



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL  
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND  
ENVIRONMENT**

**(Reference: Review of draft plan of management for urban open space  
and public access sportsgrounds in the Gungahlin region)**

**Members:**

**MR M GENTLEMAN (The Chair)  
MR Z SESELJA (The Deputy Chair)  
MS M PORTER**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**TUESDAY, 20 MARCH 2007**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Dr H Jaireth (Ph: 6205 0137)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

**WITNESSES**

**MARRIAGE, MS SUE**, Director, Sport and Recreation Services, Department of  
Territory and Municipal Services ..... **1**

**McNULTY, MR HAMISH**, Executive Director, Environment and Recreation  
Network, Department of Territory and Municipal Services ..... **1**

**The committee met at 1.59 pm.**

**McNULTY, MR HAMISH**, Executive Director, Environment and Recreation Network, Department of Territory and Municipal Services

**MARRIAGE, MS SUE**, Director, Sport and Recreation Services, Department of Territory and Municipal Services

**THE CHAIR:** I declare opening this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment and this afternoon we are looking at the draft plan of management for urban open space and public access sportsgrounds in the Gungahlin region. We have from the Department of Territory and Municipal Services Mr Hamish McNulty, Executive Director of Environment and Recreation and Ms Sue Marriage, Director of Sport and Recreation Services. Thank you for coming in this afternoon. Just before we begin, I will read out the privileges card for you.

The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and rebroadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings.

Before the committee commences taking evidence, let me place on record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee in evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attach to parliament, its members and others, necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, if the committee accedes to such a request the committee will take evidence in camera and record that evidence. Should the committee take evidence in this manner, I remind the committee and those present that it is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly. I should add that any decision regarding publication of in camera evidence or confidential submissions will not be taken by the committee without prior reference to the person whose evidence the committee may consider publishing.

Mr McNulty, would you like to make an opening statement to the committee?

**Mr McNulty:** I do not have an opening statement but we are happy to answer any of your questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

**MR SESELJA:** In terms of the time frame of this document, I was reading through it and it talks about an update coming in late 2005, I think it was initially, or the plan was for an updated draft. Have I misread that? Was the plan to have an updated draft of this then and that has not happened, or am I reading off the wrong draft?

**Mr McNulty:** Without knowing exactly which document you are reading from, this

plan has taken a long time from start to finish. One of the reasons for that is that the two major changes that the department has undergone in recent years have meant that essentially the document has to be modified to reflect the changes in the new department. Most recently, the creation of the new Department of Territory and Municipal Services delayed once again the release of the draft document, so it has taken some time. As it is still a draft I think it is fair to say that we won't be updating it until it is finalised.

**MR SESELJA:** Okay. Page 12 of the document looks at emerging issues in relation to Gungahlin's urban open space and a number of things are referred to—intergovernment agency sport and recreation task force and, in particular, things like the low level of sportsground provision. That has been referred to the intergovernment agency sport and recreation task force. Where is that at at the moment?

**Mr McNulty:** Page 12 of my document is obviously somewhat different from page 12 of your document.

**MR SESELJA:** Okay, so we appear to be working on different documents. There was some confusion between—

**Ms Marriage:** This is November 2006.

**MR SESELJA:** Come back to me and we will work out where we are at.

**MS PORTER:** With regard to the new arrangements, I am not quite sure—maybe I am not reading the information properly—how the two departments work with regard to territory and municipal services and then the education and the sport area. How does it all work together?

**Mr McNulty:** Territory and municipal services are responsible now for all the public sports fields which are not, if you like, part of a school precinct or campus. So we have the arrangements for the maintenance of those sportsgrounds, the booking system with sporting and anybody else who wants to book a sports field, and upgrading them as funded.

The Department of Education is responsible for playing fields that are part of school campuses and are generally used as part of the playground for the school. They are not normally available for weekend and after-school use.

**MS PORTER:** Is that true in all cases—that they're not usually available for weekend use?

**Mr McNulty:** I believe it's the case—that someone like Woden soccer club, for instance, could not book one of those fields for their weekend games

**MS PORTER:** So what happens to them on the weekend?

**Ms Marriage:** There might be a bit of confusion regarding what we are referring to as school ones. There are actual ovals that are within a school's boundary, I guess you could say, that are often used as play areas and they are often not irrigated

sportsgrounds. There are also ones that are attached or adjacent to schools and they are therefore used as school playgrounds and school facilities as well as community facilities. Those ones are ones that we manage, look after and do the booking system for. But the ones that are internal in the school are usually under school-based management and they will not be used on the weekends unless there is an agreement with the school as such. So they can be used but that will be under a school-based management agreement.

