

POLICY CHALLENGES FOR METROPOLITAN GREENSPACE IN SYDNEY

Catherine Evans, Robert Freestone
UNSW, Sydney, UNSW, Australia

INTRODUCTION

Greenpace has long been recognised as a crucial urban amenity for environmental, social and economic reasons. Garvin (2001, 11) maintains that 'it is impossible to understand fully the functioning of cities and suburbs or plan adequately for their future' without a 'deep appreciation of parks and the way they affect every aspect of our lives'. Internationally, a wide range of research projects, strategic plans and planning guides, prepared by and for government authorities and not-for-profit agencies, attests to an increasing demand for well integrated and high quality greenpace in urban regions (Veal, 2009). Recent Australian work has ranged from evaluating the adequacy of standards of provision for the compact city (Byrne and Sipe 2010; Searle, 2011) to considering the contribution of regional open space to metropolitan form and quality of life (Dooley and Pilgrim, 2010; Low Choy, 2010).

Greenpace is vital to the character and amenity of Sydney yet can fly under the radar when other seemingly more pressing issues such as employment, transport and housing dominate contemporary discourse (Freestone et al 2006). Metropolitan Sydney is well endowed with greenpaces which in aggregate comprise approximately 630,000 hectares or 49% of the total land area (NSW DoP 2005). These greenpaces vary widely in type, program, administrative structure and size. They include the extensive and iconic national parks which rim and punctuate the built-up area, three botanic gardens, many sporting grounds and diverse, small pockets of bushland. Nor is Sydney plagued by issues of limited accessibility: 91% of residents live within walking distance (5-10 minutes) to a greenpace; the same percentage is less than a 30 minute drive to a large regional greenpace (NSW DoP 2005). Over the last decade the NSW government has focused less on supply *per se* and more on ensuring accessibility and improving the quality of facilities and experiences (NSW Government, 2006, 2010).

At the same time, important strategic and management challenges need to be confronted. Ownership, management and planning regimes for greenpace at the metropolitan level remain incredibly complex, and no synoptic overview exists. Supply remains an issue for a growing and densifying metropolitan population. Access to diverse and quality open space remains uneven. New environmental demands for metropolitan greenpace in response to climate change adaptation are surfacing. Financial resources are constrained and governance structures are fragmented across an admixture of different state, metropolitan and local stakeholders. Furthermore, in recent years open space has commanded less political attention, with, for example, a demonstrably diminished status in the latest metropolitan strategy (NSW DoP 2010a).

How to assess the overall state of play? The aim of this paper is to identify and discuss some of the main strategic and policy challenges for planning metropolitan greenpace in Sydney. The paper has three main sections. First, we attempt to briefly catalogue the evolution and typology of open space within the Sydney region. Second, we overview the current administrative structures for greenpace in the metropolitan region. Third, we identify and discuss a number of key policy challenges currently surfacing or looming in the not too distant future. Our research for the paper draws on a review of recent policy and planning documents, some limited academic reviews, and detailed interviews with senior representatives of key stakeholder organisations in metropolitan greenpace acquisition, funding and management.

GREENSPACE IN THE SYDNEY METROPOLITAN REGION

History

Sydney's current stock of greenpace has emerged over a long period through diverse mechanisms dating back to the designation of a government domain, commons and botanic gardens by the earliest colonial administration (Freestone, 2010). Both state action and community initiative, and struggles between the two, have resulted in diverse lands being protected from development. Local, state and federal politics have intersected with the variegated physical geography of the Sydney Basin at intervals to catalyse opportunities, often hard fought, to create new parklands, sporting fields, conservation zones, and national parks. This

complex history underlines the diversity of greenspace today, as well as the variety of managerial arrangements and systemic challenges.

