

**Submission
No 59**

**INQUIRY INTO GREATER SYDNEY PARKLANDS TRUST
BILL 2021**

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Submission re the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Bill

Select Committee on the Greater Sydney Parks Trust Bill 2021

14/01/2022

I wish to submit my objections to the proposed Greater Sydney Parklands Bill 2021.

As a local community member, I have been a user of Callan Park for well over 40 years. I have walked and explored the Park, walked my dogs, attended sporting events, picnicked and for the last 20 years been an active member of Callan Park Bushcare group. I am concerned that the proposed Bill undermines everything that makes Callan Park a special, place to the community of the Inner West.

I am also concerned for the other parklands involved, their importance for the wellbeing of their local and wider communities having been amply demonstrated during the past two years of the pandemic.

From where has the demand for commercialisation of parklands emerged? It is certainly not from their communities. I note and support the opposition to this Bill by the Inner West Council, Friends of Callan Park and the Alliance for Public Parklands.

1. Governance

The various stakeholders and users of Sydney's parklands trust local elected bodies and do not support an overarching Trust far removed from local issues, chosen by the State Minister with no guarantee of any community voice. At the moment the Local Councils have authority to approve or reject DAs. This power should not be transferred to the State Government Minister where it is at the mercy of political machinations of the day and powerful lobby groups.

For example, the community has a real sense of ownership of Callan Park. The Management Plan developed by Leichhardt Council and presented to State Government in 2011 had overwhelming local support. The community want the Park to be guided by a Trust with local representation.

2. Public Parks are for the Public

The Bill permits the commercialisation of public parks. This is totally against the ethos of parks being provided for the enjoyment and wellbeing of the community. This need was amply demonstrated during the last two years as people flocked to the parks during the various stages of lockdown.

The Greater Sydney Parklands Trust is tasked with “facilitating business activities and facilities within the Greater Sydney Parklands estate to maintain and improve the parklands”. This unequivocally opens the door to commercialisation.

Once businesses gain access to public spaces Not-for-Profit organisations cannot compete. For example the tender for the Kirkbride building in Callan Park has been awaiting finalisation for over 9 months, despite a worthy and locally supported not-for-profit proposal.

The Callan Park Act ensures that the Park is exclusively reserved for Not-for-Profit organisations. There is no shortage of groups who are eager to be tenants and who conform to the provision of services and enterprises in the designated areas of health, education, recreation and wellbeing.

The Callan Park Act also restricts leases to 10 years. This should be extended to the other parkland sites. The Bill proposes leases as long as 50 years for some buildings. This is total alienation of large areas of these parks to the public basically for a generation. Like the Quarantine Station this is privatisation by stealth.

Again the Bill does not allow local community say in the awarding of leases. Discretion lies instead with the Minister.

That various functions in the Park can be delegated to private corporations is again of most concern.

3. Each Park is Unique

The idea that one agency and one trust can adequately administer such a disparate group of parks is without merit. Each park has its own historical, cultural and natural features which are best identified and maintained by their local communities. Callan Park was originally gifted to the people of NSW as a hospital for those suffering from mental health problems. Uniquely the local community would like to see this reflected in the sorts of organisations and services operating in the grounds. Indigenous cultural history should be celebrated and remnant bushland a precious part of this park.

Local Trusts should be maintained or created for each of the parks with any overarching body keeping a strictly support role.

4. Maintain the Whole

The continued fragmentation of Callan Park is of concern. The Park is 60 hectares of precious open space and historically significant buildings. Already the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment manages two thirds and the Health Department the other third. To carve up the site further, removing the Kirkbride, Convalescent Building and Broughton Hall is to alienate large portions of the Park and undermine the whole. These are

the most historically significant building and belong to the public. That the State Government should fund the restoration of these building is to be applauded, but their subsequent use should ensure public access.

Amendments by the Member for Balmain in the Legislative Assembly have removed some of the worst impacts of the Bill in regards to Callan Park. These changes need to be extended to the other parkland sites. Basically the whole concept of the Bill is flawed. I am concerned that it permits unnecessary commercial activity in Sydney's parklands, effectively privatising parts of them.

Summary

1. The Greater Sydney Parklands Bill 2021 should be discarded.
2. The Callan Park Act should be maintained.
3. Private for profit businesses are not appropriate for public parks.
4. Local Councils should maintain the right to approve or reject DAs.
5. The role of Greater Sydney Parks needs rethinking.
6. Local Trusts should administer parks.
7. Parks should be seen as a public good not an opportunity for profits and revenue.

Bronwen Campbell