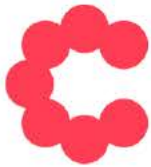


**Submission
No 30**

REVIEW OF THE GREATER SYDNEY PARKLANDS TRUST ACT 2022

Organisation: The Committee for Sydney

Date Received: 31 January 2025



January 2025

Dear Members of the Joint Select Committee on the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust

Re: Review of the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act 2022

The Committee for Sydney welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the review of the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act 2022.

Who we are

The Committee for Sydney is an independent urban policy think tank. We are advocates for the whole of Sydney, focused on developing solutions to the most important problems we face. We are proud to have over 160 members that represent key business, academic and civic organisations across Sydney.

We advocate for policy and investment outcomes that shape the future of Greater Sydney. We work across six distinct but connected program areas which include resilience, planning, mobility, economy, culture and equity and fairness.

In drafting this submission, we note that Committee staff have not engaged with Mr. Michael Rose AM, Chair of the Greater Sydney Parklands and the Chairman of the Committee for Sydney. Any comments herein are solely those of Committee staff and do not reflect or represent Mr. Rose's views on the Act or the Greater Sydney Parklands agency.

One agency to have custodianship of all of Sydney's major parklands is more important than ever

The Committee for Sydney strongly supports the vision of Greater Sydney Parklands (GSP) to "create 'a city of connected parklands' by taking a metropolitan planning view while embracing a local perspective".¹

The previous model, where inward-focused, multiple disjointed agencies managed Centennial, Callan, Parramatta, and Western Sydney Parklands separately, was far less effective than the integrated approach we have today.

As Sydney continues to experience a housing, and climate crisis, with social cohesion at record low levels, the vision for one agency to be responsible for the creation of a city of connected parklands is more important than ever – providing access not only to nature, but also critically needed sports and recreation infrastructure.

The five parks in the care of GSP offer places for community to come together, seek reprieve and respite², to strengthen biodiversity in the city, celebrate world-significant heritage, and be fit and

¹ See: <https://www.greatersydneyparklands.nsw.gov.au/about-us>

² A study by the University of Wollongong found adults with 30% or more of their neighbourhood covered in some form of tree canopy had 31% lower odds of developing psychological distress Astell-Burt, T., & Feng, X. (2019). Association of urban green space with mental health and general health among adults in Australia. JAMA network open, 2(7), e198209-e198209. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.8209>

active through both formal and informal sport. This is reflected in GSP's strong visitation rates, number of events offered, and number opportunities to engage with community and nature, including:

- Over 40 million visitors (at least four times the number of visits to the Sydney Opera House)
- 150 major event days
- \$2.2 million raised for charity
- 85,600 visits to nature-based playgrounds
- Over 15,000 trees planted
- Approximately 2.8 million hours of recreational usage across 120 facilities in Centennial Park alone.

As Sydney becomes home to a higher density style of living, it's critical a strong agency with the right know-how has custodianship of these spaces that are Sydney's big, shared backyards and green lungs.

Response to the terms of reference

The Committee supports all objects of the Act and believes they remain valid, and will stand the test of time.

Creating new parklands for a growing city doesn't happen by chance - it requires foresight and long-term planning. The parks we enjoy today exist because of visionary decisions over the past 160 years. Western Sydney Parklands, for instance, originated in the 1960s Sydney Region Outline Plan and took over 50 years of strategic effort, including Premier Bob Carr's leadership, to assemble its 5,280 hectares. This legacy of foresight, legislation, and sustained action has delivered five invaluable assets for Greater Sydney—and the work isn't done yet.

However, if the Act is to continue to enable to continue to secure those objectives, there are three main areas for legislative improvement:

1. Elevate the role and function of the 'green-grid committee' to ensure that this function of GSP is effective and has influence across government: **we recommend amending section 12(1)(a) to the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust 'must' not 'may' establish a Blue-Green grid committee.**
2. Equal terms for revenue generation across all five parklands: **we recommend amending or repealing overly prescriptive elements of the Callan Park Act for consistency in leasing and development provisions across all parklands.**
3. A long-term sustainable funding revenue for the parklands: **we recommend sourcing and transferring relevant surplus government land to GSPT to lease and fund the parklands over time - rather than selling government-owned land to the private market.**

Our three key recommendations are detailed further below:

1. Elevate the 'green-grid committee' to ensure influence across government

The Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act includes a strong objective 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" (3(d)). This aligns directly with Section 12(1)(a), which empowers the Trust to establish a Blue-Green Grid Committee.

This committee is a critical governance mechanism for realising the Act's vision. By convening key stakeholders and landowners—such as Transport for NSW, Sydney Water, Councils, and energy

providers—it can address the current fragmentation that hinders effective green and blue infrastructure delivery.

Connectivity of green and blue spaces provides significant benefits for both people and biodiversity, enabling movement of both people and biodiversity, and creating healthier, more liveable environments. These benefits and opportunities to strengthen the grid are detailed in the Committee for Sydney's report [Nature Positive Sydney](#).

However, many parcels of land with high recreational potential remain underutilised or inaccessible because agencies like Sydney Water or TransGrid understandably do not prioritise public space provision for recreation. The Trust, with its expertise in open space management, is uniquely positioned to bridge this gap.

As Sydney densifies, delivering connected green and blue spaces is not a "nice-to-have" but an essential governance and strategic planning tool. Establishing and elevating the role of the Blue-Green Grid Committee would demonstrate a genuine commitment to the Act's objectives, fostering collaboration across agencies to overcome barriers and transform fragmented spaces into a cohesive network that benefits all.

