

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE GREATER SYDNEY
PARKLANDS TRUST**

REVIEW OF THE *GREATER SYDNEY PARKLANDS TRUST ACT 2022*

At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, on Thursday 13 March 2025

The Committee met at 9:30.

PRESENT

The Hon. Peter Primrose (Chair)

Ms Cate Faehrmann
Mr Alex Greenwich (Deputy Chair)
Mr Mark Hodges
The Hon. Jacqui Munro
The Hon. Cameron Murphy
Mrs Sally Quinnell

PRESENT VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Ms Donna Davis
Dr David Saliba

The CHAIR: Welcome, everyone. Before we start I'd like to acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of the land we're meeting on here at Parliament. I also pay my respects to Elders, past and present, of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are present here or watching proceedings online.

Welcome to the first hearing of the Joint Select Committee on the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust's review of the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act. My name is Peter Primrose, Committee Chair. I'm joined by my colleagues either in person or online. In the room are Ms Cate Faehrmann, MLC; Mr Mark Hodges, the member for Castle Hill; the Hon. Jacqui Munro, MLC; the Hon. Cameron Murphy, MLC; and Mrs Sally Quinnell, the member for Camden. Ms Donna Davis, the member for Parramatta, and Dr David Saliba, the member for Fairfield, are joining us via videoconference. We thank the witnesses who are appearing before us today and the stakeholders who have made written submissions. We appreciate your input into this inquiry.

Mr IAN NAPIER, President, The Walking Volunteers Inc., affirmed and examined

Mr LEIGH SHEARER-HERIOT, Vice-President, The Walking Volunteers Inc., affirmed and examined

Mr PETER McLEAN, Chief Executive Officer, Bicycle NSW, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: We will now begin with our first witnesses. Thank you for appearing before the Committee today to give evidence. Please note the Committee staff will be taking photos and videos during the hearing. The photos and videos may be used for social media and public engagement purposes on the Legislative Assembly's social media pages and websites. Please inform the Committee staff if you object to having photos and videos taken. Before we start, do you have any questions about the proceedings today?

LEIGH SHEARER-HERIOT: No.

IAN NAPIER: No.

PETER McLEAN: No.

The CHAIR: Would any of you like to make a short opening statement before we begin with questions?

IAN NAPIER: I would like to make a short statement. Firstly, thank you for the opportunity for this. You have our written submission, which essentially says we need parklands and green open space more than ever and therefore support the current objectives. Two, there is nothing in the nature of the Act that affects the kind of detail issues we might have about location and design of walking routes through the existing parks. The existing estate we have no issue with. However, there is an apparent lack of progress in addressing the much wider objectives underlying the Act within the context of a 50-year vision for Sydney's open space and parklands. That's basically our submission. However, I would like to illustrate the latter point with reference to three examples, if I have the Committee's indulgence to do so. This is not included in our submission but does illustrate the failings of the Trust Act at the moment. Can I?

The CHAIR: Please proceed, although we're very keen to ask questions. You've been here before, so you know how it works.

IAN NAPIER: I have two examples from the Great West Walk. This is the walk that marked The Walking Volunteers' important move west towards the mountains to demonstrate that it's not just the low-hanging fruit of the harbour and the coast but that the west has important and interesting walking environments to explore. The first is where the walk starts, at Parramatta, passing through Parramatta Park and Wistaria Gardens to a path following the west bank of the Parramatta River known as Governor Phillip Walk. Due to work on the light rail and erosion of the banks, that path has been closed for a number of years, and we've had to show a detour through the Westmead Hospital grounds.

In the meantime, we've been working with local groups in Parramatta to develop a Parramatta River Walk, which extends to the headwaters but back through the city to be an iconic focus for what has been branded as the river city. It's an example where a section of walk can be both part of a major long-distance walk and part of a significant loop walk. It also highlights the challenges of working with many different landowners and managers and, in this instance, presents the opportunity for the Trust to extend Parramatta Park to include the headwaters on both banks of the river. It also entails working with other stakeholders to realise that vision of a Parramatta river walk. It's been very frustrating that, despite the support for such a concept, there is no authority who have the power to actually develop that proposal, nor even just to patch up the existing Governor Phillip Walk. I gather that the Committee has been given the opportunity to see some of our illustrations.

The CHAIR: Yes.

IAN NAPIER: My second example lies further up the Great West Walk at Mount Druitt, where our desired route is through the Ropes Creek corridor from the Great Western Highway and Federation Forest, crossing Durham Street and under the railway at the creek culvert to link up with Whalan and Tregear reserves. Over a period of 10 years, we've been in discussion with Crown Lands and the Office of Strategic Lands, who control this section, to enable us to show this route on our maps and authorise necessary works by Blacktown council. In the meantime, we've had to show a very unsatisfactory detour across the railway at Mount Druitt station and through the industrial lands back into Whalan. Only this week we've been told that Blacktown council has been able to get approval from the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure to create some paths along that route, but the funding has not allowed the critical raised walkway under the culvert, so our unsatisfactory detour will remain.

My final example is featured in the Green Grid *West Central District* report as a project opportunity that also featured in the 2020 public space competition. You maybe have this illustration. It's the Prospect Reservoir water pipeline corridor, which the department of environment report notes:

... offers the potential for a linear park through Greystanes and Merrylands and build upon the existing projects along Prospect Creek and the Lower Prospect Canal Reserve.

The project also has the potential to improve the quality of open space for recreation, active transport and urban greening, while maintaining security for the pipeline.

This project has the potential of continuing the east-west line of the Cooks River across the Sydney Basin. Other important connections to Green Grid links include the Duck River, Western Sydney Parklands, Warragamba Pipeline, the Lower Prospect Canal and Prospect Creek.

There have been modest proposals for some time to extend the existing walking and cycle path along the balance of the pipeline. But what we have here is a much bolder and visionary proposal which can add valuable active and passive recreational space through Sydney's middle suburbs. These are the suburbs that are slated for densification under the "missing middle" housing policies. The problem is that there is no incentive for Sydney Water to initiate such a project. In all these cases, a well-resourced and proactive parklands authority can be the required catalyst for action. We believe the parklands trust should have a team dedicated to the wider objectives of the Sydney Green Grid. We believe a blue-green grid coordinating committee is vital. This should have a high-level steering committee and a working group committee drawn from stakeholder agencies and the community. Thank you for your indulgence.

PETER McLEAN: We put together a very short submission. Essentially, Bicycle NSW is the voice of bicycle riders across New South Wales, a grassroots advocacy organisation made up of 37 affiliated bicycle user groups. We've been around for 50 years next year, funnily enough. We put a short submission in. Broadly, we considered the current objectives as being generally sound but with opportunities for improvement. One of those was certainly to broaden the objects to equally include active transport—or, simply, walking and cycling. The active transport does exist informally in some cases, but we think it needs to be more explicitly included to ensure that we take advantage of the future opportunities and to ensure that they're realised as well.

We note that recreation is absolutely included already, which is fantastic. Certainly there are many recreational pursuits that have long been realised and taken up by community, and that is a fantastic thing. So we really suggested that part of, potentially, some of the existing objectives—either (d) or potentially (e)—or a separate objective altogether could be something along the lines of to ensure the parklands considers and includes active transport modes and amenities both in and around the parklands to allow users to travel to the parklands, within the parklands and as a thoroughfare to other locations, which will boost the sustainability, values and contributions of the parklands. We see currently, for example, Transport for NSW developing and finalising their Strategic Cycleway Corridors in Greater Sydney at the moment, which could be a catalyst to help support that as well. Broadly, that was our submission in a nutshell. Thank you.

The CHAIR: I'll open it up for questions for members if I can, but maybe I could begin. Mr McLean, is there a specific example that you think would work well in relation to active transport—something which you could point to and say, "Look, if you did this, this would work well"? Also, who would also be involved in terms of various agencies?

PETER McLEAN: The one that really jumps out is a strengthened, more strategic north-south spine through the Western Sydney Parklands—as a way of example—with the lands which snake through a very large portion of Western Sydney. We do have some active transport corridors through there but we are constantly reminded by tourists and by regular commuters that they don't always like to be on a footpath or a shared path beside a very, very busy highway or main road. There is a significant opportunity to engage people and utilise

those spines through a key corridor. Some of these links already do exist in part, but making it into a very strategic link with proper defragmentation and better connectivity would be a major opportunity.

Mrs SALLY QUINNELL: Mr Napier, what successful examples are there of blue-green grids in other cities where we could see what's working elsewhere instead of reinventing the wheel?

IAN NAPIER: The history of the green grid came out of London, where they saw the opportunity of linking together the green space in that city. The whole idea is that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and that, if you can link together sections of green open space, as far as recreational walkers are concerned the world is your oyster that you can walk. The kind of network that we have put together is based on long-distance walking, but it breaks down into shorter walks and a finer grain. But what we saw was the bringing together of our concept with the whole concept of the green grid: The green grid that we see here is not dissimilar from our network of routes. If there was greater cooperation and a very proactive body that was pushing the green grid, we would be only too happy to be their volunteers. The thing is a lot of this is done as desktop exercises. Before we can put anything on our maps, we actually test walk—we proof walk. We proof walk many routes before we put one route on our maps.

Mrs SALLY QUINNELL: You speak about a blue-green grid or a green grid committee in your submission. How would you like to see that committee operate?

IAN NAPIER: Take the example of the pipeline proposal. That is such a major exercise that I see that there is the need for a high-level steering group, which has representatives from people at the top of, say, Sydney Water and the Premier's Department. That steering committee at least can say, "Yes, we back this proposal," but then there would be a working green grid committee, who, in that instance, would be working out what are the requirements of Sydney Water to maintain the security of their water pipes. What technology is now available to check that if there are any leaks in that water pipe, we can detect that. There are plenty of water pipes that are underground. There isn't the necessity these days for these pipelines to be occupying what is now very valuable open space that we would like to see a dual use for as good open space.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I understand that the Trust may establish a blue-green committee. What, in your view, is the reason that hasn't happened? And what needs to take place to ensure that it does? Does the legislation need to be more specific about this?

IAN NAPIER: My understanding is that the emphasis of the Trust, to this point, has been to maintain the estate as is. That's a big enough job in itself, especially trying to fund it by its own activities. That's a whole issue in itself. What this Committee could do is to say, rather than the Trust "may establish" that committee, "shall establish" that committee.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: And a question to Mr McLean as well. What other cities, in terms of active transport in other big parklands—if you've got any examples to draw upon there for the Committee?

PETER McLEAN: There are a number of, I guess, similar blue-green grid plans that are used in other places. Plenty of examples out of Europe, and indeed London, itself.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Including active transport, though? I'm specifically asking in terms of bicycle—

PETER McLEAN: Yes, including active transport as key strategic links and connection points, as well, between regional cities. Belgium, certainly, as well, has been introducing some really good ones in more recent years, as have plenty of other places in and around Europe, to get people—super-connected highways for bicycle riding. And that's been a particular emphasis across the whole EU at the moment, actually, and working quite well. In Australia more specifically, the government layout and architectural city layout in the ACT is a good example, but the governance structure in New South Wales and other states is a little bit different, obviously. So that would be another good example. They had a few other advantages in their favour, but equally, they have taken advantage of it well.

The CHAIR: In terms of funding those, are you aware of or could you tell us what the funding sources are?

PETER McLEAN: To actually fund the—

The CHAIR: To fund the development of that active transport infrastructure.

PETER McLEAN: The strategic infrastructure has always come from a Federal or State government level. The green grid has, equally, in my understanding, almost primarily come from those same State or Federal government, and less local government sources. But I would I would also just add to Mr Napier's comment around the pipeline corridors. Certainly, utilising that existing infrastructure makes things so much more significantly

cheaper. And it's WaterNSW as well as Sydney Water, with their pipelines and channel systems which can be used. But, equally, there are also rail corridor systems, which are probably a little bit more outside of the scope of what we're talking about now. But it's utilising that existing public infrastructure or public land for wider community benefit.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is less about process but more about usage. With walking tracks, are they also useful for any other activities, like running or mountain biking, for example? How do you think about the use of those paths?

IAN NAPIER: Thank you for asking that. The whole issue of walking paths or shared paths, as they are more often described, is that on shared paths walkers have to share that space with cyclists, joggers, mountain bikers or whatever. My understanding—and Peter may correct me—is that shared paths don't work for either cyclists or walkers. From cyclists' point of view, if they're using it for active transport, wanting to get to work and wanting to ride as fast as they can, people walking with dogs and kids all over the place doesn't help.

As far as walkers are concerned, research by Victoria Walks has shown that large numbers of elderly people are discouraged from walking, not because they're afraid of cars but because they're afraid of walking on footpaths that are shared by cyclists. We prefer the walking routes to be of a soft surface—either slashed grass or gravel—rather than two-metre-wide white concrete, which we often have now. The advantage of that is they usually drain better. You were talking about mountain bikers. In a lot of the bushland that we walk through, we find that some of the tracks have been trashed by mountain bikers. We support the dedicated mountain biker tracks, which actually keep these mountain bikes off the relaxed walking environments that we enjoy.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you probably need both the recreational mountain bike expansion of whatever paths they want to use and, in addition, the walking paths.

IAN NAPIER: Yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Does that extend to running?

IAN NAPIER: We don't have any problems with runners.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You don't have any problems. As long as they're on foot, you're all right.

IAN NAPIER: Yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Two legs good.

IAN NAPIER: The advantage of having separate walking tracks is that the cost per metre of a slashed grass or gravel route, compared with a properly engineered cycle track, is enormous.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I totally understand.

IAN NAPIER: The walking track can wind around trees. Hopefully there will be trees, because we want shade and shelter.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I totally understand. I'm a very keen hiker, so I appreciate that insight. Did you want to add anything, Mr McLean?

PETER McLEAN: Only that around the shared paths, we generally agree with that, but we do take a pragmatic approach in sparser areas that have less usage. Certainly having separated cycleways in every location is just cost prohibitive and, in many cases, not achievable as well. In more densified areas such as Sydney it makes a lot of sense to have them absolutely separated, but in Western Sydney and regional New South Wales it becomes a very expensive and cost-prohibitive exercise. So it comes down to having the right infrastructure in the right places.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: On other committees, we've been to bushland areas where there have been unregulated, let's say, mountain bikers coming through and using pathways and there were locals who are very concerned about the destruction to various flora, I suppose. It seemed as though signage was not enough. I guess I'm asking how you have seen the separation of walking and recreational cycling work well or otherwise? I just wonder if signage is enough or how you build that culture that there are actually separate locations and separate purposes for these paths. Anyone is welcome to make a comment.

LEIGH SHEARER-HERIOT: A lot depends on the topography that you're dealing with. There are, as Peter suggested, some areas where constraints are such that you have to have a shared thing for a small distance. The south end of Tregear Reserve is an excellent example of this.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Sorry, where is Tregear Reserve?

LEIGH SHEARER-HERIOT: It's on Ropes Creek. You have a concrete path and a mode walking path nearer the creek. It doesn't exist for the entire part of the reserve, but it does in the southern part, and it's a very effective separation. A slashed walking path is very minimal in the scheme of things, so there are examples of that. I think the mountain bike thing is a harder thing to deal with because there's a sense of independence by mountain bike riders, but in the Western Sydney Parklands there is a dedicated mountain bike area with various skill levels of the riders. There are also mountain bike areas in the lower Blue Mountains, which are very popular. I don't know how you get around some of the cultural responses to restrictions that people like to break. That probably applies to just about everything. But I think if the topography allows for a high-quality mountain bike network that excludes walkers and gives them free reign, I think because it is a legitimate activity there perhaps needs to be more thought about that so that there isn't the pressure to use other tracks.

Mr MARK HODGES: Mr Napier, you spoke about slashed grass or gravel in relation to the walking tracks and you indicated that the cost of gravel was significantly less than the cost than the concrete paths. Have you taken into account the ongoing maintenance costs for a council to maintain either slashed grass or gravel going forward?

