

**Submission
No 13**

REVIEW OF THE GREATER SYDNEY PARKLANDS TRUST ACT 2022

Organisation: Total Environment Centre

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www.tec.org.au

SUBMISSION TO:

Joint Select Committee on the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust

1. Introduction

TEC welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the progress of the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act. We are particularly focussed on the following three provisions:

3 (d) to advocate for a long-term vision to achieve the outcome of quality parklands across Greater Sydney, particularly connectivity of green corridors and public access to open space,

12 (1) The Trust may establish—

*(a) a committee, known as the **Blue-Green grid committee**, to advocate for a long-term vision for and outcome of quality parklands across Greater Sydney, particularly connectivity of green corridors and public access to open space,*

15 (j) to advocate to the Government to influence the long-term vision for open space and parklands in Greater Sydney

The protection and expansion of green space and waterway corridors is essential to a liveable city, the mental and physical health of its citizens and as a response to climate change and urban heat. The Act clearly anticipates a broader role for the Trust beyond the large areas it is directed to manage.

However, there has been little activity by the Trust and certainly no pronounced achievements of the above provisions.

TEC has been advocating for [an approach in Sydney's growth that elevates the Blue-Green Grid](#)¹ to a regulated and protected level, but to date the NSW government has failed to take action. We have been in meetings with government officials including representatives of the Trust and been assured that the Trust will be moving on the above provisions, for example, the B-GG Committee, but are not aware of any significant progress.

There is a basic question as to whether the Trust is the appropriate body (with its limited resources and junior bureaucratic position) or a new pathway is required.

¹ Link to our detailed report on the Blue-Green Grid - https://assets.nationbuilder.com/themes/57a8e81475dd2fc0f1000001/attachments/original/1702953709/The_Blue_Green_Grid.pdf?1702953709

2. The Benefits of a Blue-Green Grid

These can be summarised as follows:

Active and Passive Recreational Values	Associated with improvements in physical and mental health and reduction in costs of health services.
Aboriginal Cultural and Heritage Value	Aboriginal cultural heritage places, traditions, beliefs, customs, values and objects that represent the living history of Aboriginal generations and also enrich post European settlement culture.
Active Transport Benefits	Such as cycling and walking resulting in reduced congestion and better health outcomes.
Air Quality	Vegetation can reduce particulate matter and volatile organic compounds with health impacts.
Biodiversity	Habitat for remnant bushland, threatened species and genetic resources. Also nutrient removal, flood control and climate stabilisation via a sink for carbon dioxide.
Urban Cooling	Lower ambient temperatures delivering health benefits, energy savings (from reduced cooling energy demand) and avoided GHG emissions.
Stormwater Management	Capturing water run-off reducing the volume of stormwater that needs to be processed with cost savings associated with lower water stormwater servicing and water filtration; improved water quality due to lower stormwater volumes entering waterways.
Option, Existence and Bequest Value	Individuals may experience benefits associated with community members having the option to visit green infrastructure and public space in the future; knowing green infrastructure and public space or biodiversity is conserved now; and as a bequest to future generations.
Household Property Value	Higher due to greater amenity from trees and green spaces.

3. Lack of Government Action

While the government claims to be active in the Blue-Green Grid field – there are serious inadequacies.

TEC contends that current government programs while containing some important concepts and databases are piecemeal, ad hoc, voluntary and lack an overriding vision and comprehensive and integrated implementation strategy across government for the entire metro area. These programs with TEC comments in italics, include:

1. [Greener Neighbourhoods Program](#): capacity building program for councils to support strategic approaches to urban greening. Key components (*opportunistic guidelines*):
 - o [Tree Canopy Data](#): *nice to have but only for information purposes, not linked to any protective actions.*
 - o Policy: [Greener Neighbourhoods Guide](#) provides councils with best practice guidance for preparing or updating urban forest strategies, including benchmarks for tree canopy and deep soil across different scales of development and contexts. *Just a guideline.*
 - o Funding: 32 projects funded across Greater Sydney to develop strategic approaches to urban greening, including street tree masterplans, urban forest strategies, community engagement and development of tree asset databases. *Ad hoc program, funding insufficient and may be cut.*
 - o Local council network: workshops hosted in partnership with Resilient Sydney facilitate information sharing and capacity building across LGA boundaries. *Passive process.*
2. [Valuation framework for green infrastructure and public spaces](#): The Framework provides a standardised approach to value common costs and benefits, ensuring business cases are able

to include the full suite of economic and environmental benefits. *Useful to have but not compulsory to use or as a protective mechanism.*

