiny of qualifications.*

4. Heritage Protection and the Parklands:

What is the value and importance of heritage protection if it is ignored (i) by the Government of the day, (ii) individual departments and the Heritage Council itself and (iii) the CP&MPT?

Centennial Park itself is heritage listed by both the Commonwealth and the State whereas the State has listed most of the Centennial Parklands. *This listing should imply financial assistance in preservation.*

5. Parklands and a MultiCentre Metropolis

(i) All Metropolitan Councils in the 1970s opposed the Centennial Park Moore Park Olympic Complex proposals. Yet the SCG has been allowed to surreptitiously use

NSW taxpayers funds to circumvent the rejection of the original Olympic Complex proposals, and at the same time to destroy local sporting and community facilities.

(ii) There were excellent presentations of alternative stadium sites at the Town Hall Rally in 1972 called by this Campaign by the Mayors of Bankstown, South Sydney, Penrith. More sites are now needed and emerging with Sydney's development as a multicentre metropolis. But should the new Agency have powers of acquisition without proper town planning and parliamentary approval?

(iii) Leading Sydney architects have rejected the case for pulling down the first SFS and they believe that limited renovation was sufficient and by implication the taxpayer funds would be better spent elsewhere where needed in the western suburbs. Surely the CP&MPT could see a danger to the local open space from the recent developments. And will the new Agency act to protect the Parklands from incessant SCG aggression.

6. Parklands and Infrastructure

Again dealing with the CP&MPT, it is apparent that it has not been properly qualified to deal with the possibilities of developing the EQ as an adjunct to the film studios. *All infrastructure developments within parklands environments should be subject to special scrutiny. The extension of the CP&MPT to Callan Park needs revision as Callan Park is an entity requiring separate administration as a whole.*

7. Conclusions

1. It is clear that the proposed legislation does not properly address the failings outlined above.
2. The Minister has sought to reduce exposure to local representations but has been forced to shift his ground with the establishment of local advisory Trusts to his Agency.
3. The composition of those Trusts cannot be left to corporate sector executives, as in past Trusts, with money making propensities and experience.
4. There is an obvious need to provide greater protection for parklands.
 - (i) The pattern of Ministerial appointments to parkland bodies needs to be changed.
 - (ii) The independence of the Parkland Trusts needs to be strengthened to ensure Parliament and the public confidence in the dedications are respected.
 - (iii) The significance of heritage protection of Parklands needs attention.

NR (25/12/2021)

Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Committee reviewing proposed legislation for the creation of a new Agency and Trust to administer five Sydney Parks: Postscript

***By Dr Neil Runcie
Foundation President, Save the Parks Campaign (est1971)***

1. Selected Correspondence

- A. To the Chairman, CP&MPT***
(i) Light Rail in the Parklands (23/11/13)
(ii) Creative New South Wales: The EQ as a Cultural and Arts Centre (30/12/16)
B. Lord Mayor's Paddington Town Hall Meeting (30/7/19)
C. To Hon Robert Stokes (6/6/21)