**MS PORTER:** So how many of each do we have?

**Ms Marriage:** The majority of the sportsgrounds are managed by us and the majority of the ones that are adjacent to schools are managed by us as well. So there is a small proportion of sportsgrounds or play areas, which we call them more often, that are attached within a school and as part of the school-based management. We also still provide support to those principals as well, so that they can maintain that facility to the best of their ability, because most of those are on manual watering systems, so they are not under the same irrigation system as a normal sportsground would be. So the school might water them when they feel that it is necessary to water them, because obviously they are paying the water bill.

**THE CHAIR:** Since you have brought that up, the committee has had the opportunity recently to look at some different irrigation systems for sportsgrounds. I was wondering if you could tell us whether the department has looked at different systems from those that have been provided over the last 10 years or so—more environmentally friendly watering systems.

**Ms Marriage:** The KISSS system that you went out and had a look at on the field trip—we are organising to go and see some of the facilities that they have provided us with testimonials on. There are some differences between the facilities that they have put them into, in Sydney in particular, in the type of grasses that are being used on those facilities in comparison to here in Canberra. We are looking at doing that after the Easter break. It has taken us a little bit of time for the consultants to respond in emails, and we only got some information back from them last week for that.

The irrigation system that we currently have has the Comtrol attached to it. Comtrol makes it one of the most efficient watering systems that there is, purely because it measures on each of the facilities the evaporation rate and the type of turf that you have and then determines when it needs to irrigate. It has been recognised Australia wide as one of the most efficient irrigation systems.

Then you get down to things like what type of turf mix you utilise and what subsoil systems you are using, as in what sort of dirt systems and things you have underneath it. Obviously you can spend a lot of money putting those into play. The important part for us when we look at our facilities is trying to determine what the use of that sportsground is going to be. That has been one of the things with the KISSS system: where it has been used it is mainly used with couch grass, and couch grass is not the most effective grass for us as a winter grass here.

The ovals that it has been put onto tend to be ones that have low usage during the winter period, and of course winter is our high usage time for facilities here, with all

the football codes and things. So it really gets down to the mix of who's going to use it. Most of our facilities are multiuse, summer and winter. We have very few sportsgrounds that are used for a limited amount of time. So you have to look at all of that mix before you can determine how you are going to develop the facility.

**THE CHAIR:** I guess it has been a challenge for the department over the last few years with the drought. Is there recognition of the challenges in this draft plan of management?

**Ms Marriage:** Not so much in the draft plan of management; the recognition really comes down to when we have put our service charter in place with the sports to say what we can do in a servicing arrangement with them to make sure that our facilities are up to a quality standard. In particular, it really comes down to us working with the sports to identify how we can manage the most suitable quality facility for them to be able to work on.

In this document there is not a lot of recognition of that; this tends to be one of your standard plans of management, which is how you manage it over the longer term. But when it really comes down to it the drought has a huge impact for us to be dealing with at the sportsgrounds that we have. Now we are at the point where the sports are starting to realise and work with us on the potential if we have to go to the next water restriction level and things like that—how they are going to handle their competition. Again that comes back to what uses of the facility we are going to have and that is where it becomes quite tricky.

**Mr McNulty:** The effectiveness of the Control system has been recognised by Actew, however, in our negotiations around the impact of water restrictions on our irrigation of sportsgrounds. They have taken that into account in the amount of watering we have been allowed to do, and that has been a factor, and the fact that when stage 3 water restrictions were introduced we did not have to turn off any more sportsgrounds—the fact that we have Control and that we are optimising that further at the moment.

**MR SESELJA:** Aside from having an efficient watering system—I assume at the moment that is just your standard irrigation system but it is able to respond to how much watering is needed rather than just watering at set times—

**Mr McNulty:** That's correct.

**MR SESELJA:** What is there in place, whether it be bores, recycled water or issues like that, so that I guess we can hopefully droughtproof some of our ovals in future droughts or when there are severe restrictions in place?

**Mr McNulty:** We are taking as much advantage as we can of the north Canberra effluent reuse scheme to irrigate sportsgrounds in north Canberra. We have sportsgrounds at Southwell Park, which are being irrigated from a sewer mining operation there, but our ability to obtain that water relies heavily on Actew providing infrastructure and at the moment there is no additional capacity to do that.