IAN NAPIER: We have. I'm not privy to figures on that. The crushed gravel doesn't take much to look after. The main concern when you're designing these paths is drainage. If you've got a well-drained gravel path—crushed granite—that doesn't require a great deal of maintenance. But compared with the initial cost of putting in concrete paths, it's so much less.

Mr MARK HODGES: Elderly people walking on paths generally would require something that is relatively flat. Do you agree with that?

IAN NAPIER: Yes.

Mr MARK HODGES: It's clear that we can't satisfy everyone, but elderly people would probably prefer a concrete path to walk on. Would you agree with that?

IAN NAPIER: Yes.

Mr MARK HODGES: And people using strollers, for instance, or wheeled things—they would need something that's a bit more flat, using concrete. Is that right?

IAN NAPIER: Yes, I have no problem with that. We do have to provide for people in wheelchairs, people with strollers and people even, these days, with wheeled luggage. We're not saying that a concrete path shouldn't be there. For instance, in this Ropes Creek situation, we're very happy with the council providing the concrete paths, which can be used by cyclists, by wheelchairs and by strollers. But to have the addition of a bushland track, which is shaded, more interesting and more comfortable to walk for bushwalkers or recreational walkers—we would prefer that.

Mr MARK HODGES: You spoke in your submission in relation to the blue-green committee. You said:

Despite a number of enquiries, we are not aware of such a committee being established nor of a core group within the Trust staff tasked with advocating for the connections between parks and scoping opportunities ...

How many inquiries did you make with the Trust or with the committees established pursuant to the Trust?

IAN NAPIER: How many—

Mr MARK HODGES: How many inquiries did you make as to whether or not the blue-green committee was established? Did you make many inquiries?

IAN NAPIER: We've made inquiries through the Minister's assistants. We've made inquiries through the office of the Government Architect. We have, I think, from memory, approached the Trust directly. We're talking about four or five occasions.

Mr MARK HODGES: When you made inquiries through the Minister's office, do you know when that was?

IAN NAPIER: About a year and a half ago.

Mr MARK HODGES: What was the response?

IAN NAPIER: More or less what I said earlier—that the Trust's attitude was that they were focusing on the Trust estate as it was at the time, at the moment.

Mr MARK HODGES: On another point, you spoke about active and passive playing fields. Would you agree that we need many more active sporting fields as well for our population?

IAN NAPIER: Yes.

Mr MARK HODGES: Do you have any difference between your view as to whether active or passive fields, or passive areas, should be included within some of the Trust land?

IAN NAPIER: I've got no problem with active recreation. With a grandson who is a fanatic football player—soccer player—I've been to a lot of these places and I know there is a great shortage of them, so I've got no problem with that. When we're designing walks, it is good to have events along a walk. If you, in the course of a walk, are able to walk around a field and you see people playing a game of soccer or a game of cricket, it is an interesting thing. It is possible to make very pleasant walking routes around the perimeter of these fields. In our climate, the more shade that we can provide is beneficial for walkers. It's also beneficial for us grandparents and parents watching our kids playing soccer or playing games. The environment around these spaces can be useful for passive recreation as well as active recreation.

Ms DONNA DAVIS: Thank you for being here today. I apologise that I'm not there in person. I will be tomorrow. I apologise to those who are there that I'm not able to be with you. I have a question for The Walking Volunteers. I firstly acknowledge everything that you have been doing, particularly in Parramatta, with your plan and enthusiasm for the Barramada river walk and the proposal that you've put forward. In light of that, I know that you state in your submission that under the current framework, the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust appears to not be in a position to drive the agenda of connections between parks outside of the parklands boundaries. Can you talk a little bit more about how you see Parramatta Park and the Western Sydney Parklands, their connection to Parramatta North and what that could mean for the potential Barramada river walk.

IAN NAPIER: If I understand you correctly, there is the opportunity—Parramatta Park, as I understand, expanded to be able to purchase Wistaria Gardens. What we see, to help achieve the concept of this river walk as a focus for the river city, is the opportunity to expand even further, up to the headwaters of the Parramatta River. You must be well aware of the controversy of the redevelopment of Cumberland Hospital and the women's—

LEIGH SHEARER-HERIOT: Women's factories.

IAN NAPIER: —factory area and so on. It is very important that when you walk up to the headwaters of the river, it is a sylvan environment with trees. You could be anywhere. We're concerned that overdevelopment encroaching on that riverine environment may be detrimental, but The Walking Volunteers don't want to get embroiled in that controversy. What we want to make sure of initially, at least, is that the route on the eastern bank, the Governor Phillip Walk, is restored. In colonial history, that is very important. At the headwaters, there's also First Nations history that's very important. If Parramatta Park had control of that river environment, it would be a natural extension of Parramatta Park.

Ms DONNA DAVIS: I must note that I have walked that walk with Phil Jenkins, and I'm very familiar with the proposal. I note that in the rezoning proposal for Parramatta North, it does actually allow for a much wider setback than is in the current zoning for Parramatta North. In that area that connects directly to Parramatta Park, it actually extends 30 metres on either side of the river and, in some places, much more than 30 metres. Do you feel that there is something that needs to be done to the Act to actually make this happen and more feasible? You're sort of suggesting an extension of Parramatta Park. Would you, therefore, welcome any changes in the Act that would allow for something like that?

IAN NAPIER: We would certainly welcome that. And I think generally we would welcome the Trust having more power or more involvement in extending the parkland estate and the linkages that make this whole concept of a green network viable. That doesn't necessarily mean that the Trust should own all this land. There is plenty of opportunity for green links to be created that are actually in ownership of other bodies, where there are rights of way and easements that the public can use. Very often in situations where the owner of that land has the responsibility of maintaining that green corridor, it needn't always be an impost on the public purse to create these areas.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Can I just follow on with that? That was a very important question, I think, in relation to the role of the Trust outside of the parklands specifically. Can I ask all the witnesses again. What particular amendments, do you think, would need to be made to the Act to allow them to achieve that? If they were to begin driving those connections outside of parklands, are there any amendments to the legislation that restricts them and controls them that are required to allow that to occur? Mr McLean, do you have any views on that? And please feel free to take this on notice.

PETER McLEAN: Yes. I would be happy to take it on notice. I guess our single edition does take into account that, to ensure that the Parklands considers including active transport modes and amenities to the parklands, to allow users to travel within the parklands and as a thoroughfare. So I guess whether we change that word slightly to look at peripheries, connections—but I guess we tried to put the word "thoroughfare" in there.

We do see these as intersections and ways of improving linkages and strategic corridors within existing and planned networks. How that then influences that—it is going to naturally and organically influence those routes, because it will make them more appealing and cheaper and more attractive for users to use. But I could certainly take it on notice how we could further enhance that potential additional objective.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Walking volunteers?

IAN NAPIER: My reading of the Act would suggest that, in the Act at the moment, there is the potential for the Trust to enter into partnerships to acquire land. I don't see any impediment in the Act at the moment to be able to do the kind of things that would extend the network. What is lacking is the drive to actually get things done. And our main issue is with the establishment of a body in terms of the blue-green grid committee, which, as I said earlier, I'm suggesting, is actually in two parts. It's very important to have a steering committee with high-level involvement, who are able to make big decisions, the financial decisions, and a working committee, which actually does work things out, who are familiar with how things are working on the ground.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Thank you so much for the work you do, gentlemen. My question is the intersection of wildlife, particularly for these pathways. I'm a regular user of Western Sydney Parklands, and I've walked on the track, and I walk there regularly with my dog. But then there are bicycle riders and other modes of active transport there. But I do notice that there's a lot of wildlife around, as well, like kangaroos, snakes and the like. When you talk about these different pathways, has there been any thought in terms of the wildlife—the intersection there? That's open to any of you.

PETER McLEAN: I'd see that as a key attractor and point of experience and point of difference that the parklands has to offer. It's part of the ongoing education and awareness to both make people aware of that and educate them at the same time in how to interact with it safely and effectively. I would note that it is a common occurrence in plenty of other shared paths in not just Western Sydney but plenty of other places as well, with reptile interactions and indeed others as well. It's something that people are coming to become more and more used to, but further awareness and education would be important.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Just on that too, because I've always thought—some of these tracks are quite remote and a lot of the users of this space are tourists and visitors who are not regular users. The public safety concerns—for example, I've had near misses with snakes in quite remote areas, particularly over in Western Sydney Parklands, which has high foot traffic. When you talk about public awareness programs or any form of risk management, is there anything there that you think we should be doing?

PETER McLEAN: Certainly, looking at the aquatic environment at beaches is probably a really good example of that. That is certainly done in inland areas as well. But I think, from a consistent communication point of view, when you go and look at a lot of beaches, for example, which I have done, I do see more consistent use of signage communication tools that are being used there. Something similar to that would certainly be an example to look at as well.

LEIGH SHEARER-HERIOT: One of the things that I think is so important—and it sometimes gets lost—is the fact that in modern society we are being isolated from nature. Large areas of the Trust land bring people back into contact with the natural world. I can take you to places half an hour from here where you can see echidnas, wallabies and kangaroos, which are not necessarily people's everyday experience. Now, interpretive material and things like that may be very necessary to help introduce people into, perhaps, protocols of how to respond to these things. But I think it's immensely important that children have an integration with the natural world, and we're losing that.

Most of us here—our childhood would have been spent wandering around the bush, possibly alone, with a Vegemite sandwich in the backpack or something, and come back home for dinner. Not the modern way of parenting, but the requirement for that kind of thing for our mental wellbeing, I think, is enormously important. That's why green corridors become so valuable—because they allow us to move from these larger islands of the natural world that we still have around Sydney, and we're able to link them in ways that are practical, that are safe and that are aesthetic.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: I agree with the mental health impact—I was going to talk about that—and that social isolation thing as well. Enjoy these spaces. There's nothing more majestic than a sunset, looking at kangaroos or wildlife as you're enjoying your day. Thank you so much, gentlemen.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: I apologise, Chair, members and our witnesses for running late this morning. If this has already been asked, I'm happy to refer to the transcript for the answer. I have a question for Bicycle NSW. Your submission talks about broadening the objectives of the Act to include consideration of active transport throughout the parklands. I wonder if there is a specific role you feel the Parklands could play in the regulation of share bikes? We know that this is an issue which MPs inboxes get filled with. The City of Sydney

is addressing this by allocating space for share bikes to be parked in transport routes. Obviously within the inner city, Centennial Park and other parkland spaces are on major cycleways or cycleways that are coming. I just wondered if there was a role you felt that the Parklands could have in the regulation of share bikes?

PETER McLEAN: Yes, absolutely. It's a great question. One of the e-scooter trials was undertaken in Western Sydney Parklands as well a couple of years ago as well as at the Mount Annan botanic gardens, for example. There are a few examples there. They certainly could provide and help accelerate that. Whether it has to be a separate objective within the Trust—maybe not too explicit and detailed, but certainly allowing the acknowledgement and inclusion of those mobility forms would probably be enough to capture the shared e-mobility options that will no doubt continue to grow into the future.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I was just wondering if either organisation collects data about where your members are using open space in these Greater Sydney Parklands areas?

PETER McLEAN: I'd be happy to take that on notice and provide some further information. Broadly we do survey our members every 18 to 24 months to understand what their preferences and bicycle types of use are. I hate to use the term "we're a broad church", but bicycle riders—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Good Howardism.

PETER McLEAN: There are so many types—no doubt walkers but also plenty of types of bicycle users as well—from recreational riders and family riders to various types of commuters, competitive riders, mountain bikers, touring riders and everything in between. They all have different needs and wants, and are seeking different experiences, which is really important to acknowledge. It goes back to one of the previous questions as well about types of track use.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you put that together in a report periodically? It would be interesting, I think, for the Committee to have that kind of information.

PETER McLEAN: Yes. I'd be happy to pass something back on notice.

IAN NAPIER: The Walking Volunteers are not in a position to survey the use of tracks. What we do have is figures on the number of people who access our maps, and that runs into millions. What we do find when people do surveys is that recreational walking is by far the most popular recreation activity we have.

Mrs SALLY QUINNELL: I have a very quick question, Mr McLean. When the Act was put together in 2022, Western Sydney—between the Western Sydney Parklands and Mulgoa, for example—was a completely different beast to what it is now. Do you think there is capacity for the linkage between those two areas and also incorporating Penrith down to Mount Annan botanic gardens? Is there scope to expand and connect those areas together?

PETER McLEAN: Without any doubt, absolutely. It's a significant legacy opportunity as well, with the highest rates of development in the country occurring in some of those areas, to connect those blue and green grids and take advantage of some of that green space that is already there. It is not underutilised; it's not utilised. To connect that from a legacy point of view into the future and protect it is a massive opportunity. It's no different to the Prospect pipeline that was converted many years ago. That's fantastic. So much more of that could very easily be done. The corridors are already there.

Mr MARK HODGES: Mr McLean, you say you've got about 14,000 members across New South Wales. Do you specify or ask them to indicate whether they're normal bikes, e-scooters or e-bikes in your membership form?

PETER McLEAN: Yes, absolutely. I can provide that follow-up. About 75 to 80 per cent of them are located in Greater Sydney. The vast majority of the membership base is in Greater Sydney, but they do have a multitude of different bicycle user types and pursuits. We can certainly provide that. There is a rapidly increasing rate of legal e-bike use in our membership. We are seeing that increase. For example, nationwide, one-third of new bicycle sales are now legal e-bikes. We're seeing that through our membership quite consistently.

Mr MARK HODGES: Could you provide that information to us?

PETER McLEAN: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: That's a good question. I look forward to seeing that information. We've run out of time. I think we could've continued to ask lots of questions. Thank you for appearing before us today. You'll be provided with a copy of the transcript of your evidence for corrections. Committee staff will also email any questions taken on notice from today and any supplementary questions from the Committee. Again, to all of you, including those

who I couldn't remember their names because I couldn't see their nameplates, thank you very much for coming today. We really appreciate your evidence. It has been very valuable. We'll take a break now until 10.45 a.m.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

Ms CHERYL BATES, OAM, Chair, National Trust of Australia (NSW), Parramatta Regional Branch, sworn and examined

Mr DAVID BURDON, Director, Conservation, National Trust of Australia (NSW), affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I'd like to welcome our next witnesses. Thank you for appearing before the Committee today to give evidence. Please note that Committee staff will be taking photos and videos during the hearing. The photos and videos may be used for social media and public engagement purposes on the Legislative Assembly's social media pages and websites. Please inform the Committee staff if you object to having photos and videos taken. Before we start, do you have any questions about the hearing process?

CHERYL BATES: No.

DAVID BURDON: No.

The CHAIR: Would either of you now like to make a short opening statement before we begin with questions?

DAVID BURDON: Yes. My name is David Burdon, and I'm the conservation director of the National Trust of Australia (NSW). The Trust are pleased to contribute to this review, and I thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today. It's nice to see some of you again. I will take the National Trust's submission as read, but I will take this opportunity to elaborate on just a few points of relevance. The National Trust has a very deep and ongoing interest in the lands which we are discussing today. Four of the five parks are, of course, listed on the New South Wales State Heritage Register, which was established in 1999. But the Trust listings for Centennial Park, which is 1976; Callan Park, 1974; Parramatta Park, 1978; and Fernhill, 1974, all predate that legislative protection for these places. I hope this speaks to our concern for the built and landscape heritage of those particular places. Our interest in Parramatta Park is particularly relevant given that we have the World Heritage listed Old Government House site within the middle of that particular parkland.

The National Trust know and understand the challenges and the opportunities that are inherent in being the custodian of a large number of places across different sites. The objectives of the current Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act, I think, are generally sound and, in particular, I would just draw attention to three in my opening remarks. The first objective is the number one in the Act, which—as I would summarise it—is to maintain and improve the parklands estate to deliver world-class parklands for the public. I think that's a great objective, but to deliver something that is truly world class requires investment of two types.

