

29th October 2021

NPRAG Submission to the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Exposure Bill

North Parramatta Residents Action Group (NPRAG) have little faith in the Minister and his department's "best practice community consultation". Constructive feedback and objections from the community, including NPRAG, have not yielded any positive impact on the Minister's plans but on the contrary have produced unpleasant surprises. None of those changes were canvassed in earlier consultation processes. Instead, the community has been ambushed by the proposed Exposure Bill which is not reflective of the Whitepaper presented to the public.

We urge the Minister to stringently review the proposed powers of the GSP Board as described within the draft legislation.

The intention (and the power) to commercialise is embedded throughout the Exposure Bill.

The Bill emphasises 'activation' rather than protection of the parklands and reduces community input on parkland management to a mere tick-box exercise with community trustee boards wholly under the control of the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust board.

Our position is clear: This Bill should be withdrawn and recast to emphasise the protection of the environment, heritage, biodiversity and public access and facilitate genuine community input over the management of each of the five foundation parklands.

In the case of Parramatta Park, this would require the reinstatement of the Parramatta Park Trustee Board with strong, local and accountable community representation on its board. Parramatta Park is a World heritage listed site and as such would strongly recommend that a representative of National Trust of Australia (NSW) and/or ICOMOS have a permanent seat on the board of the GSP Agency, not only with the UNESCO listing of Parramatta Park but the state heritage listed buildings on the other parks.

NPRAG also wish to state, again its strong recommendation that the entire Cumberland Hospital East Precinct of approximately 20 hectares, containing the National Heritage listed Parramatta Female Factory and over 70 state heritage buildings in a significant botanical precinct be added to the Parramatta Park Trust to increase the size of the brutally divested park grounds. The creation of a botanical gardens which Parramatta as a city lacks adding more passive green space for our burgeoning high-density population.

(This proposal was submitted by NPRAG as part of the Committee for Sydney and NSW Government Public Spaces Ideas Competition in 2020 – <https://sydney.org.au/psic/entry/cumberland-botanic-gardens/>)

OBJECTIONS TO THE PROVISIONS IN THE GREATER SYDNEY PARKLANDS TRUST EXPOSURE BILL

- 1. The Bill does not mandate community consultation and allows for a 2-year consultation hiatus that will obliterate any meaningful public scrutiny or response to proposals.**

The Bill provides that consultative 'community trustee boards **may be** established' for the five foundation parklands currently within the Greater Sydney Parklands agency portfolio¹.

The powers of any such community trustee board are very limited under the Bill. The members of these trustee boards are to be appointed by the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust board and can be dismissed by the Trust Chair. No grounds for any such dismissal are provided in the Bill.

In any case, the Trust is NOT required to have an approved consultation and engagement framework until **2 years after** establishment of the Trust, removing public scrutiny entirely from its decision-making and actions in the meantime. The Board has had over a year to create this framework and it should have already been released.

- 2. Privatisation is a real danger under sweeping powers proposed for the GSPT**

The Bill gives the GSPT the power to **compulsorily acquire public and private land**; Includes the power to form, or participate in, the formation of **private subsidiary corporations and joint ventures**; Includes a clause that a contravention (of the rules) regarding disclosure of pecuniary interest DOES NOT invalidate a decision of the Board. All of these powers are extraordinary and would allow for unilateral decision-making at arms' length even from the Minister.

- 3. Permits Disposal / Surrender of Public Lands**

The Trust may propose to surrender land within the GSPT estate to the Crown to be dedicated for an (undefined) 'public purpose' and / or 'road'. This clause allows for transport infrastructure and tourism activities or SSD (like hotel proposed by Parramatta Football Club) on existing parklands and also allows for the GSPT to determine with what a 'public purpose' is. There is already alienation of Parramatta parklands with the development of an even bigger football stadium in 2017 demolishing the 65 year old public pools which forced the replacement facilities to take more Parramatta parklands. In addition, the Department of Education has been already investigating the southern end of Parramatta Park (known as Mays Hill); making it easier for our parklands to be given away is not supported by NPRAG.

4. Permits leases above 25 years with ministerial consent.

This provision allows for effective alienation and privatisation of lands and buildings within the five foundation parklands and indicates the GSPT focus will be on 'set and forget' revenue raising. While the Parramatta Park Act 2001 currently permits 25 years leases anything above this is unacceptable for parklands which primary purpose is for public recreation.

NPRAG members believe that the best way to translate the Minister's worthy principles into reality is to entrust each of our parks to its own discrete Trust. We recommend a federated, community model, not a top-down umbrella trust model. The membership of these individual Trusts would combine local community members, First Nations representation and experts in heritage, biodiversity and park management and a representative of the local Council.

North Parramatta Residents Action Group is a member of Alliance of Public Parklands and fully endorses their submission to the GSP Draft Exposure Bill which is included following,

Signed



Suzette Meade – Secretary

On behalf of NPRAG and the Alliance for Public Parklands