**MR SESELJA:** Is that trucked in at the moment?

**Mr McNulty:** No, there is a main that goes from Fyshwick through a sewage treatment plant up Limestone Avenue effectively and the water is taken off there. In terms of bores there is a moratorium at the moment, as you are probably aware, on the use of bores, except for government uses. We have made a small number of exemptions to that but we do not have the ability or probably the volume in a bore to water a sportsground; they take large amounts of water to keep them in a playable condition.

**MR SESELJA:** You don't see that as a viable option even as supplementation?

**Mr McNulty:** You need the bore right adjacent to the sportsground, obviously, or it is not usable, and, given the moratorium and the small amount of water that is currently available, bores are not a realistic option at the moment.

**MR SESELJA:** So realistically the main non-potable would be recycled and it is a matter of having the infrastructure in place to get as much of that as possible?

**Mr McNulty:** Correct. We have been talking with Actew about the potential use of the recycled water that they have available out at lower Molonglo, but the problem is that the only way you can get that is in tankers and if you drive them around a sportsground you compact the surface and destroy the sprinklers, so it is a sort of two-edged sword, and it is very expensive.

**MS PORTER:** So ideally it would be—for the future perhaps—something that would deliver the water through pipes, a separate reticulation, that could be delivered underneath the ground. There are various attitudes to recycled water and one of them is “I wouldn't want my child playing on grass that has been watered with recycled water”.

**Mr McNulty:** Clearly our use of recycled water is subject to the Department of Health agreement; they have agreed to that. In terms of the future, one thing is the availability of the water where you need it, and that is an Actew infrastructure issue. The issue of subsurface irrigation then is to what extent should we retrofit existing sportsgrounds with a new irrigation system, which would mean basically throwing away the existing system and putting in a new one, which is an expensive thing to do. Then, allied to that, if you can do that, as Sue mentioned, you have to start looking at the sort of turf you are using if you are going to be using subsoil irrigation because generally you need a different sort of turf to that that we are using in Canberra at the moment.

**MR SESELJA:** What about for new ovals rather than retrofitting? What is the situation with those in terms of irrigation systems?

**Mr McNulty:** I guess it is an issue we are looking at on a case by case basis. Currently we are looking at the system that the committee saw out at Canberra Grammar School. If that proves to be something that we can look at in the future, we would certainly include it if it is viable, but it is on a case by case basis.

**MR SESELJA:** It sounded, from our discussions, that there were still some Canberra

specific issues that hadn't quite been worked through.

**Mr McNulty:** I think that is turf species particularly. Most of those systems use a couch grass, which is a runner grass, which in winter goes terribly brown very quickly and does not wear very well in winter, so the efficacy of that on sportsgrounds is potentially a problem for us.

**MS PORTER:** There were also some issues around delivery types of fertiliser, I thought, and the clay soil was another issue.

**Mr McNulty:** The issue with fertiliser is that fertilisers get spread on top of the ground and the only way you can water them is by applying water to the surface of the ground, so you have a temporary irrigation system that you bring in to do that or you leave a surface irrigation system as well as the underground system, which means that you have double the capital investment.

**MS PORTER:** Mr Gentleman, do you remember that turf experiment that we went to see months ago—over in Watson, wasn't it?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, Rosary school in Watson.

**MS PORTER:** Are you familiar with that?

**Ms Marriage:** I understood it was part of that same—the KISSS guys were also looking at it—experiment on the different types of turf at the same time at that school project. Is that the one that you are referring to?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Marriage:** Yes, it is the same subsoil irrigation system that they were looking at trialling with the various types of turf to see how successful it is, and at this stage, from our discussions with both the school and the consultants, they are still trialling that and they will give us the information when it is available.

**MS PORTER:** Okay. So it's not complete yet?

**Ms Marriage:** No. I think they want to go through the winter process in the next couple of months to get that information back. There are two parts of it. In some of the testimonials that they have given us the sites that they have utilised that subsoil system on are sites that have very low usage, so they might be community parks and things rather than sportsgrounds, so there is that other consideration: if you have hurtling 15-men rugby teams and things like that going across them continually, week in and week out, that has an impact on it. That is why we are trying to look at it from all the different components. But I understand that at least that one has some turf assessments involved in it.

**MR SESELJA:** Just around the issue we touched on before of the recycling, how many ovals are we talking about that currently would use recycled water for irrigation?



