

**Submission
No 23**

REVIEW OF THE GREATER SYDNEY PARKLANDS TRUST ACT 2022

Organisation: Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue

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Joint Select Committee on the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust

Submission by the Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue

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About the Dialogue

The Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue (the Dialogue) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Joint Select Committee's review of Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act 2022.

The Dialogue is fiercely committed to enhancing the future of the Greater Western Sydney (GWS) region and has cultivated an extensive network of Partners from within the community, private, and public sectors who share this goal, including some engaged directly in the Parklands across Western Sydney, especially Parramatta Parklands (PP) and Western Sydney Parklands (WSP).

The GWS region is home to over half of Greater Sydney's population and functions as the third largest economy in Australia, and the infrastructure, or often the lack thereof, that makes up the region has direct implications for these Partners. Through research, events, and strategic partnerships, it aims to shape a prosperous future for the region.

Since its inception, the Dialogue has been advocating for sensible, equitable, and transformative infrastructure for the residents of GWS alongside quality-of-life priorities including green spaces.

Overview Statement

The Dialogue recognises that the Joint Select Committee's inquiry is in response to a provision included when the 2022 legislation was enacted. The primary result of the legislation was to bring multiple existing parkland entities across Greater Sydney under the governance of a single entity, while maintaining Community Trustee Boards to provide locally relevant advice and input.

It is our view that the policy objectives of the Act remain valid, and that generally the provisions of the Act remain appropriate for delivering on those objectives. There are, however, some specific elements of the operation of the Act that the Dialogue considers require further consideration, in relation to:

- Facilitating Parkland estate usage through commercial partnerships – strengths, challenges and opportunities
- Advocacy role of the Trust

We would additionally like to highlight the vital role that the Greater Sydney Parklands (GSP) and the organisations that exist on the Parklands delivers in providing green/blue spaces and social infrastructure and services for the region.

The Dialogue has long been an advocate for the importance of green spaces and recreational amenity in Greater Western Sydney. Residents also consider access to high quality green spaces as essential to their wellbeing. Results from the 2024 [Greater Western Sydney Community Wellbeing Survey](#), delivered by the Dialogue and RPS, showed that residents from almost all demographic groups ranked it in their top 5 wellbeing priorities.

Specific elements

Facilitating Parkland estate usage through commercial partnerships – strengths, challenges and opportunities.

Related Functions of the Trust:

s. 15 (c) *to facilitate and promote the use of the parklands estate for education, environmental sustainability and scientific and other research, including by providing facilities for education and research*

s. 15 (d) *to encourage and promote appropriate public access and enjoyment of the parklands estate, including by catering to a diverse range of community interests, organisations and activities*

s. 15 (e) *to provide for and facilitate a diverse range of recreational, historical, educational, environmental, cultural, sporting, entertainment and tourism uses of the parklands estate, including by providing facilities and associated services*

s. 15 (f) *to facilitate the use of the parklands estate to meet community health needs and provide opportunities for, and encourage, activities that promote health and wellbeing in the community*

s. 15 (j) *to undertake or provide, or facilitate the undertaking or provision of, commercial, retail and transport activities and facilities in or in relation to the Parklands with the object of supporting the viability of the management of the Parklands.*

Recommendations:

1. The Dialogue recommends that the Trust becomes empowered to make direct decisions on granting of new and extended leases beyond 10 years and less than 25 years, with appropriate probity guidelines and a framework in place to assess and ensure community and whole of government benefits.
2. Consideration should be given to allowing the ability for leaseholders to affirm the renewal of their lease in the years prior to its expiry. This should be based on previous and existing performance and not be dependent on open tenders and/or ministerial approval.

Key points:

- The Trust has an important role in facilitating the use of the parklands for the community, including through the granting of leases for the operation of venues, activities and facilities.
- The facilitation of leases across a variety of sectors and services has been successfully used by the Trust to fulfil the remit of the Act.
- The current structure of leasing arrangements has the potential to inhibit investment, including in relation to innovation. Greater security for lease holders needs to be provided to ensure ongoing investment in facilities and services.

