



National Position Paper Sports Space

This Advocacy Position Paper summarises Parks and Leisure Australia's response to broad national issues associated with the allocation of land to sports spaces. This paper is for the information of political and decision-maker audiences. A separate and much more detailed Industry Position Paper also exists to suit parks and leisure professionals' needs. It is the second paper in a series of position papers on open space in Australia.

Definition

Sports space refers to a public area that is commonly used for organised sporting activities, although may be available for other recreational uses at non sporting times.

A sports space may be a grassed playing field or area, bitumen or acrylic hard-courts, or synthetic surfaced areas. This position statement focuses on outdoor field sports (on both natural and synthetic), court and greens based sport spaces. It includes additional infrastructure required for its successful use, such as adequate run off and buffer spaces, pavilions and training facilities (i.e. cricket practice nets).

The facts

It is essential that adequate accessible land is allocated or set aside for sport space to promote physical activity in our existing and future communities. Sports space provides the means to play and participate in sport, thereby contributing to the social capital, sense of community belonging, health and wellbeing of Australians, value of urban spaces, and economic opportunities.

Sports space contributes to building social capital:

- Sports volunteers count for a large percentage of all volunteers and volunteer hours, and contribute significant labour to sport and the vibrancy it brings to communities;
- Engagement in sport provides a sense of place and sense of belonging within a community for the participants and spectators; and
- Participation in sport teaches social skills, culturally acceptable behaviours and a code of ethics.

Sports space contributes to Australians' health:

- Participation in sport and recreation provides benefits across the five Australian national health priorities
 - Promoting better mental health. Sport can foster positive mental states such as self-confidence, hope, optimism and resilience (note PLA's partnership with Beyond Blue)
 - Cardiovascular disease prevention
 - Diabetes prevention and control
 - Primary prevention of some cancers, and
 - Injury prevention



- Community level sport promotes physical activity which can reduce health costs, in gross terms; and also result in productivity gains by making the workforce healthier; and
- Parklands and natural sports spaces improve environmental quality by providing shade, ameliorating temperature, reducing heat island effect, and converting CO₂ to oxygen.

Sports space contributes to Australians' progress and opportunities:

- Educationally, children engaged in sport and active recreation do better academically and are more likely to enjoy school; and
- Sport fosters economic activity through the manufacture and sales of sporting goods, and provision of sporting services and events at local, national and international levels.

Sports space adds value to urban living spaces:

- Sports spaces provide strategic and aesthetic separation of urban areas; offering landscape buffers, boundaries and focal points within a neighbourhood and providing active linkages between community nodes;
- Sport spaces are an invaluable community resource: they are places for congregating and for holding community competitions and events; and
- Sports spaces provide facility for other non-sporting community groups.

The issues

- There is no consistent approach to the provision for sports space;
- The demand for sports spaces is greater than supply which leads to a need for an increase in sports space and for existing spaces to work harder; some solutions include lighting, synthetic surfaces and multi-functionality.
- Many new housing estates do not provide sports spaces of a size which caters for multi-purpose full-size senior sporting participation and competition;
- Co-located joint development models can result in loss of sports space such as overflow training spaces;
- Playing space on education land is an inherent part of sports space of a community and this space is lost where education facilities are sold;
- Inadequate or difficult to access sports space can result in people choosing not to play sport where they have to travel long distances;
- Inadequate provision results in waiting lists to join club or long waiting periods to access adequate facilities. This impacts participation and is most evident in junior sporting activities where engagement is most critical;
- Poor access, inadequate and inflexible sports space can often impact on the long term viability of sports clubs and organisations and inhibit potential growth;
- Poor design and growth can increase demand on, and for, volunteers;
- Sports space provision needs to be mindful of changing population demographics (e.g. aging residents, or a new influx of young families);
- Population growth is increasing demand for adequate sports space;
- Sports space provision includes strategically located and dispersed regional catchment spaces;



- At times there is a tension between provision of sports space and provision of parkland and it is important to recognise that both are important and both should be adequately provided;
- There is a need for a continued high standard of research and data capture, for example that ABS, or other, collects data equivalent to that captured previously by ERASS;
- Fenced sports space, which therefore restricts access, needs to be removed from what is legitimately called 'public open space';
- There is an increasing reliance in growth communities for club sport to access school facilities which frequently have a range of complexities in practical implementation.

Parks & Leisure Australia's Position

1. PLA promotes the need for sports spaces in all future Planning Schemes and Structure Plans to meet government (and PLA) objectives of promoting good health and wellbeing through effective design to enable communities to engage in physical activities and sports of their choice.
2. State legislation in respect of land use planning should incorporate a requirement for the future planning of sports space to be part of an integrated planning framework having regard to locally determined needs which is enforceable through conditions.
3. Sports spaces must be an identified part of an integrated planning framework with defined and accessible linkages to residential and employment areas.
4. Where possible there should be no net loss of open space and that this applies to any space which may come up through surplus state government land.
5. Sports space planning should also demonstrate linkages to other recreation spaces including parklands and gardens, nature places and other public open spaces.
6. All age groups and abilities require adequate competitive and structured sports spaces.
7. PLA argues that planning for senior sport provision allows for and accommodates junior sport and should be the priority.
8. Sports spaces should be 'fit-for-purpose', include provision for supporting infrastructure (e.g. lighting, carparking, amenities), be well designed in terms of orientation, drainage and safety with adequate buffer areas and be located in accessible places.
9. Providing sports precincts and/or co-located multiple sport spaces is more efficient than dispersed single fields from both user and maintenance perspectives.
10. Early planning is required to enable the provision of regional sports spaces (multiple fields and facilities) and enable active and passive recreation and nature play experiences in the same precinct.
11. There are different sports space issues and needs for cities, large towns, and rural areas.



12. Parkland (play space, incidental open space, conservation space, drainage swales etc.) provision and other community needs should not be compromised as a result of sports space provision in new and existing urban areas.
13. A regular and systematic collection and analysis of information relating to provision, use and development of sports spaces is required to better understand the value of such provision and the need for continued investment.
14. PLA advocates for the reinstatement of Exercise, Recreation And Sport Survey and other equivalent data capture methods.
15. Essential parts of a network of sports space that will service future generations are:
 - a. Quality spaces in terms of size, orientation, space for ancillary amenities and buffer zones
 - b. Thoughtful distribution and consideration of people's access
 - c. A diversity of experiences
 - d. Multi-functionality, and
 - e. Range of sizes and spaces.
16. PLA promotes shared provision / maintenance and use of sporting facilities.
17. Sports space should be maintained at any point in time as 'fit for purpose' but can change to reflect growing community demand or altered recreation trends. As such Sports space should be adequately funded for its useable life.

At times there is a tension between provision of sports space and provision of parkland. It is important to recognise that both are important, not mutually exclusive and both should be adequately provided.

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