2. Abbreviated C/V of Neil Runcie (d/b 7/3/28)

- (i) PhD from the University of London with research awards from the Leverhulme Trust and the Houblon Norman Foundation of the Bank of England With concurrent articles published in the Sunday Times, Bankers Magazine, Australian Accountant and with the Institute of Economic Affairs arising from my research.***
- (ii) B.Ec from Sydney University with majors in Economics and Politics and First Class Honours in Economics and the Caird Scholarship (evening student)***
- (iii) Former Research Officer at the NSW Bureau of Statistics and Economics with secondment to the NSW Mines Department and liaison officer with the Joint Coal Board, Commonwealth Statistician and the Bureau of Mineral Resources***
- (iv) Foundation Lecturer in Economics at UNSW in the School of Humanities and Sciences with subsequent appointments as Lecturer, Senior Lecturer and Associate Professor in the Faculties of Commerce, Architecture, Arts and Engineering and the Australian Graduate School of Management.***
- (v) In house economic adviser to the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal and author of a report tabled in Federal Parliament***
- (vi) Founder and Foundation Chairman of UNSW Staff Credit Union***
- (vii) Co-Founder and Foundation Chairman of 2MBS-FM***
- (viii) Founder and Foundation Chairman of 2RPH and of the Australian Council of Radio for the Print Handicapped***
- (ix) Founder and Foundation Chairman of 2RES -FM***
- (x) Convener of Sydney Public Affairs Radio Foundation and Sydney Open Channel***
- (xi) Founder and Secretary of the Centennial Park Residents Association and Convener of the Centennial Park Garden Suburb Association***
- (xii) Chairman of the NSW Coalition of Resident Action Groups, Convener of the Coalition of Eastern Suburbs Resident Action Groups, Convener of the Noise Abatement Society, of the Campaign against Poster Pollution and the Greater Moore Park Residents Association..***
- (xiii) Past President of the NSW Branch of the Economic Society of Australia and New Zealand.***

- (xiv) A Director of the Australian Economist Advisory Group, Group Equity Fund, I.P. Financial Services. Consultant on corporate long range planning.
- (xv) Past President and Founder of the Save the Parks Campaign
- (xvi) Co Founder and Convener, The Listeners Society (est 1960)
- (xvii) Founder and Foundation Chairman, The Centennial Park Video and Cable Association (est1987) that operated for 10+ years with a dozen Stations supplied by Telstra with advice until the latter sold a half interest Rupert Murdoch to become FOXTEL.
- (xviii) General Editor for the University of London Press of two series (Australian Studies in Economics and Studies in Finance) that included four of my five published books: *Australian Monetary and Fiscal Policy*, *The Economics of Instalment Credit*, *The Management of Instalment Credit and Credit Unions in the South Pacific*.
- (xix) *Contributor to Government Inquiries in Australia. New Zealand and the US*
- (xx) *Lecturer and Visitor with the Stanford Graduate School of Management including The Australian Institute of Management schools*
- (xxi) *Many articles on economic and financial matters and on Public Participation in Planning.*

NR (4/1/2022)

2 Martin Road, Centennial Park, NSW, 2021

Tel/Ans/Fax: 02 9662-6574

23/11/13

The Chairman,
Centennial Park & Moore Park Trust,
Dear Mr Ryan,

Light Rail in the Parklands

I fully appreciate the difficult position that the Trust faces in view of the determination of the forces behind the City and East Light Rail project. May I offer a few comments?

1. **The EIS does not have the cost benefit report that was allegedly done by a firm of accountants belatedly after unfriendly comments from Infrastructure NSW.** The brief reference to a cost benefit analysis in half a page is unconvincing and well below proper professional standards. Does the Trust have the accountant's report? What value has been placed on the Trust Trees to be destroyed in the Parklands and the Precinct (eg at the southern end of Martin Road)? **What value has been placed on the land to be acquired from the Trust?** Will it be on leasehold or acquired from the Trust at market rates? **Still another alienation of our dedicated Parklands!**
2. Cost benefit analysis should be done under **the supervision of professional economists** so that, for example, the externalities (eg resulting congestion and lengthened travel times, appropriate interest rates, etc) are recognised and accounted for. I can well remember the delight when **trams were taken off** in Sydney with the reduced congestion, improved safety and improved vehicular travel times. **Has this reverse process been properly accounted for?**
3. **Will Light Rail mean that you are going to eliminate the Moore Park Bus Station and/ or event parking on Moore Park? Do you have a conflict with the SCG?** What will happen to the **acoustical mounds** –see enclosure?
4. **Professor David Hensher** is the senior transport economist in Australia. I attach a copy of his report comparing buses and Light Rail. The comparison is not flattering to Light Rail and raises many issues that the Trust should consider. Please take the trouble to read it and the **Ken Henry's comments** enclosed.
5. **The Eastern Suburbs already has a very efficient bus service.** But there are trouble spots that could be substantially improved now (eg the Eddy Avenue loading of UNSW students). Is the cost of the present proposals at the expense of Sydney as a multicentre metropolis? The EIS has no comparison of other options.
6. **How effectively has Trust examined alternatives that would have less impact on the Parklands (eg confining the light rail to the existing busway and putting the buses on Anzac Parade that could be widened at low cost)?**
7. I must confess that I was tempted to accuse the Trust of **Complicity and Complacency** when I received your last letter about the Light Rail proposal when you directed my efforts be directed at the Department. There is no point in having the Trust unless you are prepared to fight for the Parklands which is your statutory duty. There are many unsatisfactory aspects to the EIS that the Trust should contest. I am worried that this is not being done in view of your earlier letter.