The first, initial investment is to bring it up to that required standard. The second, which is then hopefully less of an investment, is that ongoing investment to maintain that standard. It's important to note that with any asset, a lack of investment ultimately leads to greater costs to rectify, particularly if our aim is to have it as world class. Calling for investment is an easy thing for me to advocate for, but I would also caution in ensuring the way that that investment is ultimately allocated. Investment should deliver on-the-ground improvements and service delivery, not just simply some more—dare I say it?—bureaucrats behind a desk and that kind of thing. We're looking for actual improvements to the park.

Another key to delivering this is to have the long-term vision in place. We note that the Act requires a plan of management for each park. These are critical. Finally, it's encouraging that the functions of the Act make reference to this in terms of managing and operating the GSPT estate in a way that aligns with the Government's long-term vision for metropolitan open space and parklands in Greater Sydney, and also advocating to the Government to influence the long-term vision for open space and parklands in Greater Sydney. This reference to the long-term goals of the GSPT and the interaction with other public parks is very important, as various agencies all working together can only help us to, I think, raise the bar of all of our public parks in New South Wales. This brings me back to another of the objects of the Act: to advocate for a long-term vision to achieve the outcome of quality parklands across Greater Sydney, particularly connectivity of green corridors and access to public open space.

The current proposal for the Parramatta North site, which has only just been on public exhibition, is not an example, in my opinion, of this long-term thinking. There is an obvious opportunity to extend Parramatta Park, to

link a green corridor and to provide public access to open space. This State heritage-listed area should not in its entirety, I would make clear, be seen as a development opportunity. It should be seen for what it is: part of the long-term vision for open space and parklands in Greater Sydney, which is exactly what this Act is about. Thank you.

CHERYL BATES: Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. As a volunteer I chair the National Trust Parramatta branch committee. I have also had the privilege to serve as the heritage representative on the Greater Sydney Parklands Parramatta Park community trustee board. I was born and bred in Parramatta. When I was a teenager in the '60s, Parramatta Park was my playground. I walked, I picnicked, and I swam at Little Coogee, a swimming hole on the Parramatta River within Parramatta Park. My school swimming carnivals were at the War Memorial Pool, we went to the footy at Cumberland Oval and my siblings and their families cycled around the park. I learnt to drive in the park, probably because my dad wasn't game to have me drive on the roads!

I would like to make some comments on the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act 2022, with a particular emphasis on Parramatta Park. What I didn't realise in my early life was the significance of Parramatta Park to not only locals but also the State and the nation. For seven decades, Old Government House and the Governor's Domain was the country residence of the first 10 Governors, who lived there from 1790 to 1855. The transition from the Governor's Domain to Parramatta Park came in 1858 after a community lobby group wanted access to the domain "for exercise and recreation in open grounds and pure air". Interestingly, the COVID pandemic proved that this is still as relevant today.

The particular part of the GSPT Act that I wish to comment on is section 21: leases, licences and easements. This section provides requirements for the leasing, licensing or easements of land within the GSP. The branch does not support the provisions of this clause as it does not provide sufficient protection for public open space. Section 21 (1) states that the Trust may grant a lease, licence or easement if only two criteria are satisfied: firstly, consistency with the objects of the GSPT Act; and, secondly, if the lease, licence or easement "will not reduce the extent of the net existing natural environment of the GSPT estate". I have no idea what the "net existing natural environment" means as it is not defined in the Act. If these words are given their normal meaning, it is hard to understand how such large encroaching developments have been allowed to be granted leases. The branch believes that section 21 (1) (b) should read: "(b) will not reduce the extent of the GSPT estate."

Since 1858 the size of the park has continued to diminish with the western railway and road dividing the park, as well as a school, an RSL club, a swimming pool, a stadium and a leagues club. While Parramatta Park's population continues to grow exponentially, Parramatta Park has dwindled in size. With the population forecast at nearly half a million people by 2041, the need for open space will be over 80 times greater than in 1858. It is irresponsible to give away any more open space parkland when, in fact, we need more open space. Many grabs for Parramatta Park have occurred in the past, but the most audacious plan was reported in *The Daily Telegraph* in 1916, when a railway goods yard, sheds and marshalling depots were planned for the park. What has happened, particularly in Parramatta Park, has been the alienation of public land for commercial uses.

Parramatta Leagues Club is an example where land has been granted long-term leases and, given the improvements constructed on public land, there is no practical way that the leased land for commercial uses will ever be returned for public use. A bold proposal currently being espoused by the club is to create a sports and entertainment precinct as well as a hotel. If approved, this will extend Parramatta Leagues Club further into Parramatta Park and encroach more into the areas available for the public. The current process is simply a death by a thousand cuts for Parramatta Park, as well as the other land that falls within the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act. The current long-term leases that exist with organisations need to be reviewed. Although the branch is not privy to the breakdown of income received by the GSP, we believe it will be timely to review these leases. One lease, to our understanding, far exceeds the ten years that is acceptable in general today and the 25 years with the Minister's consent.

I'd like now to talk about part five: finance. The branch believes that the allocation of money from one part of the parkland to another with the written authority of the community trustee board, from where the money comes, is appropriate for securing the objectives of the Trust. Although, in saying that, we have concerns about the amount of money allocated to Greater Sydney Parklands and the need for the parks to seek funding elsewhere to achieve their important objectives. The branch does not support the overcommercialisation of public land as it denigrates the benefits of public open space, particularly when areas like Parramatta Park have such strong links to the growth of Sydney and there is a strong and valid need to protect the heritage significance of this area.

The pressure to provide commercial activities to generate funds for maintenance and embellishments must be measured and should not impact on the use of the area by the general public, nor unacceptably impact on the heritage significance of the park. Whilst within the GSP framework, the parklands are considered individually.

Yet the need for each parkland is very varied. Parramatta Park is one of the earliest gazetted public parks in Australia, and there is a World Heritage listing of Old Government House and the Governor's Domain at an international level. The authenticity and integrity of the landscape structure of Parramatta Park should be retained. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you today.

The CHAIR: Very comprehensive. Thank you.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Mr Burdon, I was curious about whether you think a place like Wendy Whiteley's Secret Garden would or could fall under the purview of the Greater Sydney Parklands.

DAVID BURDON: I think there's a place for many smaller individual parks, but I think that the aim of an organisation such as Greater Sydney Parklands is to look after what I would call the larger estates. I would place maintenance of items like that where they usually belong, which is with local councils.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I mean, it's heritage listed at a State level. Does that shift the approach at all?

DAVID BURDON: No. I think whoever's in charge of something is responsible for it and the protections that it's afforded. So the fact that one owner might have one piece of land and the other has another—if they're both on the State Heritage Register or both locally listed or both listed by the National Trust, then they should be afforded the same levels of protection.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: In terms of Centennial Park, there's obviously a proposal at the moment to potentially extend the space in that area to take over the Moore Park Golf course. In your view, is that a separate parkland to Centennial Park, or does that get subsumed within the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust through Centennial Park?

DAVID BURDON: I'm happy to be corrected on this, but my understanding is that it's the Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust, so they actually do look after a larger portion of the site than just Centennial Park. I think maybe City of Sydney are responsible for the golf course part—I could stand corrected on that, if anyone knows those particular details. I'm looking at Alex, as the member for that particular area. But, yes—in my opening remarks, the aim of large estates and linking them together, and, if they are to be expanded, that can only be a good thing, given Ms Bates's comments about the gradual reducing of such spaces.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Ms Bates, in your opening statement you suggested an amendment to the Act that was something along the lines of "will not reduce the extent of the Greater Sydney Parklands estate". That's the estate, but it's the values, obviously, that's contained in that estate as well—and obviously you're coming from a heritage perspective. But is there a change that could also be included there that talks about the retention of values in terms of ecological as well as historic and heritage? Because we've seen some of the loss, of course, of some of the estate to various operations, and I don't think we want that. So is there a slight amending of that wording to incorporate that, do you think?

CHERYL BATES: I think the word was the "net reduction". With that, it's very obscure. There's no definition of that in there. But I certainly do take your point. When there are certain ecological things that we need to preserve, we need to look at that. One thing that I did not mention was the significance of First Nations within Parramatta Park—very, very significant in that area. But—and I think possibly The Walking Volunteers may have spoken about that also—that's something that we really need to consider in the parklands.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I therefore have another question in relation to that—because of course one of the objects of the Act, the second one, is to enable the GSP trust to facilitate the connection to country for First Nations people. Do you believe that the work at the moment is enabling that? And what could it do better in that respect, do you believe? Of course, I'm assuming we'll aim to hear from First Nations people themselves in this Committee.

CHERYL BATES: I certainly haven't dissected every part of the Act, so I can't make comment on all of it. But one thing that is very important to First Nations people and also to the early settlers is Parramatta River. Parramatta River as it sits at the moment has four different ownerships—four different bodies—doing all sorts of different things. We really need to be getting together to make sure that it's healthy and also utilised correctly. That was one of my biggest concerns about the river. The storytelling of First Nations people is very focused on the river. It's also focused on colonial settlement, because Governor Phillip came up the river to find fresh water, which he did. They did stop right in where Parramatta Park was and got out, where the Crescent is. We all know where the Crescent is because we've probably been to events there. It's a wonderful space. But that was the early thing. They built a redoubt on the top of the hill just overlooking that. The river is critically important, including better management of the river and what the river will mean to our story.

Mr MARK HODGES: Ms Bates, you say in your submission, "Now is the time to acquire, for the Parramatta community, the quantum of land that has been lost." You talk about "for the Parramatta community". Do you have any records or information as to where the people who generally use the park come from?

CHERYL BATES: Because of the increasing population in Parramatta, certainly it's new residents. We have a very mixed population—a very multicultural population—and they do use the park. I certainly don't have figures. I'm not sitting on a turnstile, clocking people in and out of the park. Does that answer your question?

Mr MARK HODGES: Yes, it does. You would believe—correct me if I'm wrong—that most of the people that use the park would come from the Parramatta area?

CHERYL BATES: Not necessarily, no. With the new transport links that we've got—we have a rail link and we will soon have a metro link, in 2026, I believe. But we also have a light rail link that takes you very close to the park. If you're coming on the metro, it will probably be a bit over 20 minutes from the city to get to the park. I see the park as being a very big tourist attraction for people really interested in tourism in Parramatta.

DAVID BURDON: I might just make a comment on that, if I may. I think good-quality parklands, which are hopefully what we are talking about here, are attractive to people to go and visit, wherever they are from. I think it's fair to say that actually many of the visitors to Centennial Park, Callan Park and Parramatta Park don't necessarily live immediately adjacent to them, although, of course, the people that do live in those suburbs make regular use of them. But they are popular and used by many people across the State.

Mr MARK HODGES: For clarity, Ms Bates, you refer in your submission to how Parramatta will "grow to 487,731 by 2041, 81 times greater than when the park was allocated". You're aware, I presume, that presently there are 283,204 people in the Parramatta region. Therefore, by 2041 it will grow by another 204,000, approximately.

CHERYL BATES: Absolutely.

Mr MARK HODGES: Another 71 per cent of people will live in that area. That probably doesn't take into account the Rosehill racecourse redevelopment, which adds another approximately 25,000 homes or more.

Ms DONNA DAVIS: Welcome, Cheryl and David, to the inquiry. Thank you so much for all that you do. You are such strong advocates and very passionate and important voices for Parramatta Park, particularly. I want to touch on a couple of things that you've mentioned and that are in your submissions. David, to you first, I know you have already touched on this slightly in your presentation but, in your view, should the Act be amended to enable the Trust to acquire more land for Parramatta Park? Also, given the recent public exhibition of Parramatta North and the preservation of the Parramatta Female Factory and Institutions Precinct, as well as parklands and other heritage buildings within that site, what do you think are some of the possibilities? Could you talk that through in terms of Parramatta Park's expansion, potentially?

DAVID BURDON: I can't remember the exact part of the Act, but the Act does allow for parks to be increased, and for land to be purchased. I think it outlines there are two mechanisms to do that: One is that it can be done by compulsory acquisition; another is that it can be done by agreement. I think that's the wording of the Act. To me, that says that parklands can be extended. Of course, this act also provides provision for the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust to own other land to support the functions and operations of its parks. So I think the Act does allow for what we would call, in the context of your question, expansion of Parramatta Park.

I think that any expansion of any of the parks would require additional investment. I would note also at Callan Park that there's the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust part of the site, but then there is also the Department of Health section of the land, which the National Trust advocated, in its submission on that plan of management, actually needs to be considered as part of the management and ongoing operation of Callan Park. They're both critical to each other, and I think it's unfortunate where certain parts are excluded from each other in terms of different ownerships by different government areas. I think if we can expand these parks and actually use those facilities that are existing within them at the moment, such as the built heritage that is there, they could ultimately be used as support mechanisms for the ongoing commercial operation of the park as well, in certain instances.

Ms DONNA DAVIS: Cheryl, I know that you have mentioned about being a member of the Parramatta Park community trustee board, a heritage member. Can you just give a little bit of insight into what your experience has been like on that board? I know it's something that we advocated for passionately to exist, so how have you found that? Do you feel that you are getting a really good opportunity to provide feedback or is it just a tick and flick? How do you find that whole process?

CHERYL BATES: I find that process a very respectful process. Our thoughts are certainly listened to and accepted into that. I think there is one thing: most of our agendas will essentially be a one-way information-giving to us with a short opportunity to say something in there. We don't necessarily have an

opportunity to put a great deal of things on the agenda to be able to bring to the meeting some concerns that we may have. What certainly comes out of it—and what I like to think is a way of feeding back to the community—are some ideas that we need to explore more.

Certainly, my biggest concern—at our very last meeting we did have some information shared with us about finances. There are certainly some things that concern us about finances. One particular one is do we have enough money to be able to do what we want to do? It's sort of 10 years almost to the day when a 42-year-old lady was killed—was stabbed—in the park at 9.00 p.m. on a Saturday night. There was no lighting at park. Now, since then, some money has come forward through the department of transport for Safer Cities, I think it was—a grant where they got \$2.5 million for Parramatta Park. But it hasn't done the whole park; it's done part of the park. It's very disappointing. It's done some of the—I was going to say key areas, but all areas are key in the park that need to be funded. That is feedback that we gave them. It's a question that I have continued to ask: When will we finish that? It will activate the park a bit more. It will bring people into the park in the evenings. As far as my experience on the committee, very positive experience to be able to feed back information to them.

Ms DONNA DAVIS: This is to both David and Cheryl. One of the objects of the Act is to encourage the use and enjoyment of the parklands estate, and that is by promoting an increase in the recreational, historical, scientific, educational, cultural and environmental values of lands within those parklands. I know this is putting you on the spot; you might like to actually take this on notice. What are some of the things that you feel are opportunities that we are missing now that we could be embracing particularly—and I know I'm very focused on Parramatta Park; there's a reason for that—in the park to bring more people? To your question, member for Castle Hill, I know that Parramatta Park does have figures on who comes to the park. Incredibly, more than half of those people that come to the park on a regular basis are from neighbouring councils such as Cumberland, the Hills and Blacktown, not necessarily just from Parramatta. But back to you, Cheryl and David—what are some of the things you think we're missing out on that we could be doing that would bring even more enjoyment and respect to that World Heritage park?

CHERYL BATES: I think the one thing—and David touched on it a little bit, and I think The Walking Volunteers all touched on it too—was the opportunity to increase heritage tourism. I know I've said that before, but if we could acquire the area that is available, the taxpayers' area in North Parramatta, there is hopefully still another World Heritage site. We have multiple State Heritage buildings there, and we have a jail. If we can open that up—and that is very close to the park and another World Heritage site. So the tourism opportunities for the park, I think, would be enormous in that way.