**Ms Marriage:** We have got that figure somewhere.

**MR SESELJA:** Do you have a broad percentage? Is it just a handful of ovals or—

**Ms Marriage:** It is a very small amount at the moment. There are 24 hectares of ground in north Canberra that use recycled, there are nine hectares at Southwell Park, which is from the sewer mining plant, and then 15 hectares in Campbell, Reid, Ainslie and O'Connor from the Fyshwick treatment plant. So it is in that north area.

**MR SESELJA:** And a hectare is broadly two sportsgrounds?

**Mr McNulty:** Yes.

**MR SESELJA:** So 48 sportsgrounds, roughly.

**Ms Marriage:** That's about it.

**MR SESELJA:** In terms overall of how the restrictions apply to you that is obviously just additional. I forget what the savings are that you have to make at the moment—is it 40 per cent under stage 3?

**Mr McNulty:** Thirty-five.

**MR SESELJA:** So you make it 35 in potable water and anything you get from recycled is additional to that?

**Mr McNulty:** That is correct.

**THE CHAIR:** The committee has, though its interactions with ACTPLA, been looking at different ways of treating runoff water in urban open space. We made some recommendations in our submission back to the Assembly on the suburb of Crace, which is now being released. No doubt that is going to present some challenges to your department in the treatment of that. Have you had a look at that and can you tell us what sort of things you have been looking at?

**Mr McNulty:** Yes. We have looked at a number of proposals which have been put up by developers, both government and private, for water efficiency. Some include using stormwater runoff to irrigate street trees and the plantings on the side of roads. Others are a bit more elaborate and include storing water for reuse on irrigation on ovals and things like that. There was a proposal in the Gungahlin town centre to use tanks and irrigate from those.

Each of those options has some costs of maintaining the delivery mechanisms associated with them. We want to make sure that when they get handed to the department those costs are recognised and that we have the ability to maintain that, because it would be tragic for that stuff to go in, not be maintained and then fall into disrepair. So, yes, we have looked at a continuum from fairly simple things to quite elaborate schemes and as far as I know some of those are being installed by developers at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** I was quite interested during that process of looking at the environmental aspects of the way we have been treating water runoff. In the old days it was the big concrete open drains and now with Crace and other areas we have been looking at swath ponds and different ways of treating it.

**Mr McNulty:** It is probably worth noting that the government has recently received funding from the commonwealth under the Australian water fund for a project that essentially involves replacing concrete-lined channels with more natural things—with wetlands. The idea then is to use the water stored in those for irrigation of sportsgrounds and things also. That is a large project that is just starting at the moment in partnership with the commonwealth.

**MS PORTER:** Going back to convert the old ones?

**Mr McNulty:** Yes, similar to what has been done at the David Street wetlands in Turner or O'Connor, whichever it is. It is that sort of thing but probably on a larger scale so that the stored water can be used for irrigation.

**MR SESELJA:** Looking at the number of ovals in the Gungahlin area, how many sportsgrounds are we talking about at the moment? Do you have those numbers? Obviously we have the charts where it talks about district sportsgrounds, neighbourhood sportsgrounds and special purpose areas. I am just trying to get a feel for within those how many playing fields we have.

**Ms Marriage:** At the moment we have 2½ hectares in Palmerston neighbourhood oval, 2½ hectares in Ngunnawal neighbourhood oval, 7½ at Nicholls, which is a district playing field, and 7½ at Amaroo, which is also a district playing field. The next one that is being developed at the moment is Harrison neighbourhood oval, which will be about a 2½-hectare facility as well.

**MR SESELJA:** That is being constructed at the moment?

**Ms Marriage:** Yes, a tender process now.

**MR SESELJA:** So going on two per hectare you have roughly 40 playing fields at the moment in Gungahlin; is that correct?

**Ms Marriage:** That would probably be about right. It depends on configuration.

**MR SESELJA:** This is a question I asked probably a couple of years ago in estimates and we weren't able to get an answer. You might be able to update us. How is the number needed determined for any given region? Is it based on population or age—that sort of thing? And how would Gungahlin compare with other regions of comparable size in Canberra—say, Weston Creek or something like that? Do you have that kind of information?

**Ms Marriage:** I am referring to the Gungahlin sport and recreation task force report of October 2005, if you are wondering where I am getting my figures from. There has been a comparison of sportsground provision across the area as part of that. It is based on population so therefore it is per thousand people. At the moment you are working

on hectares of sportsground per thousand people in Gungahlin of about 0.7 and if you are taking, for example, the Woden-Weston Creek one it is about 1.35.

