The 2018 International Parks and Leisure Congress IPLC2018 ran in conjunction with the World Urban Parks, focused on the impact urban growth and density is having on our parks and open space systems and the quality of life for our communities.

Over 700 professionals from across the globe attended the congress with our colleagues sharing ideas and thoughts in relation to the topic. As one of the most urbanised countries in the world and with our population expected to double by 2050 and 80% of our community living on 3% of our land mass; the pressure on Australia is very real.

Envied globally for our way of life and vast networks of open spaces, the pressure on planners, managers and all levels of government to acknowledge and protect our open spaces is critical. The purpose of the congress and this statement paper, is therefore to:

• Encourage better planning for Australian cities by learning from the experiences of others across the globe.
• Help Australia be prepared for and plan for the future.
• Highlight the importance of parks and public spaces to the future of our cities, the lifestyles of our communities and the environmental significance they have particularly in densely populated areas.

Our Vision

“Parks and Leisure Australia believes that parks within our cities and towns are the “heart and lungs” of communities providing opportunities for leisure, social cohesion and environmental connection”

“The focus of this congress and the impact of urban grown, strikes a chord with us all in Melbourne. In many cities, population growth and climate change are the two biggest challenges. In Melbourne, we focus on building resilient landscapes for future climate challenges.”

Sally Capp; Lord Major of Melbourne

The Background

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The Challenge

Our industry supports, plans, provides and manages the places and spaces that are critical urban infrastructure for all Australians. These spaces and places support active and healthy living, form a basis of sport and its development, combat social isolation and stress, encourage connectedness, strengthen local and regional economies and protect and enhance our natural environments. “Parks and Leisure Australia believes that parks within our cities and towns are the “heart and lungs” of communities providing opportunities for leisure, social cohesion and environmental connection”

Australia has three out of ten cities ranked as the most liveable in the World. These being Melbourne at #2, Sydney at #5 and Adelaide at #10. Cities are recognising the need to change as population profiles shift and density increases. If we don’t plan now, those places we are envied for will be compromised and the quality of life of Australians will be severely affected.
PLA advocates and recommends:

1. No net loss of open space in our major towns and cities.
2. A park, plaza or greenspace within a 10-minute walk for all Australians.
3. A 25% greening target for our towns and cities through gardens, public plazas, green walls or rooftop gardens.
4. Developing the concept of a town in a park for all of our major towns and cities.
5. Ensuring all public open space in towns and cities has recreational value.
6. Recognising and acknowledging the traditional owners of public land in all settings.

“The change that is needed is to plan parks and public spaces first. Ensuring our cities are built around green spaces, natural places and quality public open spaces that are accessible to all. This isn’t a ‘nice thing’ to have; but a crucial one if we want cities for our children and grandchildren to live in and urban areas that we want to grow old in.”

Mark Band; CEO Parks and Leisure Australia

“Municipally-owned parklands are a non renewable resource that should be protected. Once lost to another use, recreational or open space is difficult to recover. For this reason, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation strongly endorses the maintenance and expansion of municipal parks, and the recreational opportunities they offer. State Parks encourages a “no net loss of parkland” policy.”

Mitchell Silver; Commissioner, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation
The Principles

The following five principles form the basis of PLA’s position on protecting and preserving our open spaces in Australian towns and cities for future generations.

1. Investment
Acknowledge that spending on parks and open spaces is not a cost, but an investment in the future. People want lifestyles not just houses. Access to parks and open spaces will provide positive returns to the national health budget through improved lifestyle, activity and wellbeing.

2. Policy
Local, State and Federal legislation needs to protect our open spaces. Putting measures in place to protect and minimise the loss of impact on open space is critical and we need to learn from global cities that are more densely populated than our own.

3. Planning
Open space planning needs to occur as a priority before roads, housing and hard infrastructure. Ensuring communities and towns are connected to open space is critical, and planning should prevent the development of isolated parks or unusable open space. Poor connections, loss of active transport opportunities and isolated or unusable assets that are a cost burden rather than a community asset.

4. Design
Plan for towns and cities in parks rather than parks in towns and cities. Greening our urban form connects people back to nature and promotes wildlife habitats and corridors for a healthy urban environment.

5. Place
Open space doesn’t necessarily have to be all green. Public plazas, town squares and civic spaces add to the open space fabric and sense of belonging. Where space is in demand, green infrastructure and public spaces all add to the fabric which connects our communities and the places we live, work and play.