Yours sincerely,
Dr Neil Runcie

*Coalition of Eastern Suburbs Resident Action Groups
c/- 2 Martin Road, Centennial Park, NSW, 2021
30/12/16*

[Tel: (02) 9662-6574 email: nruncie@bigpond.com]

*Tony Ryan, Esq
Chairman, Centennial Park & Moore Park Trust,
Locked Bag 15, Paddington PO NSW, 2021*

Dear Mr Ryan,

*Creative New South Wales:
The EQ as a Cultural and Arts Centre*

1. A wide range of ideas emerged about the future of the RAS site when the RAS moved to Homebush. These ranged from Parkland to Residential Development that would be an adjunct to the existing Garden Suburb of Centennial Park. In the event, the decision to allocate a large portion of the site to Rupert Murdoch's Fox Film Studios was seen as a creative step in enhancing the local film industry and enhancing Australia's cultural image. EQ with its two large cinema complexes was seen as an adjunct to Fox studios. **It is now time to take that vision further by adding the building blocks of an Arts and Creative Industry Precinct.**
2. In my initial discussions with the present Director of the Centennial Parklands (Mr Kim Ellis) I elaborated the idea that the College of Fine Arts (COFA) in Paddington near Oxford Street would be better located in EQ to complement The Australian Film Radio and Television School (AFTRS) whilst maintaining its UNSW connection. **The time is ripe to revisit that idea as I understand that the UNSW is reviewing its commitment to COFA. May I add that St Vincents Hospital and the Notre Dame University nearby would be ideal bodies to take over the present building and site as they have a close affinity and growing pains.**
3. Some years ago with Professor Stephen Prickett (formerly at ANU and subsequently Regius Professor of English Literature at Glasgow University), we proposed a Globe Theatre at the northern end of the Finger Wharf at Woolloomooloo. A Globe would just have fitted in on the apron at the end. However we were misinformed at the time that the contracts for residential development had been approved and signed. But the EQ would also have advantages and cost less than the misallocated funds of the original lessees (Fox and Lend Lease). Note the size of their writedowns. **A significant live theatre on the EQ site is overdue and a replica of the Globe would of course be available for other than Shakespearian productions, important as that is.** My original proposals with Professor Prickett included a Shakespearian studies centre and an Elizabethan menu restaurant.. **An adjunct performance studies centre has potential too; more on this later. Note the case for a writing school for radio, film, TV and video.**
4. In looking at the future of EQ I have been disappointed to observe the apparent lack of interest by the Centennial Parklands administration in the community aspirations in the South Paddington Park & Community Centre

that was to be established on the Army Engineers Depot in Moore Park Road. **It was a tragic loss locally but had wider significance.** For example, the dozen large garages on the southern boundary were to be made available for arts and crafts activities that have been suppressed by lack of suitable accommodation. Distinguished artist such as **Charles Blackman and Brett Whitely** lived and worked locally but there were many others. Note the fate of the Glebe arts and crafts centre in an old factory space now redeveloped for residential units.. **The lessons of the loss of the South Paddington Park & Community Centre have yet to be learnt by the relevant EQ planners and frankly the locals too. It is a story of missed opportunities.**

