



Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

**FINAL DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLANS FOR
URBAN PARKS AND SPORTSGROUNDS IN
WODEN, WESTON CREEK AND BELCONNEN,
AND FOR LAKE GINNINDERRA**

Report No.9 of the Standing Committee on Urban Services

October 1998

Resolution of appointment

On 28 April 1998 the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory resolved to establish a general purpose standing committee, called the Standing Committee on Urban Services, to inquire into and report on:

planning and lease management, road and transport services, housing and housing assistance, government purchasing and public utilities purchasing, electricity industry and regulation, construction industry policy, parks and forests, private sector employment inspectorate, building services, environment, heritage and municipal services and any other matter under the responsibility of the portfolio minister.

Also on the same day, the Legislative Assembly resolved:

If the Assembly is not sitting when the Standing Committee on Urban Services has completed consideration of a report on draft Plan variations referred pursuant to section 25 of the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991* or draft Plans of Management referred pursuant to Section 203 of the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991*, the Committee may send its report to the Speaker or, in the absence of the Speaker, to the Deputy Speaker, who is authorised to give directions for its printing, circulation and publication.

Minutes of Proceedings (Fourth Assembly) No.2, 28 April 1998

Committee Membership

Mr Harold Hird MLA (Chair)
Mr Dave Rugendyke MLA (Deputy Chair)
Mr Simon Corbell MLA (appointed on 25 June 1998, replacing Mr Wayne Berry MLA who was discharged on the same day)

Secretary: Mr Rod Power

Standing Committee on Urban Services

1. On 10 August 1998 the Minister for Urban Services (Mr Brendan Smyth MLA) referred the revised draft plans of management for urban parks and sportsgrounds in Woden, Weston Creek and Belconnen, and for Lake Ginninderra, to the committee for consideration.
2. This is in accord with the requirement contained in section 203 of the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991* for a draft plan of management for public land to be referred by the Minister to 'an appropriate committee of the Legislative Assembly'.
3. On 21 August 1998 the committee resolved to invite public comment on the draft management plans. Advertisements to this effect appeared in the local media on 28 August 1998 (*Canberra Times*) and 1 September 1998 (*Chronicle* and *Valley View*).
4. To the committee's surprise, no submissions were received.
5. However, in considering the draft management plans, the committee considered the issues raised during the consultation phase conducted by the Department of Urban Services.
6. The actual documents provided by the Minister comprised:
 - *Plan of Management for Woden and Weston Creek's Urban Parks and Sportsgrounds* (June 1998);
 - *Plan of Management for Belconnen's Urban Parks, Sportsgrounds and Lake Ginninderra* (June 1998);
 - summary of issues raised by the public during the department's public consultation process, and actions taken by the department;
 - list of respondents;
 - report on the consultation process (submitted by the department); and
 - a 'position statement' prepared by the Bureau of Sport & Recreation on the informal use of ovals.
7. The committee held a public hearing on 25 September 1998 to hear, and question, government officials in relation to the draft management plans.
8. The officials told the committee that, 'for management purposes' in relation to urban park planning, Canberra has been divided into six regions. The management plans before the committee deal with two of those regions.¹
9. The management plans set out the manner in which the requirements of the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act* and the *Nature Conservation Act 1991* are met. This includes detailed maps showing the hierarchy of urban open space (town park, district park, neighbourhood park, district sportsground, neighbourhood sportsground, informal use oval, semi-natural open space, native grassland sites, Lake Ginninderra and the Ginninderra Creek corridor). The type, and level, of services provided within each category of open space is clearly outlined.
10. It seems to members of the committee that some terms used in the plans, such as the names of some grasses, might be usefully described in layman's terms, in order to improve public understanding. The officials undertook to consider this suggestion.²
11. In relation to whether the plans might contain more detail about matters such as various types of landscape and watering regimes, the officials stated:

¹ Transcript of the public hearing held on 25/9/98

² *ibid*

All of that information is set out in fairly minute detail in specifications we have developed with our service provider in the maintenance process. We are more than happy to make those specifications available to the people who are interested in finding out more detail about the level of maintenance to be applied to an area...

[We consider that] in a lot of cases, even in particular park types, the level of maintenance from one location to another will vary, and the amount of detail that would have to be entered [into] plans of management to... [provide a greater level of detail] would make [the] plans very much more difficult to read and get an overall feeling for the service levels that we are trying to achieve...³

12. The committee appreciates the point of this observation.

13. In relation to Lake Ginninderra, the draft plan of management notes that it has ‘a complex management arrangement’ involving Canberra Urban parks & Places (general management), Environment ACT (stocking of fish, and water quality), ACT Stormwater (dam wall and water level), the Department of Health (public health issues associated with recreational use of the water), and PALM (cultural planning).

14. The plans refer to various government policies that impact on the way urban space is managed, including policies about public safety, regulation of use, mowing regimes, irrigation, weeds and pests, litter, playground equipment, fees and charges, wet weather usage, fire hazard, public toilets, tree management and commercial activity.

15. The plans also outline where improvements will be made over the next five years. For both the Woden and Belconnen areas, efforts will be made to improve park signage, to increase the level of maintenance of public toilets, to trial more drinking fountains in district parks, to provide greater support for (and organisation of) the ‘adopt-a-park’ program, and possibly to increase ‘aesthetically pleasing commercial services that support the use of the park for recreation’.

16. Government officials stated that they are expanding efforts to obtain feedback from the public about the overall management of the parks:

We are starting to get valuable information back precisely on how particular services or facilities provided in parks are being appreciated by the public. On the question of cleanliness, we are showing an improvement...

We have analyses for a number of facilities now and overall satisfaction is increasing with the standard facilities. There is obviously room for improvement in some areas and what we hope to do is continue these annual surveys each year so that we know where the hot spots are and where we need to put more effort, and where we can drop back a bit perhaps as we are achieving our goals.⁴

17. The committee considers this type of information is extremely important.

18. In relation to ‘informal use ovals’ (which are located adjacent to schools and shopping centres), the documents provided by the Minister included the following statement:

in the early 1990s the then government sought to identify areas across operational areas where savings could be achieved. This resulted in the identification of 27 sportsgrounds across the city which were subject to particularly low levels of formal sporting use. At these grounds, maintenance

³ ibid

⁴ ibid

levels were significantly reduced, with limited mowing, virtual elimination of irrigation and the removal of goalposts.

These grounds, 16 of which adjoin schools, remain available for informal recreational activities but they are no longer suitable for organised sport. In the selection of these grounds no bias was exercised against any geographical area of the city, with the decision solely based on the level of formal sporting use. Any inconvenience to local communities is regretted but at this time funds are not available to reinstate full maintenance. In most cases good quality ovals exist within a reasonable distance to cater for formal sporting needs.⁵

19. The officials told the committee that, although 'there has been no scope for increasing the budget to bring them back to full maintenance standard...we do keep them to a standard roughly equivalent to neighbourhood parks so that they are still quite suitable for informal leisure activities'.⁶

20. The committee appreciates the background to this policy.

Recommendation

21. *The committee endorses the revised draft plans of management for urban parks and sportsgrounds in Woden, Weston Creek and Belconnen, and for Lake Ginninderra.*

Harold Hird MLA
Chair

16 October 1998

⁵ Position statement prepared by the Bureau of Sport & Recreation on the informal use of ovals.

⁶ Transcript