Note: The comments below primarily relate to Western Sydney Parklands (WSP).

Strength - Delivering activity diversity & fulfilling the remit of the Act via lease granting

Objects (e) and (f) of the Act (s.3) provide for the use and enjoyment of the Parklands in ways that are adaptable and responsive to the needs of the community. A mix of arrangements, such as Parklands managed, Council managed and commercially operated, enable the community to have access to a wide range of facilities and experiences across the Parklands.

In some instances, this involves the Trust approving leased parcels of land within the Parklands for the development of facilities that achieve the Act's objectives. This has seen the development of a variety of facilities, including those that support these experiences across a 24-hour economy, to serve as attractions and services for both local Western Sydney residents as well as visitors and tourists. Additionally, it is anticipated that this will further become the case with the opening of Western Sydney International Airport in 2026.

Parramatta Aquatic Centre and the Blacktown Exercise Sports and Technology Hub are also both examples of the development and operation of facilities which directly fulfil the remit of object (f). The Trust's facilitation of community health needs and encouragement of activities that support health and wellbeing is especially important in responding to the highly diverse needs of the Western Sydney population. The presence of services such as these also demonstrate that the Trust and Councils successfully do and should continue to collaborate.

The object (j) functions also support the Trust in achieving the requirements of the Act. Private contributions by way of leasing terms successfully work to contribute to supporting the functions of the Trust. It is of note that the Greater Sydney Parklands (GSP) highlighted the connection between the leasing agreements and the "private contributions to restore public assets or to provide new community experiences", in its submission to the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Bill 2021¹.

Cornerstone facilities of the Western Sydney Parklands, such as the Sydney International Motorsports Park, have been part of the community for over 30 years. The 2030 Plan of Management highlights, that prior to 2018, new private investment had been made in key facilities, including:

- Wet n' Wild Water Theme Park,
- Sydney International Motorsports Park,
- Tree Top Adventure Park, and
- Horsley Drive Business Park, Australia's first 6 green star rated industrial estate.

The Plan of Management additionally showed that these partnerships supported the generation of jobs in retail, industrial, agricultural and tourism sectors. Noting these examples of success, the Dialogue believes that it is vitally important to continue to facilitate opportunities like this, to support local job generation across Western Sydney, especially where they also deliver high end leisure opportunities and experiences.

Sustaining the quality and diversity of attractions is listed as a remit of the Trust (d), important for the economic sustainability of individual leaseholders, for the Parklands and the communities that access specific attractions and the Parklands overall. It would be expected in line with local plans of management the mix and value of those facilities and experiences are subject to regular review by Community Advisory Board and the Trust Board.

¹ (accessed 17 January 2025).

Challenges and Opportunities – Length of leasing arrangements

The intent within the Greater Sydney Parklands Act 2022 has been to standardise arrangements across each of the Parklands with a requirement that the Trust must not grant a lease or licence beyond ten years unless it has been the subject of an open tender process. While the intent of the requirement, namely the promotion of transparency and accountability, is supported, in practice this structure of leasing arrangements risks inhibiting sustainable investment in the Parklands, and innovation in enterprise.

The Dialogue recommends that the Act be amended to empower the Trust to be able to make direct decisions on granting extended leases beyond 10 years. The amendments should include appropriate probity guidelines and a framework in place to assess and ensure community and whole of government benefits. The framework should include consideration of:

- Whether the existing tenant has a demonstrated history of reinvestment in facilities.
- If the tenant operates as a not-for-profit organisation and is therefore required to reinvest any profits towards its stated purpose.

Leaseholders would be supported to make investment decisions more confidently, if allowed greater security of lease terms, the ability to engage in longer lease terms, and the capacity to negotiate extensions within an existing lease term.

This is particularly applicable for leaseholders that are looking to expand their scope, upgrade their offerings or embark on innovations around sustainability or technology, all of which could relate to Trust functions (c)-(f). Large scale investment decisions are generally reliant on providing suitable confidence to external capital providers. The risk attached to investment can often be too great when elements like a demonstrable security of long-term tenure period cannot be secured.