DAVID BURDON: My answer to that would just be—and I'll try to speak a little bit more generally. I think it's about the quality of the spaces that are available as well. The better quality and the more opportunity that places give to people, the more they will become known and the more they will be visited. I'm just thinking in terms of just very basic infrastructure at Parramatta Park. When you go in—and I drive there regularly to visit Old Government House. When you do turn into the park, there's always a mix of people and bikes and cars using the same road just to do that very basic first entry point to the park, off the street, up to Old Government House. Something as simple as defined bike routes and defined pedestrian areas so that mothers with their strollers can walk past and not be interrupted by a car flow—those sorts of things.

Once people visit a place and know how good it is, they will come back. The challenge sometimes is getting them to visit there in the first instance. Many people don't understand how good a lot of these parts of our great city are to go and visit. So those sorts of investments, I think, are really critical. Speaking from the National Trust's point of view as well—because we are the trustee for Old Government House; it's actually owned by the State Government—we would love to see some investment there that would help our visitation as well to increase, because there's a corollary there between getting people into Old Government House and into Parramatta Park as well. I touched earlier on—I was just going to say the other aspects of the stranded assets, like the Callan Park historic buildings as well and the health department, once those things are all brought in again, people would love to see this stuff and to visit it. If it was available, you don't have to build it and they'll come; it's already there.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: One of my concerns with the funding model for our parklands is that, through successive governments, the funding model has been that parklands need to eat themselves to feed themselves, with very little recurrent funding provided. The Act that we are dealing with indeed regulates the commercialisation of our parklands, but it also facilitates it. In my view, it does that in a very narrow way by seeing the funding opportunities for parklands to be cafes, car parking, hospitality or other venues. Do you see a role in which the Act could facilitate a broader consideration of the economic value of our parklands to include things like carbon offsets, the health and mental health benefits that come from our parklands or even the increased stamp duty that government receives because property prices near parklands are often higher than those that aren't near parklands? To sum it up, my question is this: Should the Act facilitate a broader consideration of the way in which we should value our parklands economically, beyond just cafes and car parking?

DAVID BURDON: That's a very interesting starting point for a discussion. I don't have figures to hand, obviously, but it's very easy to see how having good parklands actually can reduce costs in other ways. Like you've just said, people can get out and exercise, have healthy lives and breathe fresh air—all of those sorts of thing. You would think that is going to decrease the impact of funding on our hospital system. It's very easy to see our parklands being funded through the ways you've outlined, through leases and the like, but there is a greater value to them in terms of what they provide back to the community. How you align that with a funding stream, I don't know. It's possibly another way to think about the way that the State invests in our art galleries and other things, like the State Library, for example, and those sorts of institutions. People visit them, they benefit from them and they learn from them. It's a place of enjoyment, of reflection and of self-improvement. Maybe we need to think of our parks as part of that too. We do think that way about our botanic gardens, dare I say, but maybe not necessarily as much about the Greater Sydney Parklands. It's a good point.

CHERYL BATES: I agree with David, of course. Particularly with Parramatta Park, we've got an opportunity to make that into more of a botanic garden to make that more attractive. We've got multiple transport links that will get you there, but we've also got the opening of Badgerys Creek to bring people there. Why not have a western suburbs botanic garden? In fact, Parramatta Park was a botanic garden to start with. We've gone a little way back to that with Wistaria Gardens coming back into the park, but that certainly could expand.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: So a potential role for the Trust could be to quantify the economic benefits of the parklands beyond the commercial services that are offered on site.

DAVID BURDON: I think so. The National Trust itself often tries to promote the economic value of heritage and tourism to its places in various reports that we give. Obviously, in recent times, we had the International Council on Monuments and Sites conference in Sydney, which is very much about the economic value of heritage sites and the way that can provide benefit to the economy. I always like to think back to what politicians must have been thinking when Henry Parkes and the Governor at the time—when Sydney had, what, half a million people living in it—said, "Let's dedicate Centennial Park to the future health and happiness of our city." They were actually thinking about that sort of provision at that time. Maybe they're the sorts of discussions we need to be having now. Otherwise, there wouldn't have been a Central Park in New York or a Hyde Park in London. These are precious things.

The CHAIR: This question arises from an item in your submission, Ms Bates, but I'd welcome comment from both of you. Can you please expand on the reasons you support the ability of the Trust to transfer funds from one parkland to another, and whether that should be a loan or some other form? Can you talk further to that, please?

CHERYL BATES: I guess as I understand it, quite simplistically, the Trust has a bundle of money and they can allocate it to each of the parklands. The needs of each parkland are very different. If things come up, that opportunity to shift from one part of the parklands to another is a very critical thing to happen—for funds to be allocated to things that may be a priority in another parkland.

DAVID BURDON: My understanding of the mechanism is that it is difficult at the moment, because of the separate trusts, to transfer money from one to the other. I think that's the heart of your question, Mr Primrose. But I think the whole idea of the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust is this long-term and broader thinking about a body that looks after multiple sites. I think that the ability for centralised management of that sort of arrangement could have its benefits, particularly if we're talking about who is the owner of that particular asset that may be purchased or operated or whatever in order to fund these parklands. That's something that you would think needs to be owned by the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust, rather than one of the individual trusts, so that that funding can be directed where it's needed. There is always a danger, though, of the whole "robbing Peter to pay Paul" kind of mechanism, and I think that it does need to be considered as a holistic portfolio in terms of how that allocation is made.

The CHAIR: May I then just follow that up with another financial question? Can you please comment on how leases over Parramatta Park are administered by the Trust and how the Trust provides information about income received from these various leases.

DAVID BURDON: Personally, I think that's a question best directed to the director of the park. I don't have anything to add to that.

The CHAIR: How secret is it?

CHERYL BATES: I haven't been privy to any of that information on the community trustee board.

The CHAIR: Would you like to be?

CHERYL BATES: I think it would give you a bigger picture of how self-funding the park is if you knew that.

The CHAIR: This question also goes to both of you, but it arises again from Ms Bates' submission. Could you please talk more about your suggestion that leases over Parramatta Park should be reviewed? Is there scope within the Act to review existing commercial leasing agreements? Do you have any comments on that? Please feel free to take these on notice.

CHERYL BATES: I think what we have within Parramatta are some leases that are actually well above the 10-year or 25-year limit. We're not privy to any of that. My biggest concern is leases—and I know we've certainly given away some of the parklands to Club Parramatta, which was the RSL club. We've had a lot of changing things happening in Parramatta. We have schools. In the past we've had a golf club; we've had a bowling club. They're not there now. That land has come back. I've lost my train of thought. That's terrible, isn't it? Could you just restate for me what your question was.

The CHAIR: Is there scope within the Act to review existing commercial leasing arrangements?

CHERYL BATES: I would say yes. I think decisions that were made in the past should be reviewed.

DAVID BURDON: My very short response to that would be yes, I think that's the whole purpose of this inquiry and the mechanism in the Act—to have these reviews. Sometimes things get set up. They initially think they might work a certain way or provide a certain benefit. Sometimes it is the case; sometimes it's not. I don't see any reason why you wouldn't undertake that sort of a review as part of this.

The CHAIR: Do Committee members have any further questions? You get an early mark. Of course, if members have further questions after reviewing today's transcript, they'll obviously come back to you. Thank you for appearing before us today and it is a great pleasure. You'll be provided with a copy of the transcript of your evidence for corrections. Committee staff will also email any questions taken on notice from today and any supplementary questions from Committee members.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

Mr EAMON WATERFORD, Chief Executive Officer, Committee for Sydney, affirmed and examined

Ms ESTELLE GRECH, Policy Manager, Planning and Housing, Committee for Sydney, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I welcome our next witnesses. Thank you for appearing before the Committee today to give evidence. Please note that Committee staff will be taking photos and videos during the hearing. The photos and videos may be used for social media and public engagement purposes on the Legislative Assembly social media pages and websites. Please inform Committee staff if you object to having photos and videos taken. Before we start, do either of you have any questions about the hearing process?

EAMON WATERFORD: No.

ESTELLE GRECH: No.

The CHAIR: Would either of you like to make a short opening statement before we begin with questions?

ESTELLE GRECH: To the Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting us to speak today. The Committee for Sydney strongly supports the vision of Greater Sydney Parklands as one parkland agency overseeing Sydney's major regional parks, and we also support the Act that enables it. These spaces are Sydney's shared backyard. They are critical for our climate resilience, for recreation, to be fit and healthy and for social connection. They welcome over 40 million visitors each year, which is four times more than the Sydney Opera House. As Sydney's population continues to grow, and as Sydney becomes a higher density city, ensuring that long-term protection and sustainable funding is more important than ever. We really support the objects of the Act. We think they'll stand the test of time, but we recommend three key legislative improvements.

The first is strengthening the blue-green grid committee's role. In the Act it refers to something that may be able to be set up, but we recommend that it's something that must be set up. As Sydney densifies, all these spaces that can connect people into a network of regional parklands are really important, and we can't let them sit idle. We have a governance challenge. They're often owned by agencies who don't know how to manage parklands, so having Greater Sydney Parklands as the expert to convene all of these landholders is a very sensible idea. Our second point is about the importance of standardising leasing and revenue rules across all parklands.

Effectively, we don't believe that Callan Park should be treated differently from any of the other parklands. We recommend consistent lease terms and uses that are allowed to be leased across all of the parklands. Parramatta Park is a World Heritage listed parkland. We think it should have the same rules as Callan Park.

Thirdly, and critically, it's important to think about how we can secure long-term funding through the use of things like surplus government land. Western Sydney Parklands already has a model where a small portion of land can be leased to generate sustainable revenue. We recommend the idea of park business hubs—Greater Sydney Parklands being vested with other forms of government land that it can develop, lease and create long-term revenue for the parklands. Where that's happened at Western Sydney Parklands, they have 100 years of secure funding. That's not leaning on Treasury, and it can't be taken by Treasury either. We think that that's something that should be rolled out for all of the other parklands too.

Just to wrap up, the success and future expansion of Greater Sydney Parklands is a legacy-defining initiative if we can get this right. It builds on decades of visionary leadership, from Sir Henry Parkes in Centennial Park to Tom Uren's advocacy at Parramatta Park and Bob Carr's assembly of the 5,280 hectares at Western Sydney Parklands. This is something that takes all political parties to get behind and a very strong Act to guide it as well. Finally, before I wrap up, I'd also like to flag with this Committee that while I am presenting evidence today on behalf of the Committee for Sydney in my current role, in a past role as a ministerial adviser for the previous Government, I was closely involved in the development of this Act. And I'm happy to take any questions if I can recall that time when we created this thing in my previous role, and I'll flag when I'm switching hats from current committee role to our previous experience.

EAMON WATERFORD: I, obviously, support everything that my learned colleague has just stated. I just wanted to add one additional caveat. As we noted in our submission, the chair of the Committee for Sydney is also the chair of the Greater Sydney Parklands. In developing our submission but also in our statement and our evidence given today, we've had no engagement with Mr Michael Rose, AM, the chair. So any comments that we provide today are solely those of the committee staff and don't reflect Mr Rose's views on the Act or the Greater Sydney Parklands agency.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: Thank you very much for your submission and the work done in this space more generally. My question goes to funding models for parklands and if you feel there are any really good international examples that we should draw upon and any ways in which the Act could be amended to facilitate more sustainable funding models or advocacy to government for funding.

ESTELLE GRECH: Very good question. To my knowledge, there's not really the perfect international example out there. Obviously, the US model is 100 per cent reliant on philanthropy, which is not sustainable or unlikely to work in the Sydney context. There's one example from LA where they've tried to—actually, they looked to Western Sydney Parklands as the model to replicate. So we probably have a really good example of how it can work already. Through forums like World Urban Parks and the Green Flag program, to my knowledge, Western Sydney Parklands is seen as a really good case study of how you can get sustainable funding.

EAMON WATERFORD: The only other, which I don't think is really appropriate for the parklands that we're discussing—but, obviously, in America, the other version of funding they have is privately owned public spaces, the POPS model, that works quite well in terms of some of the major parks in New York City that are actually operated by private providers. Where that works well, it's because there is benefit for that private operator, for the buildings that they own next to the park, to activate that park. So they're not making a profit from running the park. They're making a profit from renting out the commercial real estate next door to the park, and part of the way that they are able to increase the rents is by having really excellent activation in the park next door. That's probably not an appropriate model, given that we don't have a lot of commercial buildings next to these parks, and probably doesn't suit the approach that Australians have to operations of parks.

ESTELLE GRECH: Yes. I think what Eamon's referring to, Bryant Park in New York, is the classic example of that model. It works for smaller urban parks, potentially, but for these—these are huge regional parklands. It's not going to work, and we wouldn't recommend that. Obviously, there will always be a space for government funding. But we know that that can ebb and flow, depending on economic circumstances. The benefit that Western Sydney Parklands has, by having its—it knows it's going to get a certain amount every year for the next 99 years because it has that lease. I think it's that certainty that enables investment in projects, potential expansion. There's always capital works to do when you're running parklands.

So that's why it's that—is it a Goldilocks solution, potentially?—around having a portion of the park that's set up. It's very clear that it can only be 2 per cent of the park land and has that sustainable revenue funding. That works in Western Sydney Parklands because it's so big. It's over 5,000 hectares. Centennial is 360-ish. Fernhill is 400-ish hectares. Callan is only 61. So you probably can't take 2 per cent of a park to do that, which is why—and

the Act has been designed in this way. You can vest land to it that's perhaps not for primary parkland usage, but use that as a revenue source to support all of the others.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: Do you feel the Act gets the balance right? Or is there anything that could be done in terms of the potential for commercialisation versus protection of parklands? When the Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust was established, that was when the population was much smaller. The commercial activities and pollution within the inner city and congestion were much lower. But the public or political value of the parklands seemed to be much greater than it is today. Is there anything we could do within the Act to reset a bit of that balance?

ESTELLE GRECH: I think it goes back to our second point, which is ensuring that equity across all of the parklands. I would say that the protection Centennial Park has does strike a balance between ensuring recreation and public use without having to buy anything—you know, just being in a parkland. However, Callan Park, for example, has much stricter restrictions that limit the revenue that it can take. For example, you can't have a commercial cafe open, which I would argue can enhance your parkland experience as well. We think that, to look at sustainable funding across the parklands, there need to be equal rules for all of the parks. I would recommend just expanding the regulatory restrictions that Centennial—just mirror that in Callan, Fernhill et cetera.

EAMON WATERFORD: To think philosophically about this, obviously parks are things we want to preserve, but we're talking about an intergenerational asset. We're not only preserving it in terms of the funding mechanisms but also ensuring that future generations love and want to continue to preserve these things long after we're gone or long after we're in Parliament—you're in Parliament, I should say.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: You're welcome to join.

EAMON WATERFORD: I guess I'm technically in Parliament at this moment.

Mr MARK HODGES: You could be the member for Sydney.

EAMON WATERFORD: One of the balancing acts we need to have on that is—just preserving something and locking it away so that people can't touch actually undercuts our ability to make it a place that has intergenerational support. The famous David Attenborough quote that people won't preserve things they don't love; people won't love things they don't experience—it's actually really important that we think about getting people in to experience these parks. Things like cafes in Callan Park will actually drive more people, drag more people into experiencing that park and, as a result, love that park. Then future generations will be more likely to want to support and preserve those sorts of places. I appreciate that we've got this balancing act around commercialisation and preservation, but I think the right position, the right balance between those actually delivers on that long-term intergenerational preservation.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I might just jump in there to continue that line of discussion. It is fair to say, though, that none of the parks—I think you used the words "locked up", Mr Waterford—are locked up. Sure, they may not have a cafe within certain square kilometres or whatever—some of the bigger ones. But none of them are locked up and off limits to people. I think that's important for us to be careful, don't you think, in language, because it's nature, people able to experience nature. All of those parks provide that and people like the serenity. That's what's actually really important too. Would you acknowledge that?

EAMON WATERFORD: Yes. I'm happy to withdraw the words "locked up". That's obviously hyperbole.

