



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Transport
and City Services

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the provision of municipal services in Canberra

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Standing Committee on Transport and City Services

ACT Legislative Assembly,
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Canberra ACT 2601

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Re: Submission to the Inquiry into Municipal Services in Canberra

Impact of Poor Facility Maintenance Across Government Facilities on Cricket in the ACT

Cricket is one of Canberra's most inclusive and widely played sports, engaging over 15,000 registered participants annually across junior, senior, social and multicultural programs. However, the growth and sustainability of cricket in the ACT is being significantly constrained by poor maintenance standards across government-managed facilities.

Inconsistent ground preparation, aging amenities, and inadequate upkeep of practice and playing surfaces are eroding participant experience, limiting talent development, and undermining the ACT's ability to deliver equitable access to sport.

This submission outlines the systemic maintenance challenges impacting cricket and recommends targeted actions to improve municipal service delivery for sporting infrastructure.

Cricket ACT utilises 77 playing fields, including 20 turf wickets and 57 synthetic wickets, supported by 149 practice net lanes across the ACT. Majority of these facilities are used on an almost daily basis, contributing to the need for quality maintenance programs.

Junior cricket participation is growing at 4% year-on-year, seeing a 24% growth since the 2021/22 season (compared to 8% nationally). Female cricket grew a staggering 29% year-on-year in last year's census period driven by the new Cricket Smash format (60-minute social cricket games). South Asian Junior Cricket alone grew 7% growth this season year-on-year, with 30% growth since start of current strategy cycle (2022-2026). On top of this 45% of all junior cricketers from CALD (cultural and linguistic diverse) backgrounds in the ACT.

Canberra's population growth, particularly in Gungahlin and Molonglo Valley planning areas, is outpacing facility capacity and quality. Cricket ACT's Infrastructure Strategy (2025) (CACTIS) identifies maintenance as a critical enabler of safe, inclusive and fit-for-purpose facilities. Without intervention, poor maintenance will continue to compromise participation growth, player safety, and community wellbeing.

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Key Maintenance Challenges

1. Provide targeted support for Cricket ACT to deliver education and training programs for clubs on best-practice turf wicket preparation and maintenance

Turf wicket preparation is highly technical and physically demanding. Currently, the ACT relies heavily on volunteers with limited formal training, leading to inconsistent standards and burnout. Poor turf quality contributes to Canberra's reputation for "low and slow" wickets, which negatively impacts player development and performance. Impacts of this are widely seen through the performances of elite pathway teams at national championships where conditions in other states/territories differ significantly to those experienced in the ACT. In many cases this is what drives talented athletes to seek moves to other states and why the ACT is often overlooked in terms of hosting National Championships.

Expected Outcomes:

- Improved consistency and quality of turf wickets across the ACT.
- Enhanced player experience and skill development, strengthening local talent pathways.
- Retention of local talent and continued improvement of competency in local competitions.
- Reduced reliance on volunteers and improved sustainability of club operations.
- Creation of structured training pathways and apprenticeships in partnership with industry bodies (e.g., Australian Sports Turf Managers Association).

2. Establish a Municipal Sports Maintenance Framework

Maintenance standards for playing surfaces and amenities are inconsistent and lack accountability. Outfields often have excessively long grass, diesel line-marking damage from winter sports, and uneven surfaces, increasing injury risk and diminishing game quality. Blanket bi-annual ground closures disrupt cricket seasons without delivering meaningful improvements.

Expected Outcomes:

- Clear minimum standards for ground upkeep, turf preparation, and amenity maintenance.
- Transparent reporting and accountability mechanisms for municipal service delivery.
- Reduced disruption to cricket seasons and improved scheduling certainty.
- Safer, more enjoyable playing conditions for all participants.
- Grass length to be cut as a consistent level and at a level conducive to quality play for all.

3. Prioritise Inclusive Amenity Upgrades

Many ACT facilities were built in the 1960s–70s and fail to meet modern expectations for safety, accessibility, and inclusion. Lack of gender-neutral changerooms and accessible toilets creates barriers for women, girls, multicultural communities, and people with disabilities.

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased participation among women and girls, supporting Cricket Australia's gender equity goals.
- Improved comfort and safety for all participants, volunteers, and spectators.



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- Enhanced community experience and alignment with universal design principles.

4. Introduce a Centralised Turf Management Model

Volunteer-driven turf maintenance is unsustainable and inconsistent. A centralised model led by Cricket ACT and funded by the ACT Government would provide technical oversight, hands-on support, and direct management where required, ensuring high-quality wickets and reducing volunteer burden.

Expected Outcomes:

- Professionalised turf management across ACT cricket facilities.
- Improved resilience and sustainability of turf infrastructure.
- Greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness compared to outsourcing to private contractors.
- Enhanced longevity of playing surfaces.