5. **But big film productions that are the concern of Fox do not focus on the need for creative activity in small productions.** I am thinking particularly about the tremendous need to capture transmission opportunities for educational material. This was demonstrated in the 1980s with our Centennial Park Optic Fibre Trials with Telstra when we were able inter alia to foster Uninet (linking four Sydney Universities) now taken over by the consortium of 40 Australian Universities in AARnet (linking the Universities and certain private schools with interactive optic fibre communications). **However the big problem is not means of transmission but appropriately structured educational (and research) material. There is an enormous payoff in primary and secondary education as well as export opportunities if these developments are handled well.**
6. **The development of community radio, television and video production has much to contribute to the Creative Society.** The main restraint is the exhausting difficulty in finding suitable low cost premises and the need for an appropriate juxtaposition of activities. 2RPH (Radio for the Print Handicapped) for example has moved from Paddington to North Sydney to Marrickville and has now settled in a community centre in Glebe. Former Premier Neville Wran promised us the old Fire Brigade Training College under certain conditions as a Community Radio House to house three Stations. Having helped establish three of Sydney's community radio stations as Foundation Chairman, and a number of related ventures, I can speak with first hand experience. **In an earlier communication with Mr Ellis, I drew attention to the Victorian Government's recent initiatives in Creative Victoria that has some relevance to my more focussed proposals on community use of EQ.**
7. **The EQ is crying out for creative innovation, professionally or socially based as need be, but not commercial development as originally proposed by Mr Gerry Harvey.** We seek an early appointment with you to discuss these ideas.

For the Committee
Yours sincerely,

Dr Neil Runcie
Convenerr

PADDINGTON TOWN HALL MEETING: 30/7/19

Some Comments by Professor Neil Runcie

1. **Preamble:** On 22/2/19 I wrote to the Lord Mayor as Foundation President of the Save the Parks Campaign suggesting a public meeting to consider the impact of the new Sydney Football Stadium replacing the old, rightly or wrongly, and the impact of recent developments on the Centennial Parklands. The present meeting has gone a step further and integrated those suggestions with the City's plans for 2050. Herewith are a just a few suggestions.
2. **First Suggestion.** Looking ahead to 2050 should COFA, the College of Fine Arts at the UNSW, be moved by 2050 from the corner of Oxford St and Greens Road into the EQ to complement AFTRS, the Australian Film Television and Radio School, and other community based activities such as performance schools? The NSW Government EQ aim of course was to complement and bolster an Australian film industry now present at Fox Studios. The existing COFA premises could be added to St Vincents Hospital and/or Notre Dame University in due course. Kim Ellis the former Director of the Centennial Parklands thought this was a great idea but as far as I know he took no action. The original logic of EQ is regretfully being undermined by lack of vision and commercial activities. Why? I think the original vision has been lost sight of.
3. **Second Suggestion.** Again at the EQ, should there be a permanent Globe Theatre to complement present and possible future uses of the performance schools. This idea was discussed with the then CP&MPT Chairman Tony Ryan and then Director Kim Ellis as well as the case for an invitation for the Pop Up Globe to visit the EQ. The NZ Pop-Up Globe did of course eventuate and had a very successful season. There is a long history of attempts to get a Globe theatre in Sydney. There is an international network of Globe theatres (ie with an apron stage stretching out into the audience to give intimacy). London and Stratford on Avon in the UK, Stratford in Canada and Minneapolis in the USA. In the 1980s ANU Professor Stephen Prickett and I campaigned for a Globe on the apron at the end of the Finger Wharf in Woolloomooloo....But Maritime Services had other ideas. The EQ site is a second best location but with better multiple uses complementing the other performance activities, nearer universities and with easier access to many schools. In short it has better access than the Finger Wharf.
4. **Third Suggestion.** Again at the EQ there is an overwhelming case for the complementary development of public and community radio, TV, and video production to provide for better use of modern communications. EQ is the logical place to further that development and supersedes an earlier plan for a Community Radio House in Oxford Street. By way of my background I commenced campaigning for FM in Australia in 1960 and was the Foundation Chairman of Australia's first licensed FM station, 2MBS-FM. It took over a decade to get FM here. We lagged 25 years behind the rest of the advanced world. I was subsequently Foundation Chairman of 2RPH and 2RES here in PTH and of the Centennial Park Cable System that eventually became Foxtel. **We still lag in adapting modern communications to community needs especially in education.**
5. **Fourth Suggestion.** Starts with a question: Are the present proposals for the Swans takeover of the RHI, a new building for the Swifts, the Hordern renovation and adjoining spaces in the best community interest? **What tests**

