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SUBMISSION ON “WHITE PAPER – PARKLANDS FOR PEOPLE”

Since its establishment in 1972, Total Environment Centre has defended and sought expansion of Sydney’s green spaces and parks. It was, and to a significant extent is, still too easy, to alienate these vital areas for commercial or single use or infrastructure purposes. Often the irreplaceable environmental values are not well assessed and marginalised. The new legislation should aim to overcome these problems and set the stage for a more robust, protective and better managed framework to service existing and future generations and the environment.

We wish to note that the new agency has already taken actions to negatively impact its reputation with the removal of trees for new carparking in Parramatta Park; and failure to issue a bedrock conservation plan for Fernhill Estate, before inviting a wide range of undoubtedly damaging proposals for the site.

The following are key measures we recommend should be integrated into the new legislation.

1. There must be clear prohibition of sale of any part of the existing and future parklands.
2. The Agency should have first choice of surplus government lands and where major land use changes offer new parklands (eg, Canterbury Racecourse).
3. Future infrastructure development (eg for transport purposes) of the parks or any associated offsets areas should be prohibited.
4. Where leasing is proposed – the legislation should require the process is fully transparent; is open to tender; and have limited periods (ie, avoid a lease so long that it is virtually a sale). The Local Government Act has useful provisions in this regard.
5. The legislation should contain environment protection principles to guide decision making to ensure activities and structures are compatible to the site and adjacent lands. This should include a commitment to ecologically sustainable development. One of the proposed funding solutions – is inadequately limited by the phrase “does not significantly impact on recreational, heritage or environmental values” (p25). This should be replaced by “minimal impact” with also a consideration of cumulative impacts over time.
6. There should be an explicit responsibility to protect mature, well developed and significant trees, wildlife corridors and canopy. This would involve development of a register by the Authority in a set timeframe (eg, 12 months), with annual public reports.
7. The Discussion Paper opens up the opportunities for “new and innovative ways” to fund the parks from on-park activity/development. While this may be possible in a very limited way, there should be recognition that some of the parks already have significant development (or too much) and have reached a management and publicly acceptable cap. Instead there should be exploration of developer levies and ongoing guaranteed government funding.

8. The legislation should bind other agencies and departments to consult with the GSP about any development that may impact the parks, with an obligation to assess impacts and develop alternatives. There should be an obligation to inform, assess and obtain the GSP's concurrence.
9. A charter of community consultation principles should be included as a schedule.

Finally, the GSP should be placed under the auspice of a senior Minister, so that it can advocate with strength and not be sidelined at Cabinet level.

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