ESTELLE GRECH: If I could expand on that metaphor, I would say that there are components of the park that are locked up currently. If you think about Callan Park, Kirkbride is locked up from the community. There are heritage buildings that are locked away from the community to use right now because there are not the funds to restore them and open them up.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: There are proposals, in fact, to use Kirkbride, but I'm very aware of, though—

ESTELLE GRECH: Yes, I know but, if we can get the sustainable funding right, we can actually open up more of these spaces, encourage more people to use them. These are incredible heritage assets that we don't want to see locked up.

EAMON WATERFORD: We actually released a report this morning on walkable density done well and what does it mean to make places that are really walkable. Part of what makes people walk is having somewhere to walk from obviously—they need to live close to where they need to go—but also a destination. So one of the things I would propose at Callan Park is—there are not many things to do in Callan Park. There are not that many reasons to have that as a destination to want to walk to. If we create more opportunities and desire points within

the park, that actually will drive more people to want to spend time in the park because there will be somewhere to go.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Ms Grech, my last question is about your experience with the legislation. Regarding the intent or vision for the blue-green committee—and we've already had people suggesting to change the Act so it's not "may establish", firstly—the legislation states its purpose:

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 ...

It says, "to advocate for a long-term vision". Could you expand a little bit on what the thinking was behind that committee, from your experience?

ESTELLE GRECH: Yes, sure. The idea of the five parklands and the one trust to rule them all was based on the idea of having a parkland city. If you think of cities like Paris, they have two major regional parks that anchor them, but we're lucky enough to have five—and hopefully even more if we get this right. But in the previous model, where it was trusts looking inward to each park, they didn't have a remit to care about connecting to other ones. The whole idea of Greater Sydney Parklands was to give the agency a remit to think about how we can draw as many people as possible to their regional parkland and also connect the parklands together. The green-blue grid is the way that you can do that. The Government Architect set that vision several years ago. It features in the *Greater Sydney Region Plan*.

The idea was that—and I mentioned it in the statement—currently a lot of those pieces of land are owned by disparate entities: energy companies, leftover Transport land, leftover Sydney Water land. All of those agencies do a great job of providing transport, water and energy, but it's not within their interests to provide parkland or connect people to parkland. That was the idea. It's having a really strong governance framework so that you can get all the right people together in the same room and have that focus. There are great public servants doing their job, but it's about also letting them know that this is part of the job and the vision that we want to see delivered across Sydney. Obviously blue-green grid corridors are great for recreation, but they're really important for biodiversity as well. Getting that balance right was another component and another thing that we wanted to embed in this Act.

The CHAIR: Could you expand on the points you make on pages 2 and 4, and which you've already alluded to, about the financial sustainability of parklands? There could be a critique that talking about commercial arrangements, as was mentioned earlier today by a witness, could almost be the equivalent of the parklands eating themselves to survive. If that's the option that's been put up, how do you answer that criticism? The second part of the question is what are your views on the inability at the moment of the Trust to actually transfer funds, even on the basis of a loan from one parkland or one local trust to another. It's a big question; I was wondering if you could just give us your views.

ESTELLE GRECH: One comment I'll make with my previous role's hat on is that this sort of legislation was born at a time when there was record funding going into parklands. It was a global pandemic, a once-in-100-year event where parkland and open space was being really loved and well used, and there needed to be jobs created and this was an easy way to do that. There were record amounts of funding. The reason that this was set up, however, was to think about the next 100 years. Knowing that that economic climate is not always going to be the case, how do you make sure that there's a long-term funding stream there?

Back with the committee hat on, going back to the point around equal rules across the parklands—but to your point around the protections in place, the Act already has community trustee boards. It's about increasing transparency in—if decisions like that are to be made, they have to be demonstrated through plans of management. There are consultation requirements around plans of management. The Minister has to sign off on them and the community trustee board is also involved in that process. I think one way to avoid the case where commercialisation is cannibalising the parks is through transparency and having that really strong community connection. I believe that MPs are also invited to be part of the community trustee board process, so there is that level of parliamentary oversight as well.

To your point around the restrictions around making sure that one park can't give funds to another, I think there would be merit in reviewing that, especially for things like short-term loans. If a climate disaster happens at Parramatta Park and the boardwalk along the river caves in, could Western Sydney Parklands do a loan to Parramatta Park to get that boardwalk up and running and respond to that sort of thing? I think it would be a really positive, sensible thing to do.

The CHAIR: Could it involve, if surplus land was transferred, a loan to actually commercialise that? What are your thoughts on that?

ESTELLE GRECH: That's a good question. You would know as lawmakers that you can design protections if you deem that that wasn't the right thing to do. Do you have a view on that, Eamon?

EAMON WATERFORD: As in one park lending money to another park that had received surplus land in order to create an ongoing revenue source?

The CHAIR: Yes.

EAMON WATERFORD: That seems eminently sensible, I suppose. Transparency is the way that you ensure that there's not any concern around the way that sort of funds transfer is managed. I think it's also worth considering that we have a city in Sydney that has deep spatial inequality. The access to high-quality parklands, the heat that people experience, the need to access nature, and the level of green space available within walking distance is deeply affected by what your postcode is. Whether you live in the west or the east, the north or the south, you have a different level of access. I think it would be reasonable, right and proper that there is some consideration of, if you've got areas of the city with greater capacity for revenue raising, supporting the areas that need more investment to get them to a grade where everybody has the same level of support and access to high-quality open space. That would be a really reasonable—within a transparent conversation with the public around why and how that's happening—and good thing, I suspect.

ESTELLE GRECH: To riff off Eamon's point around spatial inequality, I remember speaking to Suellen Fitzgerald, who was the inaugural CEO of Greater Sydney Parklands, about the Western Sydney Parklands business hub model. She told me a story about how they were doing community consultation with people who lived across the road from where the business park was going to be, asking, "What do you think about this?" They said, "Will there be a hairdresser? My wife's a hairdresser. It'd be great for her to work nearby." The moral of that story, in my mind, is that, even if things like off-park business hubs do get up, it's not just about providing funding for the parklands; it's providing employment opportunities in Western Sydney as well. It was very interesting seeing how the different communities across the different parklands respond to things like that, but it was quite welcomed in that context. It was seen as an economic employment opportunity close to home.

The CHAIR: What's the alternative?

EAMON WATERFORD: Recurrent government funding: funding from core revenue from the New South Wales Government. That's how we fund a lot of things in this State. Obviously the worry we have is that parklands are one of those things that are often the first thing to get chopped in an economic downturn or in a fiscally constrained environment, but they are deeply important. We all value them but the value is diffused. We all appreciate them but we probably couldn't put a figure on it until it's gone. The value of a sustainable model that gives them that funding certainty enables them to be able to ensure that they never go away regardless of the political stripe of government or the fiscal constraints that they're under.

ESTELLE GRECH: And to expand on Eamon's point, parkland funding did get cut with the new Government. Fernhill Estate was promised \$80 million through the WestConnex program. That got removed. Parramatta Park was promised—I forget the exact figure—several million dollars to improve key things as part of WestInvest. That's a real example of how, when things and economic climates are tough, parklands is usually the first thing to get cut. That's why it's so important to make sure that they have their own revenue that Treasury can't steal from them.

EAMON WATERFORD: I think the other thing is, I don't think anybody would disagree with the idea that we want those parks to be there in 100 years time. We want them to be accessible, and we know that they will be valuable. There would be other public services that you might say, "Look, we actually think this needs to flex up and down depending on the demand as it goes along, but we're pretty confident that we will always have a demand for open space across our city for at least 100 years to come". This is something that actually suits this sort of perpetual endowment really well, because we're fairly confident that it will have to exist, and therefore, why not lock that in now?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is a little bit left-field. Mr Greenwich earlier mentioned stamp duty collection, and I think it's actually a really interesting point regarding land tax and reform around land tax, and actually abolishing stamp duty and having a situation where you have people who are actually paying more regularly in smaller amounts, but incrementally for the benefit that they receive from improvements to parklands. I wanted to get your thoughts on how something like that might work.

EAMON WATERFORD: It is probably outside of the scope of the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act, but something that we're very supportive of. The Committee has long been advocates of a broad-based land tax as a replacement for stamp duty, which would deliver benefits that are—we'd be here all day if we talked about the benefits of that. But undoubtedly, one of the ones would be that it allows you to have some sort of hypothecation of upgrades that happen within a parkland for those local communities whose land values increase

as a result of that, because they live nearby and for some of that to be captured through a land tax that goes back into funding those investments.

ESTELLE GRECH: You've sort of shaken a memory from the depths of my brain, and I'll have to take this on notice to make sure I give you an accurate thing, but I do recall we were looking at a model where—I think it was in the UK—everyone was charged, like, \$1 a year, and that funded the parklands. So it could be an option to think about. Obviously, we're in a cost-of-living crisis, so we need to take things like that very seriously. But I think it was attached to the water bill, or something like that. The secret sauce to making it successful would be, how do you make sure Treasury doesn't take it and it actually goes into the parklands?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Totally. And I think I would suggest that it is within the purview of the Act, because you've still got an entity that can actually make proposals to Government to improve, obviously, the administration of the parklands, and this could be a mechanism.

EAMON WATERFORD: Yes. There are a bunch of models in the US that that use essentially bounded, geographically-bounded tax increment financing, where essentially it's a land tax that has a boundary around a particular asset that you want to invest in. The money is lent up-front to the improvements—it's typically used for train lines and for motorways and the like, but there's no reason that open space couldn't also be a part of this, and that everybody is clear in saying that basically you get the upgrade straightaway and it will be paid off over the next 30 years through an increment on your—I think it's your council rates, or it depends on which level of government. I mean, it would be certainly something that, if this Committee was interested in making a recommendation around alternative financing models to support the upgrades to parks through tax increment financing, land tax—these value capture more broadly, I suppose, then that's fantastic. But that would obviously involve changes to Acts beyond just the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act.

The CHAIR: That might be our next inquiry!

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: The Act, in its current form, focuses on maintaining or enhancing existing parklands. Do you see there to be room within the Act to potentially be amended for it to have a role in also identifying areas of need for future parklands, and where opportunities for future parklands as part of the Greater Sydney Parklands could be?

Going to your point about spatial inequality, it's not just a funding issue; it's an actual provision of space issue. Estelle, if you can talk about it, was there ever any consideration in the Act that the Trust could actually have a role in identifying opportunities for future parklands?

ESTELLE GRECH: There is provision in the Act that it has to report on two particular parks. I remember Mr Latham made that amendment. One of the ideas was actually really good, which is why the Government accepted it at the time. It was to look at the Chipping Norton Lake area as a potential future regional park. It's at the intersection of three councils. It's along the beautiful Georges River. It's kind of forgotten about because of what happens when you get to the edges of three councils. No-one really cares about them that much or as much as they should. So there's definitely that ability to do it.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: But a broader kind of role or remit?

ESTELLE GRECH: I was looking at paragraph (d) of the objects of the Act, which is to advocate for a long-term vision to achieve the outcome of quality parklands across Greater Sydney, particularly connectivity of green corridors. I'm surprised because, with my previous hat on, I thought we put that in there. If it's not in there, definitely—

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: The language seems to be very focused on maintaining and enhancing a long-term vision, without a specific focus on where there are opportunities and need for future parklands.

EAMON WATERFORD: It's a really interesting thought. Obviously you want that to be happening. Within government someone should be responsible for identifying the need and assessing an audit of need, and then having the power to direct and seek funding to do that. If you were to change the Act so that the Trust would be the agency responsible for that, you'd want to make sure that it brought departments into that conversation. I'm often a little bit nervous about the idea of Government policy being owned by independent agencies, because it means that they're not as responsive to Government priorities at a particular time.

The Government is elected with a mandate and they should be able to direct it to some extent. But it does also mean that sometimes Government can ignore them. Unless there is some level of legislative responsibility for Government to respond to or to take direction from an independent agency, what you often end up having is a really great report that says, "Here's the dire need for the thing," which is ultimately never published or is published and ignored. You want to make sure that it's not just, "Hey, you guys should look at this," without any hooks dug into government to actually connect it into government policymaking and decision-making.

ESTELLE GRECH: My advice would be if you're looking into the blue-green grid committee and the way that governance structure could work, potentially add as another focus area to also identify future opportunities. That's a way that you are bringing together multi-stakeholders to work with the Parklands on that. But, again, it loops back to how it would be great to expand the parklands but, without that sustainable funding stream, it's probably not sustainable. It's about getting those two components right together.

EAMON WATERFORD: It would actually be an important caveat as well to say that maybe the Trust should be responsible for identifying opportunities for new parklands and opportunities for funding to support the investment, particularly the up-front capital investment but then also the ongoing maintenance investment required to maintain that park.

The CHAIR: I think we're giving you an early mark. Thank you, that was really interesting and very valuable. You'll be provided with a copy of the transcript of your evidence for corrections. Committee staff will also email any questions taken on notice from today and any supplementary questions from the Committee.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

Mr LAURIE JOHNSON, Program Manager, Public Domain Strategy, City of Sydney, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: I welcome our next witness. Thank you for appearing before the Committee today to give evidence. Please note that committee staff will be taking photos and videos during the hearing. The photos and videos may be used for social media and public engagement purposes on the Legislative Assembly social media pages and websites. Please inform the committee staff if you object to having photos and videos taken. Before we start, do you have any questions about the hearing process?

LAURIE JOHNSON: No, Chair.

The CHAIR: Would you like to make a short opening statement before we begin questions?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Yes. Thank you for the opportunity to address the joint select committee inquiry on the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act. The creation of the Greater Sydney Parklands agency by the New South Wales Government is welcome recognition of the importance of improving and expanding public parks and green spaces to support the sustainable growth of Sydney and the health and wellbeing of its people. In summary, it's considered that the policy objectives of the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act remain valid. The terms of the Act remain appropriate for securing those objectives, in particular for balancing a city-wide strategic vision for the parklands as well as providing local input and representation for each park.

The legislation provides clarity on governance, community participation and transparency of decision-making for the ongoing management, use and protection of our valuable public spaces. As outlined in the city's submission, outcomes and recommendations from this inquiry must not result in any reduction or weakening of the Trust's functions, in particular for open space strategic planning, community representation and involvement, and leasing requirements. Sydney's growing population and density make it critical that metropolitan-wide open space and recreation facility planning is undertaken to ensure a coordinated delivery of new parklands and facilities. The GSPT is well placed to take on this role and promote open space networks across Sydney as well as provide a consolidated voice to advocate the importance of parklands within government.

At the local level, the community trustee boards provide a mechanism and forum to ensure local communities continue to play a significant role in the management of their parklands. In addition, the relationship between councils and the GSPT also ensures consideration of local knowledge, community priorities and issues. Finally, the Government needs to commit to long-term appropriate recurrent funding for the GSPT, including Centennial Park, given that these parklands are critical infrastructure to support the Government's metropolitan growth and objectives for housing. In conclusion, the City supports the objectives of the Act and the broader work of the Greater Sydney Parklands in the challenge to meet the public space needs of a growing city. Thank you.

Mr MARK HODGES: You indicated that the Government should provide long-term recurrent funding for central parklands. Have you got any idea how you believe that should be achieved?

LAURIE JOHNSON: It's a case of that balance between how much the parklands have got to be self-funding and under pressure from commercial activities to provide that funding to manage the parklands asset, as opposed to what might be provided by the Government to support the operations of the parklands. I guess it's

the view that the parklands are critical infrastructure to support the growth of Sydney. There's value in that, to be supported with appropriate funding.

Mr MARK HODGES: It might be out of your expertise, or you might not want to answer it, but do you have any idea what you believe should be the mix between this self-funding model and government providing funding?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Have to take that on notice.