should we apply? Do these proposals compensate for the loss of the near new excellent City Council Indoor Stadium in the NM corner of Moore Park, the Frank Saywell Kindergarten and the disastrous loss of the South Paddington Park & Community Centre. The latter was of course planned to take over the Army Engineers Depot in Moore Park Road, the current site of the demolished SFS. The Negotiations with the Army took place over a number of years and the Army/Commonwealth Government bequeathed the site for **public recreation**. The Mess Hall was to be the new site for the Frank Saywell Kindergarten, One of the two drill halls was to be a public gymnasium and the other was for netball and indoor tennis. The battery of large Army Garages were to be artisans facilities, and a modern superintendent's cottage was at the entrance. All of this was approved by the City Council and the proposals for the addition of an Olympic public swimming complex were added subject to approval. How do the new EQ proposals compare with these destroyed **community facilities**? Not at all favourably I believe. Community interests are being diminished to gestures. Why?

6. **Fifth Suggestion.** I strongly believe that the SCG Trust needs urgent reform. I suggest one way would be for the CP&MPT to become the landlord to the SCG/SFS as it is with Fox and the EQ. Such a change should take place now to clean up the present mess, well before 2050. But the CP&MPT has to be strengthened with the addition of Trustees with botanical, architect and town planning qualifications including appropriate representations from the four adjoining local Councils. The SCG aggression must be curbed. It has in recent years destroyed Cricket Ground No2, the Sports Ground, the proposed South Paddington Park & Community Centre, much of Moore Park with the destruction of 25 cricket pitches and playing fields especially in Moore Park East with its occasional parking, and now has invaded the EQ. All of this expansion is at opportunity cost to the community and specifically participant sport and recreation. Opportunity cost is the alternative most nearly foregone. Foregone opportunities abound in current plans. The SCG appears to behave as a private club seeking taxpayer guaranteed public funds and free gifts of public land. The SCG did not pay for the SFS site and feigns ignorance of the opportunity cost to the community of the South Paddington Park & Community Centre plans. The Auditor General's reports on the Tibby Cotter Bridge and light rail make interesting reading and confirm my point: SCG aggression must be curbed. Most importantly can this aggression be justified given the needs of Greater Sydney? Moreover, are there important public interest issues at the SCG such as conflicts of interest that require immediate attention? It is true that Sydney is now a multicentre metropolis with urgent need of public funds for schools and hospitals and other community facilities both here and in Western Suburbs. What are the correct priorities?
7. **Sixth Suggestion.** What makes a City Great? It is not by creating a Minister for Sydney with a new layer of bureaucracy or luxury hotels beyond demand and linked to casinos. The case for a Minister for Western Sydney is different because of past neglect and for the reasons outlined by the Greater Sydney Commission. Please contemplate what makes a City Great. I submit it is Great Schools and Hospitals and Universities. Great Theatre and Music, Great Architecture and Town Planning including Cathedrals, appropriate statues such as Les Murray and Dublin's Canal poets. The preservation of Historic and Natural Features including our Great Harbour, long established residential

areas and especially Great Parks and Harbour Foreshores. Great Media and Communications, a financial centre based on underlying economic strength. And I would add a safe city with freedom of speech. Please consider what makes a city great.