If amending this section of the act it could also be beneficial to include more detail on the purpose of the Blue-Green Grid committee to have greater clarity, such as:

- Auditing existing and missing elements, highlighting areas with ongoing or pending decisions.
- Setting timeframes, responsibilities, and plans for progress.
- Identifying quick wins.
- Supporting councils that are aligned but require additional resources.
- Pinpointing areas needing investment

Recommendation: Amend section 12(1)(a) to the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust 'must' not 'may' establish a Blue-Green grid committee.

2. There should be equal terms for revenue generation across all five parklands

The GSPT Act references "associated Trusts legislation," but inconsistencies remain in leasing and revenue-raising rules across parklands. A clear example is Clause 7(3) of the Callan Park Act, which prohibits for-profit leases and limits activities to a narrow range.

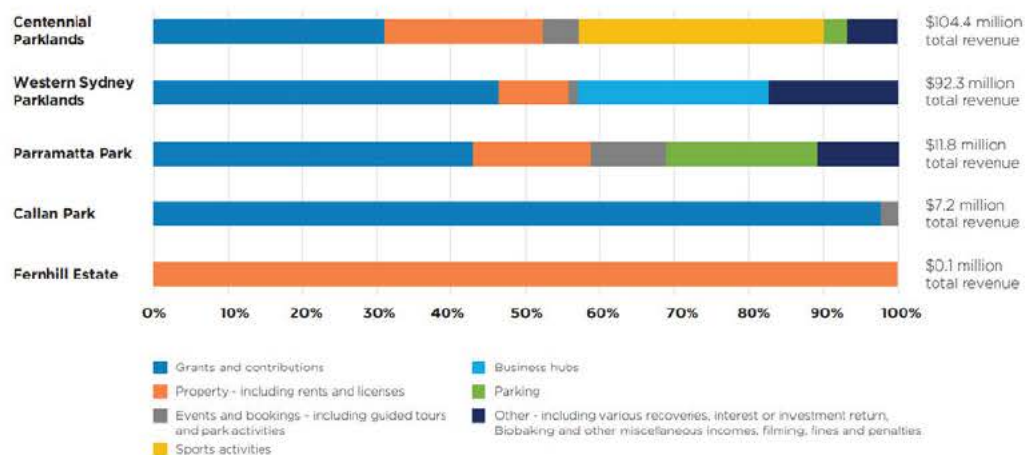
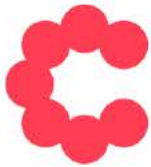


Figure 1: Share of revenue from different activities in each park, over 3 years (2018-19 to 2020-21) Source: White Paper – Parklands for People: A proposed legislative framework for Greater Sydney Parklands May 2021



We do not believe that Callan Park should be treated differently from Parramatta Park—a world-heritage-listed site—or any of the other parklands under the management of the GSPT. Standardised rules for leasing and development activities across all five parklands would ensure fairer and more consistent governance and operations, balancing protection with sustainable use. As Figure 1 above shows, there is significant inconsistencies in revenue sources across the parklands.

What have become prescriptive elements of the Callan Park Act stem from important grassroots advocacy, but legislation is not a heritage item—it must evolve to meet changing needs. Preserving Callan Park as a regionally significant parkland aligns with the community's original intent, and modernising these provisions will enable more sustainable management.

Small businesses like cafes and kiosks operating within Callan Park will likely result in increased visitation, creating more opportunities for people to engage with the heritage of Callan park.

It also would reduce the burden on recurrent grant funding from Gov as the sole source of funding for Callan Park, meaning it can meet the needs of community and reduce the cost burden to government.

Recommendation: Amend or repeal overly prescriptive elements of the Callan Park Act for consistency in leasing and development provisions across all parklands.

3. A sustainable funding source for the Parklands will set GSP up for success in achieving their objectives

Western Sydney Parklands (WSP) has demonstrated the success of leveraging surplus land to fund parkland management. By designating 105 hectares (2% of its estate) as business hubs, WSP generates 80% of the funds required to manage the remaining 98% of its 5,280 hectares. These hubs, located on land with low environmental and recreational value, are primarily used for retail and industrial purposes, often near major roads.

To truly secure the future of the parklands, GSPT has the legislative ability to establish "off-park" business hubs on surplus government-owned land unsuitable for parkland use. However it requires the Government to help make it happen.

By transferring land to GSPT, who can then develop and lease the land, it provides government with recurrent revenue generation and the ability to capture the value uplift of lands over time, which helps with the long-term increase in operating expenses of the parklands.

In the words of Bob Carr when announcing Western Sydney Parklands: "This is the payoff for good planning, good rules-based planning, it means land is being set aside and not developed".³

There is an opportunity for this Labor government to take the bold next step and plan for the financial sustainability of the parklands. This approach would create a sustainable funding engine to support the management and development of all parklands under the Trust.

Recommendation: Source and transfer relevant surplus government land to GSPT to lease, and fund the parklands over time - rather than selling government-owned land to the private market.

³ See: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/carr-park-to-be-lungs-of-sydneys-west-20041205-gdk921.html>



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Conclusion

In conclusion, we strongly support the objectives of the GSPT Act, and the broader work of Greater Sydney Parklands. With small adjustments and bold vision from the Government, it can more effectively meet the public space needs of a growing city.

If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact Estelle Grech, Equity and Fairness policy lead at the committee for Sydney via [REDACTED]

Kind regards,



Eamon Waterford
CEO
The Committee for Sydney