Mr MARK HODGES: I look forward to receiving your response on that.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: Thanks very much for appearing today. I just have a couple of questions. The city has a number of parks that they operate. They are smaller parks than the larger parks that are part of the Greater Sydney Parklands. Could you talk about the importance of the larger parks in terms of growing density?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Yes. Large parks are a very important part of an overall open space network that includes small parks, medium-size parks and large parks. You've got to have that mix. You have to create a quality network for where people live. Certainly, a large park does provide a counterpoint to higher density living, allowing a larger space for people to get lost and immerse themselves in a large green space. A larger park, given its size, can accommodate a whole range and variety of different recreational facilities within a large space, particularly long pathway networks for running, walking and cycling. There are opportunities for people to enjoy nature, larger playgrounds that become key destinations for large catchment, picnic areas and, generally, just the ability to accommodate a large number of people but able to spread out within that park area.

Large parks can also accommodate more trees, and definitely have that environmental cooling effect and include opportunity to establish more habitat and biodiversity that you can't get with a smaller pocket park. Smaller parks do have their important role. Certainly, they provide that close to home, to get out of your apartment, have a short stay, get a park experience, let the kids play, get some fresh air and enjoy the sunshine. The high visitation rates that you see for Centennial Parklands and other metropolitan parks like at Sydney Olympic Park—when you see those rates, shows people do vote with their feet. It points to the value and drawcard that people do place on a larger park for their recreation park experience. The City's largest park, which is Sydney Park out at Alexandria, is about 40 hectares. The activity that's in that park has generated over time, and it's very commensurate with the density that's happened over a number of years nearby that park.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: In terms of that ecosystem of parks you talk about of small, medium and large—with large being largely Greater Sydney Parklands parks like Moore Park and Centennial Park—does this city interact with the Trust? What is the city's role in any decision-making that the Trust may have? How does that communication go, and how does it work?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Under the Act, through the community trustee boards, there's that conduit of communication through that board on the Trust's activities. Also, at an officer level, between park professionals, particularly on proposals that might be happening within the parklands and vice versa in the city, it does get that opportunity to ensure coordination of what that passive and recreational mix is within that area, as well as a lot of learning back and forth between officers on the challenges of operating parklands in high density areas.

The CHAIR: Could I ask—just following up because I think it's an important question—is there an agreed process in relation to it? I see that you can get pieces of paper or websites or whatever that gets one, two, three, four, five. One, say hello, two, three—it goes through the whole process in great detail and says what you need to consult about. Is there such a thing in relation to the City of Sydney and its involvement with trusts when they're looking at matters relevant to the parkland estate?

LAURIE JOHNSON: With the City of Sydney we have a six-monthly check-in between our CEO of the city and the CEO of the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust. That meeting has also officers in attendance to discuss an agenda, the latest goings-on and have information sharing at that level. I guess there's also those informal—in terms of just officer level about just catching up about what's happening in each other's patch at that more informal level. Then certainly at the community trustee board level where there's, I guess, that more formal process of dialogue between the elected representative from the city on that board about the activities of the Trust.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: My next question's about the blue-green grid and the importance of that to the City of Sydney.

LAURIE JOHNSON: I guess at the metropolitan level, the blue-green grid, with its ambition for a connected web of green corridors across metropolitan Sydney, is a great vision. It has both environmental benefits and recreational parkland benefits, particularly environmentally. These include the opportunity to expand urban canopy, build on existing biodiversity within those corridors, get water-sensitive urban design, good water treatment, clean water quality outcomes and cooler environments within those corridors. Then, from a recreation

point of view, having that extensive network or potentially extensive network of pathways across Sydney, both as a recreational resource to run, cycle and walk around, as well as connecting people to key destination parks. With that connectivity, it can then increase the catchment of how people might be able to access some key parks across metropolitan Sydney.

Certainly in the City of Sydney area, areas where they have great opportunity to progress that is along Alexandra Canal and some of the other waterways within the city. That has great potential then to connect both to Tempe parklands and then to the Cooks River system and then beyond to the Homebush Sydney Olympic Park. So it can be the ambitions and the vision there to really progress and act on it. It would be a fantastic outcome to get people recreational opportunities beyond their own little world where they live and to really explore metropolitan Sydney in a fantastic way.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: I think of the Green Square area and some of the increased population that's occurring in Sydney. How important is it for a global city that we properly maintain, enhance and increase the parklands, including the parkland estate that is taken care of by the Greater Sydney Parklands?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Vitally important. The build-out population for Green Square will be close to 65,000 people, as well as a large worker population. The density there will be upwards to 22,000 people per square kilometre. Combined with neighbouring areas, particularly Redfern Waterloo, say with Waterloo south and what's happening now in Waterloo metro and what will probably be further density in those areas over the coming years, collectively there's going to be huge growth in those areas. So the provision of parklands coming out of some of those planning proposals will be—Waterloo south will be a two-hectare park, so it's a reasonable park. But for that population you'll still need to have access to larger parks and a whole network of parks to support that population. With the city's park network, of all the public open space within the city LGA, we manage 50 per cent of that, so it's vitally important that we have a relationship to other public agencies. Also to have a coordinated approach to that open space provision and management is very important.

Mr MARK HODGES: You spoke about there being—I think you said every six months—the CEO of the Trust and the CEO of council at the meeting. What about in respect of the community trustee boards? Do you have meetings with them?

LAURIE JOHNSON: I don't personally, no.

Mr MARK HODGES: Does anyone from council?

LAURIE JOHNSON: There's a member—elected representative on that board.

Mr MARK HODGES: Do you know how often the community trustee board meets in respect of the Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust?

LAURIE JOHNSON: I couldn't give you an answer on that, no.

Mr MARK HODGES: Do you have any involvement in submitting questions or what you require of the community trustee board?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Sometimes there might be agenda items where there might be a request to give some further information from the City's perspective to support the agenda.

Mr MARK HODGES: Do you have any difficulty dealing with the community trustee board?

LAURIE JOHNSON: I've had no direct relationship to them.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm curious about this line in your submission where you say that the City supports the creation of funding models that remove the need for commercialisation of valuable parklands, especially Moore Park. I presume you're referring to the golf course there? Is that correct?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Broadly, it's more about what the element, or what the proposed commercialisation—the golf course is one activity there. That's a recreational activity. There has been, in the past, other proposals that were beyond a recreational format. As a general principle, it's coming down to the intensity of what might be proposed from a commercial perspective across all the public parklands.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you wouldn't characterise the golf course there as a functionally commercial enterprise only? It does have recreational value?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Golf is a recreational activity.

The CHAIR: I know you've touched on this already, but could you please elaborate on your comment on page 2 of your submission, that the Trust role could be expanded to allow it to work in partnership with local councils to plan and increase Sydney's open space network?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Yes. That was alluding to—in terms of the legislation—having more formal channels of communication between neighbouring councils beyond what would happen through the community trustee boards. So it's how to make that more formal and to have some extent about what that communication is.

The CHAIR: Have you any suggestions about how that more formal communication might work or what would need to change?

LAURIE JOHNSON: It could be at different levels, particularly at the park professional level, or officer level. It's sometimes very helpful to have either quarterly or six-monthly updates on information sharing and particularly on either planning aspects of what's happening in parklands or facility provision. It really helps to know what terms of facility provision, particularly on active sport allocation—what's happening on that allocation front—that we're not doubling up, or having a good diversity of access for different sporting groups across the whole network, in combination with what the Greater Sydney Parklands are offering.

The CHAIR: Following on from that, I know that for most of us who've been involved in local government over the years, it makes sense to try and look at the role that local government has in relation to the Trust. How could the Trust or community trustee boards also engage more proactively with communities to inform the development of management plans for the parklands estate?

LAURIE JOHNSON: The starting point of that would be the development of those plans of management and the process that will be undertaken to develop those plans of management. Plans of management are vitally important to give a strategic framework on how lands are managed and leasing and licensing and extent of commercialisation. It does offer that transparency to a community, one involved in that process. Once that document is endorsed or adopted, it's published for everyone to see. These are basically the guardrails on how parklands are managed, for this particular park, through this plan of management.

The CHAIR: What's limiting it at the moment? Why isn't that happening now?

LAURIE JOHNSON: The formal structures might not be there.

The CHAIR: For how the—

LAURIE JOHNSON: For how that dialogue might happen.

The CHAIR: If someone who was on one of the community trustee boards wishes to engage in that, can they do that at the moment?

LAURIE JOHNSON: I'm not too sure of the terms of reference of the trustee board in terms of their participation on that board.

The CHAIR: But your view is that that's not occurring at the moment.

LAURIE JOHNSON: They have participation on the board, in terms of the views that are put from the board to the Greater Sydney Parklands on various issues, so they're the representatives at that forum.

The CHAIR: Going to the City of Sydney, for example. Again, you've touched on a number of these. I'm just trying to dig a little bit deeper. Is the City of Sydney required to consult the Trust when exercising planning powers if the land is adjacent to the parklands estate?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Under the Act, there were issues about whether any proposal within the City of Sydney would cause overshadowing to the parklands, so there needs to be an obligation of consultation on that front. That's good practice to see those boundaries and interfaces between the parklands and any proposal that might be happening. It would be a good practice to check in with the GSP.

The CHAIR: But is there an obligation in relation to the planning process?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Under the planning process, that proposal would be notified and the GSP, as a neighbour, would be notified.

The CHAIR: What about something other than overshadowing?

LAURIE JOHNSON: As I say, like any planning proposal, we'd be notified under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act as practice.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: Do you see room to formalise some of those communication processes—things like establishing an MOU between councils and the Greater Sydney Parklands?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Yes, at my level it would be very helpful because it's just good practice to do that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Johnson, do you believe that the way in which the Trust is currently operating is meeting community expectations and the objects of the Act generally?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Under the Act, in terms of the community having a community engagement framework there to give how engagement is undertaken—as well as the community trustee boards—at least under the Act, it does provide a good structure and mechanism for good consultation to communities. How effective that is, I suppose that would have to be a question from a community member on how that's operating in terms of that flow of information or how that dialogue is conducted by the GSP. But, certainly, the community trustee boards seem to be a good forum, as a starting point, to hear about a lot of the issues, and for the city's representative to furnish a lot of community views on particular issues through that forum.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's in terms of community expectations. What about in terms of the growth of the Greater Sydney Parklands assets? I can see that the corporate plan for the Greater Sydney Parklands does have a little bit in there about growth, but it seems to—and this comes down to questions around the blue-green grid as well. What are your views around whether that aspect of it has the appropriate balance in terms of the overall task and job, I suppose, of the Trust at the moment?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Yes, the objects of the Act certainly have that strategic planning vision and remit for the GSP to undertake, but I can see that probably hasn't been advanced to us to a big degree. At my level, I can understand that a lot of the people at the GSP would be too under the pump on daily issues to do with the parklands under their remit to basically throw the eye further afield and deal with broader metropolitan issues. That could potentially be brought down to resourcing, and to give it the focus that it does require at that broader strategic level. They have a huge portfolio to manage, and there would be a myriad of issues across the whole parkland within their parkland network to account for. I suspect—and I'm sure the CEO of the GSP might follow up on this—that to have the headspace then to undertake that broader metropolitan focus could be challenging for them.

The CHAIR: In terms of our actual terms of reference, are there any of the policy objectives in the Act that you think need to be altered or changed, or are you still comfortable with them?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Yes, we're still comfortable with it. There was a lot of consultation in the development from the white paper and the initial inquiry on the development of the Act, and I guess the key issue was getting that balance between metropolitan planning and local community representation. We feel that within the objects and the terms of the Act, they're there, and I guess it comes down then to the operation of them.

The CHAIR: In terms of the operations, then, which is my second question, is there anything that you think needs reform—in terms of how it's working?

LAURIE JOHNSON: I'd like to take that on notice, because there might be just a bit more of a wider view at the city on that one.

The CHAIR: I'd be very interested, given your experiences of how it's actually working, if you're comfortable with the terms of reference or if there are—even if they're just tweaks. That would be valuable.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: One of the criticisms of the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act and some of the activities there is the commercial activities and the way in which the Act facilitates and regulates leases, hospitality offerings and commercial offerings onsite. That, indeed, becomes quite a funding stream for those parklands. That's different to the City of Sydney, isn't it? In terms of the City of Sydney parklands, there's a great deal of recurrent funding that comes directly from council for those parklands versus commercial activities to fund them.

LAURIE JOHNSON: Yes. In council speak, there's operational funding to do the day-to-day operations and management of our parklands, and then we have a capital works program to provide and upgrade our facilities within those parklands. And certainly there is the element of other events or a wedding or all the different activities.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: Some cafes or kiosks?

LAURIE JOHNSON: Yes, that fees and charges are charged, but, I suspect, in terms of the overall quantum of that, it's not totally reliant on that to keep the operation going. That's all.

The CHAIR: Further questions? Being none, we'd like to say thank you for appearing before us today. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript of your evidence for corrections. Committee staff will also email any questions taken on notice from today and any supplementary questions from the Committee.

(The witness withdrew.)

Ms CHRISTINE HAY, Landscape Architect Heritage Consultant, Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I welcome our next witness. Would you like to make a short opening statement before we begin questions?

CHRISTINE HAY: Thank you to the Chair and the members of the select committee for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, also referred to as AILA. AILA acknowledges the work of the Trust under the Act, and we support the process of the review and its considerations of the select Parliament committee to meet the public needs for open space. Our main three points are: These parklands, the five iconic parklands of the Greater Sydney Parklands, are the result of the community championing their protection. They also provide significant evidence of the magnitude of foresight of government, concerning the relationship between parks, the natural domain, cultural values and the health of the general population. Each of these parklands has heritage protections.

Despite these protections, the Greater Sydney Parklands Act does little to guide the application of these protections as per the objects of the Act. This is my third point: Conservation management plans are the recommended best practice framework for managing heritage places—in this case, significant cultural landscapes. This management tool provides an accepted process that demonstrates cumulative care of parklands. This vital management tool should be incorporated into the Act.

Mrs SALLY QUINNELL: Thank you for being here today and for your submission. In your submission you speak about external bodies of work such as the Burra Charter of 2013, the Heritage Act 1977 and the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. Could you please expand a little bit further on how incorporating those pieces of documentation would enhance the current piece of legislation that we're working through?

CHRISTINE HAY: Yes. The referencing of other Acts into Acts is not uncommon, and it helps bolster the significance or management of the places. It helps give those who are managing the place further references to use for how to manage the place. For instance, the Heritage Act outlines all the different processes for the management of heritage places. It should be a basic requirement in the preliminaries to have those Acts referred to.

Mrs SALLY QUINNELL: I want to talk about conservation management plans. I want to unpick how you foresee that CMPs would improve the management of the parklands and what they would bring to that overall management.

CHRISTINE HAY: Most of the parklands have conservation management plans, and that's very good. But conservation management plans are living documents. They need to not sit on the shelf. They need to be used by the management structure or the people who are looking after the park. For instance, if a plan is out of date—management plans are often renewed every 10 years as a rule of thumb, but it's usually when major change occurs. That's often a trigger for when they should be reviewed. But if they just sit there and they're not updated for decades, then the new research, information and understandings about the place—it may mean that it's not current. It's really important that CMPs have a currency. That's one base understanding about CMPs.

CMPs are essentially an investigation. They investigate documentary evidence and physical evidence, and they engage with the community. They bring forward all the different aspects that are important to understanding a place. The Burra Charter, which is an ICOMOS Australia document, is the philosophy that underpins the conservation management process. As I've mentioned—as we all know—these places are highly significant cultural landscapes. The beginning process of managing them should be from that heritage framework, which is a conservation management plan. A conservation management plan looks at all different aspects, investigates many different aspects of heritage. There are many different aspects. It's a multi-disciplinary document so there may be architectural conservation, certainly landscape heritage conservation, archaeology and interpretation. There are many, many different aspects that it brings together, so it's a holistic document. From that, and comparing it, you would compare other sites to enrich your understanding of it. The findings and discoveries that come from the CMP are outlined under its policies.

Mrs SALLY QUINNELL: Basically you're saying we should, in the Act, be listing the references that are used in the CMP research to then apply for that policy?

CHRISTINE HAY: In the Act, it refers to plans of management so, above that, conservation management plans inform plans of management. If you have a plan of management first, it's the cart before the horse. In the Act, the CMP outline should be first, and then followed by the plan of management outline. At the moment it just has the plan of management.

