

**Submission
No 15**

REVIEW OF THE GREATER SYDNEY PARKLANDS TRUST ACT 2022

Name: Dr Peter Watts

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PARLIAMENT OF NSW

SUBMISSION TO JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE GREATER SYDNEY PARKLANDS TRUST

Dr Peter Watts AM

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29 January 2025

The Objects of the Greater Sydney Parklands Act as set out in Section 3 are:

3 Objects

(a) to maintain and improve the parklands estate across Greater Sydney and ensure the parklands estate is effectively managed and operated to deliver world-class and ecologically sustainable parklands for the public,

(b) to enable the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust to facilitate a connection to Country for First Nations peoples that—

(i) recognises and conserves First Nations peoples' cultural heritage and values through the use of the parklands estate, and

(ii) establishes long-term and mutually beneficial partnerships that give effect to the ongoing relationships of First Nations peoples with Country,

(c) to ensure the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage values of the parklands estate and the protection of the environment within the parklands estate,

(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,

(e) to encourage the use and enjoyment of the parklands estate by the community by promoting and increasing the recreational, historical, scientific, educational, cultural and environmental values of lands within the parklands estate,

(f) to ensure the parklands estate may be used by the community in a way that is adaptive and recognises and responds to the diverse needs of the community,

(g) to provide increased opportunity for community engagement to shape regionally significant parklands in response to diverse community needs.

I wish to address one matter only ie – the ongoing deterioration of important historic buildings within Callan Park and the fulfilment of Objective c) of the Act. I do so in the context of a professional career of over 50 years managing and providing advice on some of the country's most important historic sites.

I have lived very near Callan Park for some 42 years and visit it very regularly. In that time I have watched the appalling deterioration of buildings that were once useful and well maintained. As anyone who manages historic buildings will advise – the most important requirement is to maintain roofs, gutters and infrastructure that conveys water away from buildings and prevents

its entry into buildings. Simple and timely interventions to maintain these elements should be the highest priority in the management of any historic building as it saves large amounts of money on later conservation and maintenance. Such interventions DO NOT need complex and expensive Conservation Management Plans or other studies and documentation. They need experienced tradespeople, good professional supervision and a commonsense and traditional approach to maintenance. Such works would include:

- Refixing and/or replacing broken slates, tiles, ridge cappings and other roof elements;
- Fixing broken windows and other elements that allow water penetration;
- removing trees growing from walls and chimneys;
- Replacing/refixing gutters and flashings as required;
- Ensuring down pipes are connected to storm water drains and/or convey water away from buildings;
- Regular inspection and cleaning of gutters and other associated infrastructure;
- Keeping vegetation and rubbish away from buildings where it causes damage and danger;

None of this is rocket science. Yet it is abundantly apparent that this most basic function is being poorly performed by GSP at Callan Park. The primary management tool that seems to apply at Callan Park is to construct a security fence around a building or feature when it has deteriorated to the extent that it poses a safety risk to the public and then allow that structure to deteriorate with no maintenance at all.

By way of example I include a number of photographs of just one building taken in late November 2023. This could be repeated for many buildings in Callan Park.





This circumstance is clearly not entirely a matter of limited funding. It is also a question of priority. Significant amounts of money have been found to develop new gardens and lavatories at Callan Park that in design and execution might be more appropriate to a new parkland than to an important historic site where there should be very different guiding principles and priorities.

Prioritising sensible maintenance of important historic buildings and landscapes would seem to me to be a more sensible priority for Callan Park.

The GSP management of different sites should reflect the intrinsic values of each of its places. This appears not to be the case, at least so far as Callan Park is concerned.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this brief submission.