



Grassroots, Where It Starts

Parks & Leisure Australia National Conference

PLA2022 MELBOURNE STATEMENT

CENTREPIECE at Melbourne Park, Melbourne, Victoria



**PARKS & LEISURE
AUSTRALIA**

Our Vision

For Australia to be the most liveable country in the world, renowned for its parks, sport and recreation facilities that provide the foundation for healthy communities and liveable towns and cities.

The 2022 Parks and Leisure Australia National Conference was held on 16 to 19 October 2022 at CENTREPIECE at Melbourne Park, Melbourne.

Conference Focus

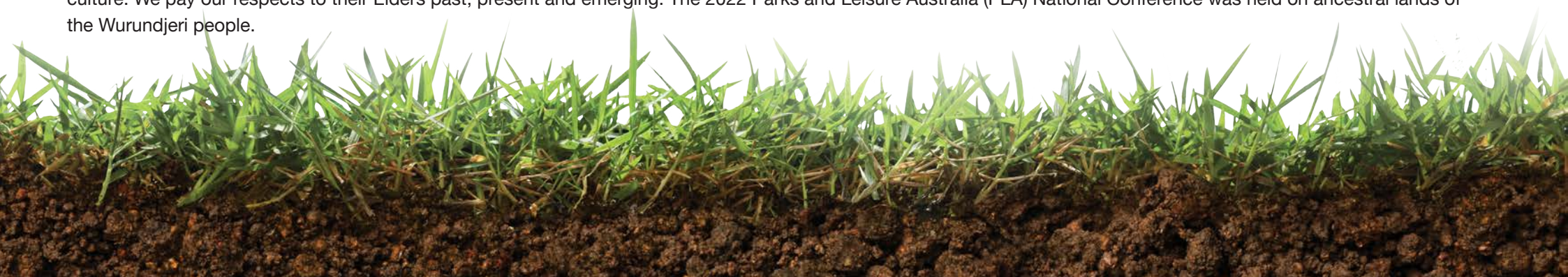
The 2022 PLA National Conference theme was “Grassroots, Where it Starts”. The conference celebrated the foundations of everything we do in the parks and leisure industry. The conference discussed the myriad of outcomes of our parks and recreation to provide health, activity, socialisation and environmental settings and outcomes, as well as acknowledging that our parks are where sporting elite performance has its start.

The conference was a welcomed opportunity for the parks and leisure industry to come together, reconnect and network after two years of virtual conferences due to the restriction on travel and gathering during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Over 500 delegates from across Australia attended the conference to share ideas and collaborate on themes including recreation and physical activity, horticulture and gardens, parks and open spaces, sport and, the health, economic and socio-economic benefits of our diverse parks and leisure industry.

Acknowledgement of Country

Parks and Leisure Australia (PLA) acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. The 2022 Parks and Leisure Australia (PLA) National Conference was held on ancestral lands of the Wurundjeri people.



Call to Action

PLA calls on Local, State and Federal Governments, and Industry Partners to:

1. Prioritise investment in delivering greener places and healthier communities in our cities and regions to improve the health of Australians and to become climate resilient places.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the parks and leisure industry, but it has also shown us that the community values our green public open spaces and that protecting, enhancing, and extending our green spaces should be a priority.

PLA continues to be concerned about the poor health of our people and the impact of climate change on our green spaces.





2. Partner in our urgent and collective response to a health and climate emergency.

Physical inactivity remains high where more than a third of Australians aged 15 and over do very little or no exercise at all and 8 out of 10 Australian children do not meet the national guidelines of 60 minutes of physical activity per day.

The cost of physical inactivity to the Australian economy is over \$800 million annually and causes an estimated 16,000 premature deaths each year. People that participate in sport or physical activity are 36% less likely to die from cardiovascular disease! Australia has increasing rates of mental health challenges following sustained COVID-19 restrictions. A key lesson from lockdowns has been how important our parks have been to the wellbeing of our community.

The rising inflation rate means the cost of providing and maintaining parks and leisure services, facilities and places is becoming more expensive. It is becoming unaffordable for some people to access services.

As the planners, architects and custodians of Australia's parks, bushlands, gardens, sports facilities, leisure centres, trails and paths, water bodies, and our urban health infrastructure, we know that people's engagement in our places will result in a healthier, smarter, and happier nation.

Participation in physical activity is changing. There are more people involved in unstructured participation, often in our parks. We also have a growing population. These competing and growing participation demands, highlighting a supply and demand issue, have resulted in Australian cities reaching the limit of the carrying capacity of our existing network of green spaces. We need to urgently expand our parks portfolio and to rethink how we use and manage our green spaces. It is not sustainable to have our quality public open spaces not fit for purpose for our community.

On current trends, Australia will experience a 1.1% to 2.9% increase in temperature by 2030! We are experiencing an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events including fire, drought, flooding, rising sea levels and variations in rainfall across the country. These climate changes impact our parks and leisure industry.

Creating climate resilient cities and regions through urban forestation, enhancing bio-links, and conservation is a priority and an outcome from investing in urban health infrastructure.

The conference acknowledged that our parks do not exist in isolation, each individual park is part of a larger collection of parks. Protecting the whole portfolio is our ultimate outcome, as the green portfolio provides a bulwark against climate change, connectivity for social outcomes, and connected wildlife corridors for our protected wildlife to move through the environment.

“ What the Pandemic showed us is that parks, recreation areas and open space are critical to our healthy way of life and even more important for socialisation and our mental health. The importance of our industry has never been more prevalent. It's great to be back together understanding that we build the foundations for these places where people meet, play and enjoy recreating. Grassroots, is where it all starts ”

Les Munn, President Parks & Leisure Australia





3. Develop and implement a national urban health infrastructure and tree canopy targets in our cities and regions.

We have seen state and local governments across Australia step-up their investment in our urban health infrastructure, recognising these places as key ingredients to the liveability of our cities and regions and economic recovery from COVID-19 restrictions.

Unfortunately, only 8% of the Australian Government’s “prioritising mental health, preventative health and sport” budget in 2021 (which makes up less than 1% of the overall health budget) is allocated to community health and active lifestyles.

Let’s fast track the creative redesign of our cities and regions and invest in greener places which are connected to where people live, work, and play so that they are active, sustainable, and productive.

“ We need to continue developing open spaces for our communities and greening programs to provide benefits far reaching beyond health, and wellbeing. Let’s give future generations access to the best quality, vibrant and equitable open spaces. ”

Bishop Ngobeli, Conservation Manager, Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo

4. Commit to Gender Equity.

PLA prepared a Gender Equity Charter in 2020 in partnership with members and the Australian Human Rights Commission and references the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights.

PLA is committed to gender equity and equality.

PLA recognises that diversity in governance and membership leads to strength in decision making and outcomes. It will help us grow in influence, and in turn creates more inclusive communities.

PLA will be a leader and champion for gender equity in the Australian parks and leisure industry. Our gender equity targets and action plan are guided by four key principles: non-discrimination, equality, participation and inclusion. They will deliver systemic change in the parks and leisure industry.





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