National Position Paper
Parkland
A Position Paper for political and other decision-makers

This advocacy Position Paper summarises Parks & Leisure Australia’s response to current issues nationally for the information of political and decision-maker audiences. A separate complementary Position Paper exists to suit parks and leisure professional needs. This paper is the first in a series of position papers on open space in Australia.

Definition
Parkland refers to those parks and gardens which can be used for casual recreation (sometimes described as informal or passive) such as play, picnics, walking, exercise, cycling, appreciating nature or dog walking. These can include areas such as formal horticultural landscapes, natural settings and linear parks.

Parkland is intended to refer to all park areas other than sporting spaces (and their associated facilities) and may feature as part of a broader sporting precinct. In some settings the Parkland may be complementary to heritage buildings. Parkland also includes areas where by their very existence any parkland use is secondary (e.g. sporting fields and school grounds) where the prime activity has precedence but at times when not in such use the area may be utilized and accessible for casual recreation (e.g. kite flying, dog exercise).

In such settings people can variously enjoy the outdoors (individually and in company) for casual physical activities, community gatherings, appreciation of nature, and to help protect local biodiversity and natural area values through volunteering. Activities may range from walking, cycling, dog walking, picnicking, impromptu play, exploring natural features, enjoying scenic landscapes and bird watching, through to participation in outdoor events and festivals.

Note:
1. Where major amenities like aquatic centres and sports facilities are sited within broader Parkland settings, this document only seeks to address the Parkland component.
2. PLA has prepared a separate Position Paper on Sports Spaces.
3. Parks created and managed under Federal and State legislation (e.g. National and State Parks, conservation reserves) are excluded from this Position Paper.

The Context
Growing urban populations, and the related costs of infrastructure and transport provision, are leading to increasing urban density (through both higher-rise development and smaller allotment size). To date there has been little corresponding consideration and allowance for the associated provision of adequate, convenient and quality Parkland, especially in areas of urban renewal.
At the same time, in our increasingly sedentary lifestyle, our health is suffering with growing concerns and costs regarding mental health, obesity and associated heart disease health. Yet there is a growing body of evidence in Australia and internationally to indicate that ‘contact with nature’ and outdoor exercise can offer an effective low-cost preventative and remedial responses.

The Facts

Parkland is not just nice to have - it should be viewed as an essential component of urban infrastructure. The health, wellbeing, social, economic and environmental benefits of quality Parkland are many and significant.

Health and well-being benefits to people:
- Encouraging participation in physical activity;
- Enhancing physical and mental health, and is an essential component for children’s healthy development;
- Helping to reduce the risk of chronic disease; and
- Assisting in recovery from stress and mental fatigue.

Social benefits to communities:
- Building stronger and connected communities through the provision of leisure opportunities where people come together;
- Supporting social cohesion and inclusion; and
- Improving liveability in urban environments.

Environmental benefits:
- Providing biodiversity and ecosystem services;
- Reducing temperature levels by up to 8°C through shade from trees and reducing the heat sink effect;
- Attenuating wind speeds;
- Removing pollutants;
- Sequestering carbon;
- Playing a critical role in storm water management (cleaning storm water, slowing its movement and absorbing water during intense rainfall events); and
- Recharging groundwater by being permeable sinks.

Economic benefits:
- Health savings attributed to the low-cost benefits outlined above;
- The low-cost climate change and other environmental offsets described above;
- Positive influence on house prices and rate income through ‘lifestyle’ attraction;
- Tourism attraction of scenic and horticultural settings; and
- Economic generator for photographic coffee-table publications, calendars and magazines.
The issues

- The importance of Parkland to the health of communities/cities is recognised but not well understood by decision makers;
- The value and importance of Parkland to communities is not appreciated or respected by many decision-makers;
- Parkland is seen as free land or empty unused space that can be given to another purpose;
- The planning process does not prioritise parkland as a key element in a structure planning process resulting in low quality Parkland;
- Insufficient funding is allocated to ensure quality of Parkland is maintained; and
- Parkland is not well protected by Government or statutory authorities.

Parks & Leisure Australia’s Position

1. Governments at all levels, and the broader community, have a responsibility to protect and enhance existing Parkland for current and future generations.
2. Quality Parkland should be planned as essential civic infrastructure in new settlement planning.
3. A diversity of Parkland suitable for various recreational uses needs to be convenient and accessible to all groups in the community.
4. There should be no net reduction in Parkland – indeed, in area of urban renewal and increasing density additional Parkland provision must be an essential component of urban planning with adequate funding allocation. A variety of approaches may be needed for planning Parkland in different settlement types as priorities may differ for inner urban areas, activity centres, growth areas and rural areas.
5. The value and importance of protecting areas for environmental benefit needs to be given a higher priority.
6. All levels of Government have a responsibility for ensuring that planning for Parkland takes place in a collaborative and coordinated manner, and that provision of Parkland is given the status it deserves given its importance to sustaining healthy communities.

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Prepared by:
PLA Advisory

Media enquiries can be directed to:
Media enquiries can be directed to Lee Gagliardi, Communications Officer, Parks and Leisure Australia National Office
m: 0421 905 037 e: communications@parksleiure.com.au