3. [GCC Region and District Plans](#) (2018): introduced the concept of the Green Grid into the strategic planning framework. *GCC was in the process of updating the Region and City Plans, but abolished.*
4. [Sydney Green Grid](#): [detailed plans available [here](#)]. Government Architect-led framework for the Sydney Green Grid that was a key input to the GCC Region and District Plans. *The published Plan is dated 2017. GCC was in the process of updating the Region and City Plans, but abolished.*
5. [Active Transport Strategy](#) and [Strategic Cycleway Corridors](#): Transport for NSW strategies to encourage and facilitate an increase in walking and cycling. Opportunity to align with Green Grid corridors. *No compulsion on Transport for NSW to do anything.*
6. [Greener Places Design Guide](#): Government Architect-led urban design guides for urban development, green infrastructure, establishing principles for green infrastructure planning and delivery. *A draft proposal in 2020; not finalised; just a guide.*
7. [Urban greening and open space programs](#): various. *Funding insufficient and under threat.*
8. Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan: the CPCP extends Sydney's urban sprawl westwards and will clear several hundred hectares of Koala habitat. Some new reserves are being created as well as two east-west Koala corridors, protected. However urban sprawl will be an ongoing threat to the greenbelt. *Government has not endorsed the TEC Koala-Whale walk concept.*
9. Greening our City Panel: a group of experts, councils, and NGOs convened by Dept of Planning. *Disbanded by the Department in 2023.*

4. GSPT Reporting

The Trust has not activated its legislative responsibility to work on the green grid and its 2022-23 and 2023-24 Annual Reports are underwhelming and very largely focussed on narrow operational activity. The 2023-24 Report claims:

We are the key advocate across government for the 50-Year Vision for Greater Sydney's Open Space and Parklands. Our work is framed around the vision's 4 strategic directions: 1 Growing parks for people. 2 Connecting people to parks. 3 Keeping Sydney green and vibrant. 4 Caring for the environment. We have established a strategic framework for 2023 to 2028. (p13)

We note the 20 July 2023 meeting of the Trust reports:

Received a presentation on GSP's approach to blue-green grid advocacy and possible approaches and governance models for future activity.

Discussed how best to advocate for a long-term vision for quality parklands across Greater Sydney as required by the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act 2022. Determined

that the establishment of a blue-green grid committee is currently not required at this stage to support this work.²

We question this decision on a Committee; can only find a copy of the GSPT Corporate Plan which articulates a strategy in generalities³; nor any concrete evidence of any progress or advocacy. There is no further mention in the Board summary reports on its website.

On page 4 of its Corporate Plan there is a link to the *50-Year Vision for Greater Sydney's Open Space and Parklands*, which links back to the Department of Planning and the government's page of multiple programs and agencies for housing and development (including a link back to GSP). There is a link to the [2021 50-Year Vision](#) produced by the Department of Planning under Minister Rob Stokes which extolls a grand role for the GSP to:

...to champion the vision, advocate for open space and parklands across Greater Sydney, and look to expand open spaces and parklands in partnership with local communities and local councils. (p5)

However, in TEC's view, this is not occurring at any meaningful level, if at all.

This may be the result of a severe lack of resources and standing in the bureaucratic hierarchy or is an exercise in tokenism. The Parliamentary Committee should seek a copy of detailed actions with milestones and reporting, if they exist – and make them publicly available.

5. The Way Forward

It may well be that the Trust is not an appropriate or senior body to engage in effective advocacy and lacks the resources to pursue the fundamentally important Blue-Green Grid.

The Parliamentary Committee should consider that if a connected series of green and blue spaces that can be protected in perpetuity and contribute to Sydney's liveability and climate response is so important – that the Trust is not an appropriate body – or requires much more funding and authority - or the government should enact a much improved set of regulatory provisions for the metro area.

TEC has recommended the following:

1. Blue Green Grid Coordination Committee to oversee and embed implementation, reporting to the Ministers for Planning, Public Spaces and Environment and to the community:

- a. Representation from all relevant departments including Environment, Planning, Water, Transport and Health, Councils, experts and Community Groups
- b. Six monthly public reports on loss/gain in green spaces, grid connections and tree canopy

2. Institutions that line the landscape must be integral to the Blue Green Grid:

- a. Water NSW - new and wider riparian spaces to setback from foreshores

² <https://www.greatersydneyarklands.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-people/greater-sydney-parklands-trust-board> - up to December 2024

³ See - <https://www.greatersydneyarklands.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-01/greater-sydney-parklands-corporate-plan.pdf>

b. Transport NSW - provide parallel green links along major roads, so wildlife crossings and active transport are implemented systematically

3. Koala Blue Green Belt for Western Sydney:

a. Signatory green infrastructure to connect Cumberland Plain and Hawkesbury region lands, Nepean and Georges Rivers to the Coastal Whale Walk, thus completing the world's first city circumnavigation walk

b. Establish Sydney Koala Green Belt to protect wildlife corridors, food bowl and water supply, and contain urban sprawl

4. Planning Department to **support fine-grain Blue Green Grid:**

a. Continue acquisition strategies to support council Blue Green Grid policy and funding tree canopy programs

b. Ensure every precinct development adds to green space

c. Use Housing SEPP and a new Blue Green Grid SEPP, improved BASIX and minimum percentage deep soil requirements

d. Prevent loss of tree canopy on private and public lands

5. **Conserve existing** green/open spaces:

a. Do not sell or resume public open space

b. Do not rezone land that is open space (including golf courses) to residential/commercial

c. Protect the tree canopy on public and private lands

6. Recognise Green Spaces **monetary value** in assessments:

a. Treasury & IPART processes and development impact reviews to integrate values into cost benefit analysis

b. Continue to recognise non-quantifiable values and climate change response policies

c. Avoid use of offsets to justify removal of green spaces

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27/1/25