**MR SESELJA:** So it is a fair difference.

**Ms Marriage:** There is a difference there and you will find right across Canberra that it works that way too because obviously in different areas the planning processes or the development of an area is changed. For example, Tuggeranong is about one, so Gungahlin is not far behind it, but Belconnen is 1.4. Then you really have to look at that stretch outside of Gungahlin, at whether Gungahlin sports are playing at Belconnen, whereas at Tuggeranong it is a lot further removed down in the valley that potentially Woden and Weston is too far away for them. So it all comes down to the provision of what is in those areas of what sort of sportsgrounds too.

**MR SESELJA:** Is consideration given in planning to the demographics? I am thinking particularly of Gungahlin. It is bursting at the seams with young kids so there would theoretically be a much greater demand than in an older area for sportsgrounds in particular. Is that considered in the planning for ovals, or is it simply done on a population basis?

**Ms Marriage:** Most local councils take it on a per head of population basis because the demographics of a region or a suburb change so easily over a period of a decade, and when you are building a sportsground you are working on three decades worth of usage not just the next five years. So they do tend to work on that. Also, sports are very transient. You find that they compete right across Canberra anyway, which has always been a challenge for us, particularly now with sports, because of petrol prices and things like that. But that certainly is how it gets worked out in most councils.

**MR SESELJA:** If it is not considered in the long term—I am thinking in particular of when you make the decision about which ovals not to water, for instance—is it considered in that? I do not know for sure but what is the situation in Gungahlin at the moment? Have any of the ovals in Gungahlin been allowed to die or not?

**Ms Marriage:** No.

**Mr McNulty:** One oval had been turned off but that was turned back on again, at Nicholls, in response to a request from the community.

**MR SESELJA:** So the reason none were in Gungahlin I assume is because you have a relatively high demand at the moment so that was taken into account?

**Ms Marriage:** Absolutely.

**Mr McNulty:** That is absolutely correct.

**THE CHAIR:** With those comments you have mentioned there about building for three decades, do you find then that sportsgrounds in the older suburbs, because of the demographic changes, are being less used? Has that been dramatically demonstrated?

**Ms Marriage:** Not usually. What you do find is that the sports themselves still play

their competitions in those areas. Sportsgrounds tend to be district sportsgrounds. Even though we technically call some of them neighbourhood ovals and district sportsgrounds, they do tend to be for the wider community; they are not just for the people in that local community. So you do find, particularly here in Canberra, that they are all utilised. In a city that uses cars, people travel everywhere for them. So we are not finding that. But what we try to do, if we have ovals that we see as low-maintenance ovals, like ones that are only being used for one season and not for multiuse activities, is to reduce the irrigation on those so that we are able to maintain the other ones up to a higher standard refurb that way. That is how you operate them, but you don't really find that there is a sportsground sitting in one area that is not being utilised.

**MR SESELJA:** Could you also explain to me on page 23 where it talks about "sometimes catered for or provided" versus "usually catered for or provided"? I have read the things below, which was the same in the draft. What happens at the other times? Is it simply not used for soccer or something? I am just not quite clear on the descriptor on that.

**Ms Marriage:** All that means is that if it is only being used, for example, in the winter season, because the sports that mainly utilise that facility are winter sports, it is still available to be booked by anybody and it is still managed, refurbished and looked after over that period of time. It is just that another sport could take it on or a community group could book their local community activity in it. So it is still maintained all the time; it is just really trying to show you the difference between those that have the multiuse all the year round and those that have not at this point.

**MS PORTER:** There are also some specialist areas. Are they used for other groups—for instance, the softball centre over in Hawker? A number of the grounds around that are multiuse but there are others that would not be multiuse; is that the case?

**Ms Marriage:** Some of the specific sports like softball do have their facility and they utilise the facility. They also do a lot of maintenance on it. In fact, with some of the sports they have the sole maintenance responsibilities in that respect and they might work through grants, sponsors and things to do that maintenance work. So you do find a few of those, yes, but again they still utilise the expertise of our area to assist them when it comes to remodelling the facility or if they want lights on the site and things like that; they still come back through us to make sure that they are meeting the design standards.

**THE CHAIR:** As there are no further questions, I thank you very much for coming in this afternoon and presenting to the committee. We will get a copy of the transcript to you as soon as we can and get back to you if there are any further questions you might be able to answer.

**The committee adjourned at 2.30 pm.**