Mrs SALLY QUINNELL: Would you envisage that there would be a CMP for the entirety of the Greater Sydney Parklands and then each individual parkland would have its own CMP?

CHRISTINE HAY: That is a possibility. I think that that's a strategic way to understand all of the parklands, all their needs and requirements and how they relate. They all tell different stories, so to understand them broadly in that way and tell the story, I think it would help draw out for those who are managing the place, how they can brand the different places and how they can attract different types of audiences to those places.

Mrs SALLY QUINNELL: What makes them unique.

Ms DONNA DAVIS: Thank you for being here this afternoon to be part of the inquiry. I note that you have mentioned the lease issue in your submission. Some stakeholders have supported the ability to grant leases with terms longer than 10 years. Can you expand on the reasons why you support the current arrangement of a 10-year limit on licences?

CHRISTINE HAY: It's mainly from a heritage point of view. I think that 10 years is a relatively long time and it is a good point to then review, not just what the particular lessee is—their current situation—but what impacts there may be on the heritage values of the place, or perhaps what opportunities there are to contribute to the heritage values of the place. I think having really long leases, you lose that ability—a point of contact—to review impacts on heritage values.

Ms DONNA DAVIS: How well do you believe the Act is working to protect and enhance First Nations cultural heritage values? I know in Parramatta Park it's slightly different because it is a World Heritage park, so there are also other aspects around the heritage preservation and management of First Nations history as well. Could you just elaborate on that, in terms of all the Greater Sydney parklands?

CHRISTINE HAY: Yes. Thank you for the question. I'll give a little bit of background to myself. Yes, I'm an AILA member and I hold a Master of Heritage Conservation and I'm a registered landscape architect, but I've also worked in both government and private sectors, including as a senior officer at Heritage NSW, where I played a key role in reviewing conservation management plans. With your question, in terms of First Nations, to answer that question, I would look at each of the existing conservation management plans, and I'd do an audit and see what the recommendations and actions are, in this case, regarding First Nations values—how they're being understood or interpreted. That's how I would approach that question. But I cannot answer it without that investigation side.

Ms DONNA DAVIS: That's okay. If there's something else that you'd like to add, I'm sure we'd be happy to have that after. Earlier this morning, we were also talking about, particularly in Parramatta, the significance of the river. We know how significant Parramatta River is to First Nations and the importance of preserving that. Management of the river is divided into different agencies at different points, even in the areas on either side of Parramatta Park. Do you have any thoughts about the management of Parramatta River in terms of First Nations as well? It may be a question you might like to take on notice.

CHRISTINE HAY: Thank you for the question. I have looked at the draft CMP plan of management for Parramatta Park, and it does identify eight precincts, which includes the river. I can't tell you from my overview how well it investigates or supports First Nations values. I would have to look into that further. But at the moment there is a structure from an existing CMP plan of management that actually divides the whole park, as I think I've mentioned, into eight areas. The river is one area. There's a statement of significance there. There's a list of policies. How well that's supported by the CMP is questionable, in my view, but, nonetheless, it is there.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: Thank you very much for appearing before us today. In your submission, you talk about the Act defining inappropriate developments which could have impacts on parkland. Could you talk to us about how you would define inappropriate developments, or the broad scope that should be considered in relation to that?

CHRISTINE HAY: I would look to the CMP for if it's a particular parkland or if it's an umbrella CMP. I would go to that and I would—in a CMP, there's a section, normally, which outlines opportunities and constraints. If it is a particular place—for instance, Callan Park—I would review what the constraints are. In that, it might be that some of the constraints relate to, for instance, sporting fields and, as I've mentioned in the submission, artificial grass. The values of many of these parklands are that they're natural and that many of them, in this instance, are adjacent to waterways. I think I'm getting off track here.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: In terms of inappropriate development, would you suggest that maybe a way to define that would be to talk about something that—it would be a development that is in conflict with the plan of management?

CHRISTINE HAY: In conflict with the conservation management plan?

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: Sorry, yes.

CHRISTINE HAY: Often in conservation management plans, once the investigation has come to an end, then there are summaries and there are often diagrammatic summaries, where they may outline areas of exceptional value, high value, moderate value and intrusive value. It is really useful. They can be very useful diagrams. If, for instance, there is a proposed change to one of the parklands and it's in an area of exceptional value, you could argue that that's not a good location for that particular element. But if it's in a moderate area, then you would look at what the policies are for moderate development. Many of the questions about managing parklands that are significant cultural landscapes can be dealt with by these particular documents and really can assist management.

The CHAIR: We met with a number of the community trustee boards early on in this hearing. I was wondering, in your view, how well do you think the Trust and also the community trustee boards are currently engaging with and consulting the public? Are they doing it well? Are they constrained? Are they not doing it at all? What's your view?

CHRISTINE HAY: My view is just based on the annual reports which I've looked into, just read through them, and I'm mainly looking to see what measure there is of the cumulative care of the parklands. These documents are available to the public. At the moment, even though for instance, with the Parramatta Park Trust it mentions the CMP and the plan of management, I can't see how they're utilising the very good work of a document like this—a very expensive piece of work, no doubt—and it being reflected in the annual report.

The whole idea, as I mentioned before, is that CMPs are living documents. At the back of the document, after all the investigation, the findings and discoveries, you have a list of actions, which is something that can be followed through and management can progressively move through and tick off. I can't see that reflected—that very good heritage management process—in the annual report.

The CHAIR: Do you think that there needs to be developed some statutory mechanisms that would oblige, require, support and assist that community involvement that we've been talking about?

CHRISTINE HAY: Yes.

The CHAIR: Or does it rely on goodwill?

CHRISTINE HAY: No. As you can see from the submission, for good management of landscape heritage, particularly significant cultural landscapes such as the parklands, we need robust conservation management plans and those plans are informed by community as well. Part of the process is engaging with the different communities that value the place. Those views can be fed through and reflect in the policies and the outcomes. Why it's important—I mentioned they're living documents so, yes, they need to be reviewed over time because the communities and their values and thoughts may change. We don't know, so it's not just doing one CMP and then that's it. You, we need to keep the process moving.

The CHAIR: Should there be statutory mechanisms as opposed to aspirational statements?

CHRISTINE HAY: I think that the process where it's outlined here—plans of management that are above that—it could mention the CMPs. There should be an umbrella CMP that has a strategic approach to management of the heritage values, particularly of the landscape heritage values of the place, and that each parkland should have its own living CMP that then would inform the plans of management. Heritage New South Wales have numerous documents on their website about how to write CMPs and how to checklist for CMPs. There's a lot of support, and it's recommended as best practice for managing heritage. This is what we have. The Greater Sydney Parklands are heritage places—significant heritage, landscape heritage places.

Mr MARK HODGES: You indicate that the CMPs are living documents, and they need to be updated. Do you have any idea as to how often you believe they would need to be updated?

CHRISTINE HAY: As a rule of thumb, you would consider an update maybe every 10 years. You would consider it. Whether it is necessary, that's another point. You would not just let it sit in the backwater. You would consider it. It also may be triggered by major change that may be occurring adjacent or suggested within the parklands. The actions and the recommendations at the back of the CMP, which is the juice of the CMP—that's what you really want to get. That's what the CMP is about, to get that outline of appropriate actions for next steps. Once they've gone through, I would start thinking, "Well, do we need a review?" It's an open question.

Mr MARK HODGES: Somebody could turn around and say, "Well, we've considered it and it's not worth reviewing." Is there some prescription that you would say would trigger a review?

CHRISTINE HAY: I would say that—which is what I've got in here—every five to 10 years consider a review to ensure currency.

The CHAIR: Thank you for appearing before us today. You'll be provided with a copy of the transcript of your evidence for corrections. Committee. staff will also email any questions taken on notice from today, and any supplementary questions from the Committee. We really appreciate your expertise. Thank you very much for appearing before us today.

CHRISTINE HAY: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the Committee.

(The witness withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

Mr JEFF ANGEL, Director, Total Environment Centre, affirmed and examined

Mr MARTIN MANSFIELD, Conservation Officer, Cumberland Bird Observers Club, affirmed and examined

Mr STUART READ, Chair, Sydney Branch, Australian Garden History Society, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I welcome our next witnesses. Thank you for appearing before the Committee today to give evidence. Please note the Committee staff will be taking photos and videos during the hearing. The photos and videos may be used for social media and public engagement purposes on the Legislative Assembly social media pages and websites. Please inform Committee staff if you object to having photos and videos taken. Before we start, can I ask either of you gentlemen who are present if you have any questions about the hearing process?

JEFF ANGEL: No.

MARTIN MANSFIELD: No.

The CHAIR: Would you like to make a short opening statement before we begin questions?

JEFF ANGEL: I'd like to very briefly address two fundamental areas of interest to the Total Environment Centre. We've had a very long history in protecting existing bushland and urban parks and expanding that, and are currently very focused on the blue-green grid for Sydney. It's a very important asset for present and future generations, and includes a whole range of biodiversity, climate change and urban heat benefits to people. Our submission largely covers the failure by the legislation and the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust to do anything on the blue-green grid. It's very clear in the objects of the legislation and in other aspects of the legislation that there is an ambition to develop green corridors and interconnected green spaces. You'll see in our submission that the behaviour of the agency has been to remove those objectives, in effect, by not activating them, and there quite clearly has been a lack of resources allocated by the Government or internally in the agency to pursue the blue-green grid.

The second aspect of our submission, or our oral submission today, is in response to the New South Wales Government's submission. Very briefly, it is clearly seeking to reverse some of the critical amendments that were passed in the legislation when it went first through Parliament. It is intending to privatise public parklands through long-term leases and licences, and it's also intending to reduce accountability by further including ministerial discretion. Equally worryingly is that it intends to allow the clearing of the natural environment through this absurd phrase that they've put in their submission about "no net loss of natural environment" in the parkland's estate. What an astoundingly vague and disreputable phrase to put in legislation. Finally, the issues around privatisation and reducing accountability do open, as I'm sure ICAC might advise, to corruption. That's the reason there is greater transparency, greater accountability and more open tendering in this legislation than previously.

MARTIN MANSFIELD: Firstly, I wish to express the thanks of Cumberland Bird Observers Club for the opportunity to appear before you today. You've probably already done this, but if you haven't ever really looked closely at a bird, you should do it sometime. Take a magpie, for example. We sometimes think of magpies as a fairly ordinary bird that we see around the place, but you watch as it cocks its head to the side to listen for worms in the ground and as it then quickly jabs its beak into the ground and comes up with a worm that it's just heard. Watch the obvious care and concern it has for its young. And you can listen to its beautiful song. When you do this, you realise that birds are not just a random part of the environment but they're an integral part of it, a really special part of it.

That's the context for our Cumberland Bird Observers Club submission to this inquiry. It's not about ensuring that we have birds that we can add to our list of birds that we've seen. It's about the respect that we have for these special creatures that share this planet with us. And this respect means that we need to ensure that they have the conditions they need not just to survive but to thrive. In particular, they need sufficient habitat to live in

and a diversity of habitats for the different types of birds. And, of course, bushland is also good for us humans. Sydney parklands are some of the most significant and substantial areas of open green space and bushland in the Greater Sydney region, and in Western Sydney Parklands, there are important remnants of Cumberland Plain Woodland.

In 2024 a total of 131 species of birds were recorded on the BirdLife Australia database in one or more of the Sydney parklands. Some 71 species were seen in Centennial Parklands, 24 in Callan Park, 31 in Parramatta Park, and 116 in Western Sydney Parklands, and there are, of course, others also in Fernhill Estate. Six of these species are listed as vulnerable under the New South Wales Biodiversity Conservation Act, and, sadly, some species have already disappeared—for example, the powerful owl and the black bittern—from Western Sydney Parklands. It's noticeable that a lot more species were seen in 2024 in Centennial and Western Sydney Parklands, and these are the two parklands where there is more remnant vegetation and also more diverse vegetation, and not just open grassy areas. The other two parklands mainly have open space and the vegetation is less diverse. So this is why our submission to the inquiry is so insistent that the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Act needs to explicitly state the objective of ensuring the retention of existing vegetation in the parklands for which it is responsible.

The CHAIR: Mr Read, do you have a short opening statement before we proceed to questions?

STUART READ: None. Thank you.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: My question is to Mr Angel, and thank you for joining us today. You reference the failure to establish or prioritise the blue-green grid. In the legislation, it's envisaged that it's important, part of the debate—put it in the legislation in terms of a committee to look at it and other processes. The options we have are to amend it to say "actually must establish this committee and put deadlines around it"—or is the responsibility for the blue-green grid best taken out of the Act and put somewhere else and given a responsibility to another part of government?

Mr MARK HODGES: Or do nothing?

JEFF ANGEL: Well, I'm somewhat torn on this, because we've been talking to the Government about the blue-green grid for some time, and they don't seem to be particularly interested in putting a substantial effort into it. There is a whole lot of ad hoc programs they aggregate together to try and claim they're pushing the blue-green grid, but when you look at the whole metro area, that's not the case. And interconnected landscapes is about the whole metro area going down to the local parks and streets with the tree canopy. The legislation certainly had the ambition to advocate for the blue-green grid, as well as parklands in general.

I don't think the Government has provided sufficient funding to allow it to fulfil that ambition. I suspect that's what was behind one of their early meetings when they discussed the establishment of the committee and decided to do nothing. Maybe you guys can find out why they've been so reluctant to act, whether it's some practical problem of resources or in fact they don't think it's important. I don't think there's any evidence of the agency being an advocate. There's one tiny little reference in one of their reports, and in the Government's submission, that they spoke to somebody about advancing the blue-green grid or advancing parkland.

In the absence of any confidence that the Government will take it more seriously, I don't see much option beyond pushing this agency to pursue it and to be given the seniority and the political influence to advance the blue-green grid. I think the establishment of a committee is quite important, because that would create momentum and have another voice pushing the agency and the Government. In fact, that was part of our proposal for a blue-green grid—a greater emphasis in the Government on a blue-green grid anyway. The really critical issue is why isn't it happening? Make this agency better at doing it, rather than throw it into abeyance.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: That links in to my second question. I'm happy for other witnesses to also share their views on this. The current Act really deals with maintaining or managing existing parklands, enhancing existing parklands and regulating the commercialisation of parklands. It does very little to put in place a process to identify future parklands or enhance the parklands. Is that a role that you feel that the Trust should also be involved in—identifying opportunities and also the need for parklands as we continue to densify and grow in population?

JEFF ANGEL: Yes, I do. The chief architect has already produced the plan. The Greater Cities Commission, when it existed, was transferring that vision into local and regional plans. We're now left with a department of planning pretending it's doing the blue-green grid. If there is some alternative agency not subsumed by the department of planning, and the committee is giving it some independent voice, then I think there is stronger likelihood of us advancing this really important concept for Sydney.

MARTIN MANSFIELD: I think it would seem to us that the parklands trust is the logical body to be looking not just at retaining and enhancing what there already is but expanding on that, both in terms of expanding

on the amount of vegetation that's in existing parklands but also adding future parklands. We agree absolutely with the need for connectivity. To give an example, you might think it's a bit strange that birds need connectivity of vegetation because they can fly. But the regent honeyeater is critically endangered. It starts in Victoria and makes its way slowly north through Western Sydney on its way up to the Central Coast and further north. It requires vegetation such as swamp mahogany to feed on the flowers. For lots of different species of birds, they need that connectivity as well. And the connectivity needs to be wide enough. There's no point having 100 metres, or whatever. It's really got to be substantial amounts of land through which birds and other animals can move. So we would certainly agree very strongly with the concept of connectivity.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Angel, I did just want to get you to expand a little bit on your opening statement where you said that the Trust had, I think your words were, "removed those objectives or not activated those objectives", which sounds almost like a deliberate, intentional thing to do. Could you expand upon that, as to why you're using those words?

