



***PRESERVING AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST GARDEN SUBURB
THE HUNTERS HILL TRUST INC
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11-7-2021 HHT submission re White Paper-Parklands for People

**Submission to NSW Government on the Greater Sydney Parklands White Paper
from the Hunters Hill Trust**

I write on behalf of the Hunters Hill Trust and our membership to add our voice to others concerned about the proposed mega agency for parklands in Sydney.

While there is a belief that bigger is always better, and also more efficient, this is not necessarily the case. There is usually a tipping point where bigger becomes less connected, less community-focused, and more costly with management removed from the people and places they are purportedly responsible for. Surely with the lessons gained from the current COVID-19 pandemic and its variants we have learned the importance of local amenity and green space for communities to maintain their sense of wellbeing and connection. The vastly greater use and appreciation of these open spaces is ever more evident.

It is unfortunate that there was little, if any, prior consultation last year before Minister for Planning, Rob Stokes, announced that a new super agency, would take over management all of the great metropolitan parks. We believe this structure to be inappropriate for Sydney's great parklands, each of which has its own unique history, local communities, and diverse cultural understanding of place. Some have had their own boards, and some had been promised their own board. It seems yet again that a decision has been made in haste that bigger is better, prior to exploring what alternatives there may be.

While the five parklands - Centennial Parklands (including Moore Park and Queens Park), Callan Park, Parramatta Park, Fernhill Estate and Western Sydney Parklands - may have some common factors they differ widely; each has its own particular challenges and management issues, and deserves its own focus and attention. Where is the analysis and case for the change to justify the greater centralisation of management for this varied range of Parklands?

The Trust believes that these unique and significant places will be compromised under the NSW Government's preferred 'one size fits all' Greater Sydney Parklands umbrella Trust model – as it appears to be driven by the assumption of cost efficiencies, and by opportunities for commercialisation; funding of public parklands should generally be covered by the State government's general revenue. As the need to protect our environment and natural resources escalates there is a desperate need to develop a new model that is more in touch with the community and the sense of local connection and passion – one that values the benefits of these community spaces in maintaining mental health and wellbeing, low-key exercise and community connectivity and volunteering.

Surely there should have been broad consultation with the communities that use these places and the boards currently responsible for their care and management prior to the Government announcing that they would be amalgamated into one super

agency? Such a change requires more detailed information and substantiation than the information currently provided in the White Paper. This is certainly not sufficiently robust in detail to allow the community to respond adequately on such an important change to the governance of these significant public lands. What other options have been considered to maintain local ownership and care?

- **The Greater Sydney Parklands Trust**

We do not support the proposal for management by a paid board appointed by the NSW Government that is then able to be directed by the Government of the day to do its bidding. These parklands are far too important to be politicised and are at risk of being driven by commercial or development agendas. Such a board will appear to lack independence, and it would be difficult for a single such body to properly care for our parklands while also exploiting them to generate income.

Considering the composition for any such body, we urge that it must include a representative of the National Trust to ensure it gives due consideration to heritage.

- **Community trustee boards**

The existing boards, currently in place, should be maintained and strengthened with local membership and governance, connected to the Council areas in which they are located. They should have bipartisan membership, including heritage and community representation, and not be politicised. With appropriate funding, local Councils could potentially more efficiently look after these places locally with their other green and built assets than a large mega agency, remotely located.

- **Community consultation**

There needs to be further local community consultation for each of the parklands to draw out critical issues pertaining to each community, particularly where there are culturally and linguistically diverse communities and important indigenous and early settler historic connections.

- **First Nations community participation**

First Nations people and their language groupings in each location should be actively consulted and included in any proposed governance model.

- **Planning**

Each of the parklands should be strongly empowered and protected by its own Act, such as at Callan Park, each with its own Crown Land Plan of Management that could be largely administered by the Local Government responsible, through a Local Community Board. Each Park should be reviewed to look at opportunities to enhance and shape it appropriately for future generations. For example, the 26 ha North Parramatta Heritage Precinct (former Cumberland Hospital East grounds) should be added to the Parramatta Park Trust to bring the park closer to its original size when Governor Macquarie set it aside for the health and wellbeing of the people of Parramatta.

- **Operations**

Each of the parklands could be managed day to day by the Council it falls within. For example the City of Sydney manages Hyde Park which is a significant heritage and community space enjoyed by millions under a Plan of Management. Surely this would create efficiencies in asset management? Every Local Government area manages multiple parklands and could actively assist in enhancing the green corridors and connections.

- **Governance**

If parklands were to be aligned with the Local Government area they sit within, then each could have a similar governance model that included relevant local groups and expertise necessary to oversee these important places. Where a place is of national or international significance such as the UNESCO World Heritage listed Parramatta Park, a representative of the National Trust should sit on the Local Trusts.

- **Funding and finance**

We oppose the implication that each park should strive to become largely self-funding, following the precedent quoted for WSP. This is a matter that must be developed separately for each site, depending on its attributes and requirements.

Consideration of funding needs to be developed and driven locally to suit the unique needs and challenges of each Park. A proper historic analysis should be undertaken for each to look at what has been required and how best to provide appropriate resources. Rather than tip more funding into a mega agency the government should investigate how local government management models might work. There are also opportunities at each site to engage local not-for-profit organisations, volunteers and local groups. (For example the WHOS drug and alcohol program at Callan Park engages their residents in caring for the parklands and learning trades and skills while they rehabilitate.)

- **Other**

The Trust questions whether the umbrella management model being proposed will afford improved protection and legacy for these highly valued Parklands. As we know, Western Sydney Parklands, lauded as the largest public parkland in the world when declared by Premier Bob Carr, has been incrementally reduced by new major roadways and other incursions during the subsequent development of western Sydney. How can we trust that the new model will secure a safer future for these vital public lands?

We believe the community consultation period should be broadened and extended to ensure more voices can be heard.



Alister Sharp, President

11 July 2021