8. **Seventh Suggestion.** As a former academic economist I submit that there needs to be a better understanding of opportunity cost and cost benefit analysis in the various bureaucracies and especially those that have produced business case studies that serve special commercial interests. I am constantly reminded of light rail invasions of the CPTrust lands and undervaluation of Trust land (eg the sale of the AJC carpark land owned by the CPT). There was no need for the original SFS to be on the old Army Land in Moore Park Road; and a SFS was possible even on the then existing SCG land at Moore Park with minor adjustments **Further the unvarnished truth is that the light rail to Kensington and Randwick and the new Sydney Football Stadium even on their initial ridiculously low cost estimates do not stand up to critical analysis and reflect an inappropriate copy cat mentality.** Reports by the Auditor General and Infrastructure Australia and others are being ignored. One of the reasons for our low productivity and a halt to rising living standards in Australia is the misallocation of resources by State Governments. Moreover there is no excuse for the damage done to the Parklands and residential and shopping areas by the route chosen for the light rail. The private operator has been allowed to treat our parks and roads as free goods- they are not. We pay taxes, rates and registration fees for their use. Like Phillip Adams in the last Weekend Australian **I like trees** and for many more reasons than Phillip acknowledges. I miss the two magnificent fig trees that stood at the junction of Anzac Parade and Alison Road immortalised by cartoonist Molnar (with the Minister telling Professor Runcie "We had to cut down the trees so people could see the Park"). Are the present arrangements better than a spaghetti junction? And with the CP&MPT I think the switch of the light rail from the southern to the northern side of Alison Road was tragic, and not only for the Parklands, and should be investigated. There have been many other losses of mature trees for the light rail.
9. Finally, Centennial Park and Moore Park are NSW heritage listed, and Centennial Park is Commonwealth heritage listed. In my view this implies a financial obligation by the State and the Commonwealth. These Great Parks are an oxygen farm, what Patrick White called *the Green Lung of Sydney*, which provide a precious retreat from urban pressures and especially in the densely settled historically preserved urban areas. The Parklands area is vital for participant sport and public recreation. The Greater Sydney Commission has supported the greening of Sydney to make Sydney Great. I hope the Council's 2050 plan supports that objective. Sydney nearly has everything to make you love it. But it needs more thoughtful planning if you are going to go on loving it. (Some of the items that make a City Great and a City Loved are shown on an illustration board).

Stokes 16

Stanton Hall,
Centennial Park, NSW,

6/6/21

E: nruncie@bigpond.com

**The Hon. Robert Stokes,
NSW Minister for Open Spaces,
Parliament House, Macquarie Street,
SYDNEY, 2000**

Dear Minister,

NSW Governor Lachlan Macquarie, NSW Governor Lord Carrington and Sir Henry Parkes were early pioneers in the "greening" of Sydney. Your current proposals outline a mechanism for continuing that process. Congratulations. However, there are qualifications.

The question is: will that "process" be more successful than earlier political attempts at "greening" Sydney? My Committee hopes so. But there are other options in spite of your response to the Parliament House forum by strengthening the scope for local input.

I think that you would agree that "open space planning" is fundamentally a town planning problem and your current White Paper is light on the necessary involvement of Councils.

To illustrate the latter point may I draw your attention to *the community struggle to get the EQ portion of the old RAS site preserved for community uses*. See the attached letter to the CP&MPT (30/12/16: Creative New South Wales: The EQ as a Cultural and Arts Centre) and my Address at Paddington Town Hall (30/7/19) at a planning meeting convened by the City Council on local planning to 2050.

As the existing Park Authorities have shown little interest and frankly ability to cope with the issues raised in the two documents attached may I suggest the need for a separate but qualified community advisory committee for the EQ. The misguided approach of advice from lessees (currently Carsingha) hardly fits the needs of developing the EQ to complement Fox film studios (now Disney) in the northern section of the old RAS site nor the community demands for historic preservation and community uses. The existing lease should not be extended.

The skills to develop appropriate community uses of lands currently under CP&MPT control at EQ need appropriate assistance. Do any of your new appointees to CP&MPT have a track record of community planning innovation? Also please consider this letter as an early submission to your White Paper Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Neil Runcie, Convener Eastern Suburbs Coalition of Resident Action Groups

15.