These suggested changes to functions of how long-term leases are renewed is likely to be more applicable to cases within the WSP, which has different commercial drivers to other GSP lands. Additionally, it is noted that prior to 2022, WSP had the autonomy to directly grant and extend longer leases.

Challenges and Opportunities – The impact of lease ‘dead zones’

Investment planning in the final years of a lease is another area of particular concern. Leaseholders gaining the ability to affirm the renewal of their lease in the years prior to its expiry, should be considered as an operational amendment to the Act. This should be based on previous and existing performance and not require open tenders and/or ministerial approval for periods less than 25 years.

The timing of lease renewal processes is critical to minimising this ‘dead zone’ for planning and investment. There is a strong risk associated with making long term, major investment decisions without certainty of ongoing tenure. Incumbent lessees are faced with the decision of shouldering the risk of uncertain investments or wait out the ‘dead zone’ period until greater certainty can be gained.

The on-flow effects of this mechanism are wide reaching, and could include:

- Delaying or preventing lessees investing in upgrades to facilities and/or services that address Trust functions (c)-(f).
- Impacting on the ability for lessees to invest or seek investment in innovative processes and/or technological advancements, including those relating to environmental sustainability and clean energy generation which would have wider impacts for the region.

- The potential for GSP assets to become neglected or poorly maintained due to lessees dampened motivation to maintain or upgrade.

The role of the local plans of management, Community Boards and the Trust Board should be affirmed in these processes. Clarifying the conditions for the renewal for existing leaseholders of major facilities will support both the Trust and leaseholders to better plan and deliver on future and increased Parkland use.

Advocacy role of the Trust

Related Functions of the Trust:

s. 15 (i) to manage and operate the GSPT estate in a way that aligns with the Government's long-term vision for metropolitan open space and parklands within Greater Sydney

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

s. 15 (k) to provide advice and recommendations to the Minister and government sector agencies about the implementation of the Government's long-term vision for open space and parklands within Greater Sydney

Key points:

- Working across levels of government in an advocacy, advisory and strategic alignment capacity to support open space and parklands strategy and initiatives remains a key priority
- The Dialogue supports GSPT maintaining a proactive stance in its advice and advocacy roles to Government, especially in relation to the open space and Parklands for the increasing Western Sydney population.

The standing of the Trust to collaborate across key government entities (across multiple layers of government) has been enhanced since its establishment. It is noted that the Trust has highlighted a series of actions under one of the 4 key directions outlined the NSW governments' [50 year vision](#) for Greater Sydney's open space and parklands, produced in 2021. These actions are listed below.

While these identified actions are not solely for the Trust to deliver, they align well to the provisions of the Act. The delivery of elements of the Mays Hill Master Plan provides a good example of this. Delivered beyond the Parramatta Aquatic Centre and in response to a growing population in the Westmead area, this project and its ongoing impact will complement other government investments into transport, education and health for the precinct.

Additionally, results from the GWS Community Wellbeing Survey, conducted by the Dialogue and RPS in 2023, highlighted strong community interest and valuing of access to open, natural spaces. As such, the Dialogue supports the Trust's endeavour to more actively engage with these broader initiatives in the future.

Actions proposed for GSP advocacy as part of its 50 year vision (2021):

- Partner with State agencies such as Transport for NSW, Sydney Water and Water NSW to complete transformational regional walking routes
- Amplify and market both the values of open space and the opportunities for the community to engage with parklands
- Establish permanent ongoing resources for Parklands to build evidence, share knowledge and establish monitoring and analysis programs
- Reprioritise and amplify existing grants programs and land acquisition plans across the NSW Government including the Metropolitan Greenspace Program, Streets as Shared Spaces grants program and Parks for People program
- Review and coordinate financial contributions schemes such as the Sydney Regional Development Fund and investigate cross-city funding mechanisms used in other states, such as levies, green bonds and parkland-specific funds, in conjunction with State agencies and local councils
- Establish new ways to listen to and engage Greater Sydney's communities
- Establish mechanisms to monitor and measure outcomes against the vision and strategic directions