5. Coordinate Seasonal Transition and Maintenance Scheduling

Season creep and poor coordination between summer and winter codes delay turf preparation and damage playing surfaces. Current blanket ground closures are inefficient and create unnecessary disruption.

Expected Outcomes:

- Formal agreements between codes to protect turf preparation windows.
- Targeted maintenance programs that minimise disruption and maximise impact.
- Improved inter-code relationships and shared use of facilities.

6. Invest in Practice Net Renewal

Practice nets are among the most heavily used assets in the ACT cricket network, yet many are unsafe and overcapacity. Poor condition limits skill development and poses safety risks, particularly for juniors.

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased access to safe, high-quality training facilities.
- Enhanced player development and retention.
- Expanded capacity in growth areas such as Gungahlin and Molonglo Valley.

Impact on Cricket and Community

- **Participation Loss:** Poor playing conditions and inadequate amenities reduce enjoyment and retention, particularly among juniors and women.
- **Talent Drain:** Inconsistent turf quality undermines player development and ACT's competitiveness.
- **Volunteer Burnout:** Maintenance gaps increase reliance on volunteers for remedial work, creating unsustainable workloads.
- **Equity Barriers:** Lack of inclusive amenities and safe facilities disproportionately impacts multicultural communities and female participants.



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Cricket contributes \$13.5 million¹ annually in economic impact and delivers significant health and social benefits, including mental health support, youth leadership, and multicultural engagement. Poor and/or no maintenance jeopardises these outcomes.

Recommendations

1. Establish a Municipal Sports Maintenance Framework

- a. Define minimum maintenance standards for playing surfaces, turf wickets, and amenities. Currently, maintenance practices vary significantly across ACT grounds, resulting in uneven surfaces, long grass, and poor wicket preparation. Setting clear, enforceable standards will ensure consistency in quality and safety across all venues.
- b. Implement transparent reporting and accountability mechanisms for ground upkeep, a structured reporting system will allow clubs and stakeholders to monitor compliance, raise issues promptly, and hold service providers accountable. This transparency will reduce delays and improve responsiveness to maintenance needs.

2. Prioritise Inclusive Amenity Upgrades

- a. Modernise changerooms and toilets to meet universal design principles. Many facilities date back to the 1960s–70s and fail to meet modern expectations for safety and accessibility. Upgrading amenities will improve comfort and usability for all participants, including families and people with disabilities.
- b. Ensure gender-neutral and accessible facilities across all major cricket venues. With female participation at only 12%, inclusive amenities are critical to attracting and retaining women and girls. Gender-neutral changerooms and accessible toilets will remove barriers and support Cricket Australia's diversity and inclusion goals.

3. Introduce a Centralised Turf Management Model

- a. Provide targeted support for Cricket ACT to deliver education and training programs for clubs on best-practice turf wicket preparation and maintenance. Turf wicket preparation is highly technical, yet most ACT clubs rely on volunteers with limited training. A centralised model, supported by structured education programs, will improve consistency, reduce volunteer burnout, and enhance player development.

4. Coordinate Seasonal Transition and Maintenance Scheduling

- a. Formalise agreements between summer and winter codes to prevent season creep and protect turf preparation windows. Season creep from winter sports delays turf preparation and damages surfaces, impacting early-season cricket. Formal agreements will ensure fair access and protect the integrity of playing conditions.
- b. Replace blanket ground closures with targeted maintenance programs. Bi-annual closures disrupt pre-season training without delivering meaningful improvements. Targeted maintenance based on actual need will minimise disruption and optimise resource use.

5. Invest in Practice Net Renewal

- a. Upgrade high-demand net facilities and expand provision in growth areas (Molonglo, Gungahlin). Practice nets are essential for skill development, but many are unsafe and overcapacity. Molonglo Valley, projected to grow by 115%, currently has no nets or

¹ Cricket ACT – Community Impact Study 2025



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wickets. Strategic investment will address safety risks, meet demand, and support participation growth.

Conclusion

Cricket is more than a sport in Canberra, it is a vital contributor to community health, social cohesion, and economic activity, generating \$13.5 million annually and delivering measurable benefits in physical and mental wellbeing.

However, these benefits are at risk due to systemic maintenance issues across government-managed facilities. Poor ground conditions, aging amenities, and inadequate upkeep of practice and playing surfaces are eroding participant experience, limiting talent development, and creating barriers for women, juniors, and multicultural communities.

Addressing these issues is not simply about improving cricket infrastructure; it is about safeguarding equitable access to sport, supporting Canberra's growing and diverse population, and ensuring municipal services meet contemporary standards.

Strategic investment in maintenance, inclusive amenities, and collaborative management models will unlock significant returns for the ACT, strengthening participation pathways, reducing volunteer burden, and positioning Canberra as a regional hub for cricket excellence. Failure to act will perpetuate inequities, constrain growth, and diminish the ACT's reputation as a leader in community sport.

Kind Regards,

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Cc: Olivia Thornton, Cricket ACT CEO