JEFF ANGEL: As I say, I don't know if their action is influenced by the lack of resources, signals from government about, "You don't have the influence, don't bother", or, in fact, the culture of the Trust or the agency is not interested in that bigger concept of the blue-green grid. In putting our submission together, we went through all the apparent reporting of the agency—could find very, very little, if at all, in its annual statements. They're not really annual reports—what's on their website. And, I think, as I said earlier, quite early in the agency's history—and they do record a summary of the minutes of their board—there was a discussion about establishing a committee, and they decided not to. Perhaps the Committee here can decipher or interrogate Government as to why this hasn't happened. But, yes, I think there has been a deliberate decision. It's not by omission or anything.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: When you look at the functions of the Trust under the Act, it's very clear that part of that has to be aligned with the Government's vision, obviously, in terms of parkland and open space. But then the Trust also has a function to advocate, which I think you're saying they don't. When you're saying you looked into their annual reports and things, I assume you also had a look at the corporate plan, which I think is a very interesting document for the lack of ambition around the environmental protection and growth of parklands, and that connectivity. It says that one of the critical success factors we need to get right over the next two years—and the only one that deals with expanding the Parklands estate or whatever—is to:

Prepare to expand the Parklands Estate through efficient, effective and scalable operations and to support the New South Wales Government's housing agenda.

What's your thoughts on that, and your overall—I suppose, if you have looked at the corporate plan, what your thoughts are on it?

JEFF ANGEL: I think the corporate plan was just full of generalities. I think it would be very hard to benchmark their behaviour against it. They'll come up with more generalities to defend themselves. The fact is that the Government does have a blue-green grid plan—and it's detailed—prepared by the chief architect. They don't have to do that work. They need to advocate and facilitate its implementation and the expansion of parkland and blue and green corridors connecting them et cetera.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: When you're saying the Government has a blue-green grid plan, has it been consciously adopted by this Labor Government? Or when you're saying that the Government has a plan, is that under the previous Minister and the Coalition Government?

JEFF ANGEL: I'm talking about the previous Minister, Rob Stokes. I'm not talking about Anthony Roberts, who came after him. And if you follow the trail of connection about government open space programs or policies or vision, it actually goes back to the previous Liberal Government. And yes, as I say, we have had intensive discussions with senior officials and the Minister, and we can't get anything definitive out of them except a bunch of excuses.

The CHAIR: Mr Read, I'm looking at your submission on page 1. Could you please expand on your suggestion that conservation management plans should be used to inform the plans of management for the respective parks, and how should these plans be developed?

STUART READ: Only that that's best practice in heritage circles, and Burra Charter I'm sure should be no news to anyone on this Committee. Australia ICOMOS, an international authority, but let's just say national authority on heritage, recommends conservation plans, recommends they be reviewed every five years and recommends they are done to inform management. So, yes, there are plans of management required—fine—but they need to be informed by heritage values and accurate up-to-date heritage information. It's good practice.

Mrs SALLY QUINNELL: Thank you for being here today and your submissions. I learnt a lot. I'd like to talk now about some practical initiatives to improve the interconnectivity of green spaces within the

blue-green grid, and what suggestions you have for some low-hanging fruit, as it were, to improve that connectivity so that we can get an improvement as quickly as possible.

JEFF ANGEL: There are two broad areas. One is the established urban areas. That's quite important to improve the tree canopy along streets and connecting parks. It's obviously very expensive and difficult to buy more land in the very competitive land market in Sydney. Some of the larger parks can have more establishment of natural bushland and connecting it, and there's also a very big opportunity along the various streams or concrete canals or whatever. There are some good examples, for example, along the Cooks River. It's utterly different to the way it used to be 40 or 50 years ago. There are trees and bushland developing et cetera. In regard to newly developed areas, noting that the Government did come to power saying it was going to curb urban sprawl, we have excellent examples in south-western Sydney, where koala corridors are being diminished and the department and the department of transport are either avoiding the establishment of important corridors, such as the one along Mallaty Creek.

When you get to the planning proposal stage, the actual allocating land to various uses, they just seem to be going backwards each time from what is scientifically being recommended as a koala corridor. So obviously we don't think the Government's being vigorous enough in creating corridors. They talk about the 40 per cent canopy target for Sydney. Frankly, all we see are trees coming down. I have no idea how they think they're going to reach the 40 per cent canopy targets. Various councils are trying but, at the same time, we have a range of development policies which cut down existing mature trees.

MARTIN MANSFIELD: Yes, I think what Jeff Angel just said is a really good starting point, and that is to not continue to cut down vegetation that already exists. As he said, there are opportunities for expanding connectivity, but in one way there's no point in expanding connectivity if, at the same time, you're chopping down existing vegetation because you end up with a net zero result. So I think a really good starting point is to stop cutting down what's already growing and then, yes, expand it as we can, and I think there are creative ways in which you can do it. Cooks River is an example. Probably 20 years ago nobody would have believed it could be like it is today, and so it just requires a commitment, a recognition that it's important, not just for nature, but also for humans. There's so much research evidence that it's important for humans' mental and emotional wellbeing, not just to be out on open, grassy areas, but really in bush—the sights and the sounds and the smells. It's good for people's wellbeing. I think governments at all levels, and community organisations, just need to take this seriously. We need to retain what we've got and expand it as best we can. We have the housing problem. We've got to build more houses, but we must come up with more creative ways than we've had at the moment of just chopping trees down and putting houses in there. We must develop more creative ways of doing that.

Mrs SALLY QUINNELL: Do you know of any examples that we could copy? Mr Read, I have seen you, so I will come to you in a second. Do you know of anywhere that's doing that particularly well?

MARTIN MANSFIELD: I'll give that some thought.

Mrs SALLY QUINNELL: Brilliant. Mr Read?

STUART READ: I support generally what Mr Angel and Mr Mansfield are saying. I just would like to flag that this is more than a single issue, managing a park. Some of those open-space areas that might be desirable to link up vegetation might have heritage value as open-space areas—as grazing land, as vistas, deliberately designed vistas. Fernhill at Mulgoa Valley would be a good example of this. Parramatta Park would be a nationally listed—never mind state—nationally and World Heritage listed, where there's been a detailed view study. You can see on approach to Old Government House across what was farmland, what is still grassland. Not every bit of available space should be revegetated just for the single issue of nature. Culture needs to be balanced against nature in here, which is a good example of why a conservation plan should inform a plan of management. Where do you revegetate and why? And where do you not revegetate?

JEFF ANGEL: If you're asking about whether the Government is serious, why on Earth, in their submission, do they call for amending section 21 (1) (b) of the Act to allow the Trust to grant a lease, licence or easement over land within their estate if the lease, licence or easement will not reduce the extent of the net existing natural environment of the parklands estate. That's absurd. They should have an objective of increasing the amount of natural environment, not trading it off for any number of other things.

MARTIN MANSFIELD: I think we'd also say that the concept of net is really problematic. When we try and create net change, often the methods that are used are not really achieving the aim because, for example, sometimes people say, "Okay, you plant seedlings or saplings to replace mature trees. It's a net zero—"

Mrs SALLY QUINNELL: You could almost be describing my electorate. I've got very small trees where there used to be very large trees, because of development.

MARTIN MANSFIELD: Yes, and they're not comparable. They're also sometimes areas that are claimed to be protected already. They're claimed as offsets to, again, create net. We would see that the whole concept of net is really problematic and should not really be in the Act at all. We need to be talking about growth, and not just net achievements. Just back to your earlier question, I did think of one. This is on a much smaller scale. I live at Baulkham Hills, and at Winston Hills—I don't know whether you'd call it an ecovillage. I don't know what exactly you'd call it, but there are about ten units. Before they were constructed, it was just one family's property with lots of vegetation. Pretty much all the vegetation has been retained and, in fact, expanded while an additional nine units have been put in there. That's only a small scale, but it's a really good example of how it can be done. You've gone from one to 10 with no loss—in fact, an increase in vegetation. They've really focused on the whole eco side of things. I think that's a pretty good example. It's directly opposite Winston Hills primary school, if anybody knows that area.

Ms DONNA DAVIS: I think Sally asked a lot of the questions, but I was interested in the comment that was just made about how we don't need to vegetate just for the sake of vegetation when there is a cultural landscape that we need to be protecting as well. I just wanted to know if you would be interested in expanding that in terms of Parramatta Park, because that's something that is often brought up to me—that we haven't invested enough in the understorey at Parramatta Park. And yet maybe there is a good reasoning for that in terms of what's in the CMP.

STUART READ: Two answers to that—in the macro and in the micro. In the micro, I'm very aware revegetators have complaints, and it seems rather longstanding ones, with management and with oversight, about good work being done at ground level in bits and pieces of Parramatta Park to do exactly that: put in understorey, manage native grasses, which are deliberately destroyed or sprayed or scraped or somehow otherwise compromised by others, supposedly, managing the place too. In the micro, it could be better, and communication could be better, and perhaps education could be better. In the macro, Parramatta Park's on the World Heritage List as a Convict Site. I'm sure you're aware of that. Vienna is on the World Heritage List. And in terms of open space connectivity, things like Schönbrunn Palace, the view from central Vienna across designed, axial, grassed, non-vegetated, non-woodland, non-forest, non-blue-green grid—just grid—are kept open, are kept grassed, because that's its World Heritage values, that vista.

The same goes if you're visiting the Governor and your destination is the front door of Government House, Parramatta Park. Yes, there's a park around it, yes, there's chunks of bush, and isn't that wonderful, but, actually, you're going to see the Governor. The message is actually about passage and arrival and grass, so open space matters too. That's all I'm saying. So I think you have to, as a manager, be aware of cultural values as well as natural. I'm not denigrating natural; I'm just saying that one size doesn't fit all and the blue-green grid may or may not be achievable in every heritage listed bit of the parklands.

Ms DONNA DAVIS: So what could we do to strengthen that in the Act?

STUART READ: Get a better conservation plan, make sure it informs the plan of management, and start talking to all involved in delivering it.

Ms DONNA DAVIS: Would you change the structure of who is on the Parramatta community trustee board?

STUART READ: I'm not aware of who's on it.

Ms DONNA DAVIS: Sorry, I mean in terms of expertise, not individuals there.

STUART READ: I think the important thing is that there is heritage expertise at the table and that it doesn't get silenced or it's not even in the room, and it doesn't get downgraded because somebody else has a louder voice or has a direct line to power. It should be evidence-based decision-making. All I'm suggesting is that often cultural heritage is not even in the room or at the table or in the document. You might have documents prepared by an architect, and this is no denigration of architects, but they don't have the expertise in cultural landscapes or vegetation. "Do you have the right expertise?" is a very good question of any committee, but certainly of any conservation plan and any plan of management. Is it single-issue only? Is it delivering on the heritage values as recognised elsewhere? They're very useful questions to keep asking.

Mrs SALLY QUINNELL: Mr Angel, in your submission you speak about creating a koala blue-green belt in Western Sydney:

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.

Can you please expand?

JEFF ANGEL: Well, originally, we became involved in south-west Sydney because of the threat to the koalas. When this debate started, the concept of connecting corridors for koala movement wasn't even on the table. So to the extent that we've got that on the agenda, that's been quite an important development. There have been independent scientific reports about where corridors should go and how big they are et cetera. What also became obvious was that Sydney, probably unlike any other city in the world, still has potential, because of the remnant bushland that's particularly along the Nepean and the Hawkesbury and the Georges, to have a circumvention—is that the right word?—circumventing Sydney all the way to the coast. That's an incredible natural attribute for a city. It's an incredibly healthy thing for the people living in the city. And of course it's a very notable tourist asset, if you like. We have given the Government various proposals along this line and tried to stop the erosion of that linkage as each big development comes up. But they have yet to endorse that as a vision for Sydney and as something that would make this an even more beautiful city than it is now.

Mrs SALLY QUINNELL: Have you had any interaction with the councils involved?

JEFF ANGEL: We've certainly put it to a range of the councils in that western part of Sydney. I know they support the blue-green grid. They're starting to talk about it more. But, as I said before, the Greater Cities Commission was actually implementing the blue-green grid, which could have easily embodied that koala-whale walk concept also. But, as you know, the Government's got rid of all that. We're now left with a department of planning which I think is increasingly taking a myopic view of how Sydney should look.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: This question is to any of you. It's about the part of the Act which specifies how members of the board are appointed. I wanted to see whether you've got any views on the part where it says that, with the seven appointed members, the board as a whole has experience or skills in the following, and then it lists the various skills and experience—for example, community consultation or environmental and conservation management. For some other boards, the legislation will specify that a particular person must have skills in this, or that there must be an individual with skills in this, or that another person must represent, for example, this particular community. Are there any views on that? Does this do the job or need to be strengthened? This question is for anybody.

STUART READ: Can I answer that? Can I restate that I think cultural heritage matters. It's a bit more precise than that because we're dealing with parkland and not particularly with buildings. A lot of people think heritage equals buildings. It's a waste of time to get a conservation architect who's seduced by the joinery details of Old Government House but is going to be no use at all to comment on open-space matters and parkland matters. I think cultural landscape expertise would be more useful to this Committee than just conservation. I'm not talking about nature conservation but building or fabric conservation. So I'd be a bit more precise.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes. Well, considering the second object is around the Trust facilitating a connection to country for First Nations people, it does seem a bit of an omission to me that those skills and experience doesn't specify cultural heritage and, frankly, doesn't specify that a First Nations person should be appointed to the board. Do you have opinions on that, Mr Read?

STUART READ: I support that wholeheartedly. Perhaps they could be separate people. To have a First Nations person would be wonderful and to have a cultural landscapes person would be wonderful.

JEFF ANGEL: From experience, I've found that a mix of local representation and experts really does work well. It also helps to have an independent chair.

MARTIN MANSFIELD: And I think if there are particular skills and experiences and expertise that are required to be effective on the Trust, then you do need to have some explicit and specific statement of the skills that a particular member, or at least one member on the committee, does have. And certainly, in terms of First Nations, yes, definitely. But I think if you keep it too broad, certain skills and experiences can easily fall through the net. You don't want it too narrow, but I think you do need to have some explicit, specific statements of the skills and experiences needed on the board.

The CHAIR: Any other questions? I think you've convinced us all about—

MARTIN MANSFIELD: Could I just add one thing in terms of Parramatta Park? As you're probably aware, over the last couple of years, a section of it—not a big section, admittedly, but a section of it has been removed and replaced by a car park, which is essentially for commuter users. And it's paid tolls during the week. I guess that's an example of how, bit by bit, parts of parklands, bits of vegetation can disappear. It may not seem like much—it's only a little corner—but I find it sad that an area of parkland that's not already really all that big, it's lost that little bit. You can envisage another—I can think of another spot in Parramatta Park where a similar thing might happen. Before long, you lose an enormous proportion, a valuable proportion, of the park. So I think that worries me that that was able to happen under the Act, and it seems that it needs to be tightened up. That sort of loss of existing parkland can't happen.

The CHAIR: Mr Read, I see you nodding your head. I presume you agree with that? Do you have any comments you'd like to make?

STUART READ: Only that we're amazingly cavalier about the car and the commuter. Parramatta has a railway station. So does Westmead. I think, in reality, Parramatta has been a CBD for a long time. It's interesting, isn't it, to go to the opera and park in the Opera House car park, which has been bored into sandstone underneath a street and a headland to avoid having a car park between Government House and the Opera House. So we can all park before we go to the opera. We don't need to drive everywhere. We certainly don't need to park anywhere, especially when there's a railway station. We've got legs. I think there are always alternatives. And I couldn't agree more: Support and protect, particularly, urban parkland for park users. And they're not car drivers, particularly. And yes, mums and dads with kids like to drive to a park and park, but maybe they could park elsewhere and walk to the park.

The CHAIR: Thank you, all of you, for appearing before us today. You'll be provided with a copy of the transcript of your evidence for corrections. Committee staff will also email any questions taken on notice from today, and any supporting supplementary questions from the Committee. Thank you very much.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 16:20.