



Hon Rob Stokes, MP – Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

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THE 50 YEAR VISION FOR SYDNEY'S OPEN SPACE AND PARKLANDS AND THE CREATION OF THE GREATER SYDNEY PARKLANDS AGENCY

Preface

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) is the peak national body for Landscape Architecture. AILA champions quality research and design for public open spaces, stronger communities and greater environmental stewardship.

In operation since 1966, AILA represents over 3,500 landscape architects nationally with over 1000 in NSW. The discipline promotes excellence in research, planning and design with community aspirations. Committed to designing and creating better spaces in Australia, landscape architects have the skills and expertise to improve the nation's liveability through a unique approach to planning issues via innovative integrated solutions. In doing so, landscape architects are a major contributor in creating better environmental, social and economic outcomes for all Australians.

We are the only discipline whose specific training is based on an understanding of the history and the evolution of parks in NSW. Our understanding of place through;

- geological formations and
- human response, as an expression of both indigenous and non- indigenous cultures,
- respecting the cultural significance along with
- diversity of indigenous ecological systems, tied into cultural values,

informs our research and design of open space networks. In reference to this submission, it may be of interest to note that landscape architecture, as the profession is known today, originated in part from the work of Joseph Paxton and Capability Brown in England and Frederick Law Olmstead in the USA amongst others who designed public parks to provide respite, healthy places and recreation for the populous in general. At this moment of rapid change in NSW, it is important to conserve diversity rather than one authority imposing sameness everywhere.



With all this in mind, we believe the creation of the Greater Sydney Parklands and its 50-year vision is an excellent initiative aligned with our purpose and much needed for the people of Greater Sydney.

Feedback

1. We believe this initiative should not be just for the people of Greater Sydney, but for the whole of NSW. NSW embraces many cities, towns, settlements and regions all requiring parklands in some form. As a State Government initiative, to focus on Sydney appears to be unbalanced, however we understand that we need to make a start. Perhaps, like all the major state agencies, this agency needs a broader remit and/or becomes the catalyst for regional agencies to bring their local context to the conversation.
2. The work of the organisation needs to be based upon the principles that the whole of Sydney (and the state) exists in a landscape of great beauty, complex natural processes and unique heritage and stories, and that the city needs to be considered a Parkland in itself, worthy of protection and enhancement. In this respect the Parks themselves are areas of landscape open space that exemplify community values and outcomes. The vision addresses this principle, however as it develops it should be based upon a continual learning process about the landscape - its processes, geology, climate, ecology, soils and its past, present and future. All urban landscapes need to achieve an effective multifunctionality, regenerating the whole ecosystem in a time of rapid change, integrated with the cultural and recreational needs of humans. Biodiversity in particular must be carefully designed in these spaces, aligning with contemporary conservation theory and practice. A research and development program should be established as part of the Greater Sydney Parklands for the purpose of designing multifunctional parkland.
3. The specific parklands covered by the organisation are insufficient to provide for the needs of the metropolis. Like Transport, Education or any other infrastructure asset, the organisation needs to explore, acquire, set aside and develop new State parkland areas, to dedicate new parks, connected with the Sydney Green Grid, solve missing links and green space inadequacies. Some examples meeting this objective include the expansion of the Rouse Hill Parklands to service the growing Western Parkland City; the further consideration of the Callan Park related health spaces at Gladesville and North Parramatta; the potential of a State managed Cook's River Park improving the river and serving the 200k+ people of the Inner West and Bayside Councils; and the potential of Prospect Reservoir Park as a vast area of open space at the heart of Greater Sydney – larger than New York's Central Park and setting a global benchmark. It is to be noted that many UK reservoirs are open to controlled non-motorised recreational use.



4. The definition of parklands needs to be explored. The needs of the original public parks to escape the grim industrial realities over a century ago have changed and a whole family of different park types have developed over time. For example, parks can be connected regenerative patches, and importantly should have a high perimeter to area ratio to maximise the connectivity of the park to the surrounding land use. They should also embrace more than just sport and passive recreation uses but also innovative landscape design for arts and crafts, landscape and cultural heritage, horticultural enterprises, musical value such as outdoor auditoriums and busking opportunities. Callan Park, for example, presents fabulous opportunities for sensitive landscape regeneration that respects the 'bones' of the place, complemented by adaptive reuse of heritage buildings for cultural and restorative purposes.



5. The impact of future development and urbanisation on the parklands needs to be understood, not just for 50 years but for a 150+ years, which is how iconic parks and commemorative avenues were envisaged. The pressures of increasing population, infrastructure development, the mistaken self-funding approach to public parks (as opposed to optimising compatible business opportunities), climate change and park overuse (amongst others) must be analysed to create a framework of protection for these spaces, ensuring they remain useable, high quality, valuable places for many generations to come.
6. In the same way that the grey infrastructure focused departments (eg utilities and rail) have a high incidence of engineers, landscape architects are most qualified to lead a collaborative Greater Sydney Parklands with training, design, management and evaluation delivered by all levels of the profession.
7. Most importantly the Parklands character, planning and future development needs to be strongly influenced by Aboriginal Knowledge holders, designers and artists from Greater Sydney. This will add value, richness and provide a 'connection to country' for the whole population and a unique global experience for our visitors (when they return). It is suggested that at the core of the Greater Sydney Parklands is a Parks Reconciliation Action Plan at least to the 'Innovate' level, committing to Co-Design principles.

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