There is a long history of grassroots efforts in creating and shaping metropolitan Sydney's open space resources, dating back to the work of the Harbour Foreshore Vigilance Committee in the 1900s (Spearritt, 2000), the early bushwalking clubs which launched campaigns for the establishment of national parks and reserves (Dunlap, 1993), and the Parks and Playground Movement between the wars (Cunneen, 1980). The early planning movement seized upon open space as a resource critical to the delivery of health, beauty and economy, and endowed with the ability to shape the size and structure of metropolitan regions. The establishment of the post-war planning machine sought to institutionalise these aspirations but community pressures and lobbying often remained central to shaping actual outcomes on the ground. Goodall (et al 2005) have already told the story of how predominantly working class progress associations and environmental trusts helped realise the creation of the Georges River National Park. Establishment of the National Parks and Wildlife Service in 1967 formalised an inherited legacy of what became national and state parks, and provided a framework for future acquisition and extensions.

Considerable greenspace has been established post WWII through statutory planning. Since gazettal of the Cumberland County Planning Scheme in 1951, subsequent metropolitan strategic plans have underpinned the reservation and acquisition of large tracts of land forming significant resources subsequently managed by a variety of agencies such as the NSW National Park and Wildlife Service, the Western Sydney Parklands Trust and local government (Evans and Freestone, 2009). The establishment of the Sydney Region Development Fund in 1979 to continue a farsighted 1950s scheme for joint state-local funding of strategic projects (Evans and Freestone, 2010) has bankrolled numerous green initiatives at a cost of millions of dollars. Drawing on this funding pool, since the late 1970s, the state government has initiated several special programs to support the improvement and extension of existing green space. The first of these was the Greening Sydney (or Inner City Open Space Acquisition Program). Established in 1977, this program targeted derelict inner city industrial sites and transformed them into parks. The program emerged from the findings of a 1972 survey which demonstrated that inner city areas were greatly disadvantaged in terms of open space provision (NSW Planning and Environment Commission, 1975). New parks created included Sydney Park at St Peters and Mort Bay Park in Balmain. A separate Coastal Lands Protection Scheme commenced in 1973 has been used to identify, acquire and protect sensitive parts of Sydney coastline through public ownership.

With passage of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act in 1979, State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs) have been utilised to initiate planning and development of several significant regional greenspaces including SEPP 56 for Sydney Harbour Foreshore in 1998 and SEPP (Western Sydney Parklands) in 2009. The Western Sydney Parklands, created out of the corridors reserved under the Sydney Region Outline Plan of 1968 (Evans and Freestone, 2009) is one of the notable 'big ticket' green spaces formed over the last decade along with Sydney Olympic Park (including the former Bicentennial Park and Millennium Parklands).

Typology

The typology of greenspace across metropolitan Sydney falls broadly into three main categories: open space managed by local government areas and servicing local residents; large, regional parks either wholly within single local government areas or straddling boundaries, accessible to wider catchments, and managed by supra-local agencies; and national parks mainly on the metropolitan fringe.

The 43 council areas in the Sydney metropolitan region have a diverse and complex portfolio of local open space which includes parks, beaches, playgrounds, bush reserves, playing fields, and ovals. Local parks opened in the last 10-15 years reflect the range of current economic, social and ecological concerns that inform planning and policy more broadly in NSW. Hence, in addition to providing traditional active recreational opportunities, these parks enhance social and ecological connectivity in other ways. For example, the adaptive re-use of two post-industrial sites on the Waverton Peninsula - the BP Parkland (2005) and its near neighbour the Coal Loader (2011) - exemplify efforts to extend habitat, protect biodiversity, conserve cultural heritage, and secure continuous access to the harbour foreshore. Other sites have been created as part of efforts to increase urban density through urban consolidation, infill and adaptive reuse and deal with the associated open space demands and water management needs in smart and sensitive ways. Victoria Park, a mixed-used infill project in Sydney's Green Square urban renewal precinct incorporates 3.5 ha of public domain with parklands, street medians, and courtyards designed to reduce run-off and pollution while improving water quality and urban amenity (Evans, 2003).

At the regional level of greenspace - here we mean large parks with a user catchment that extends beyond a single local government area - there is a range of type, scale, and approaches to governance. Some of the oldest of these parks are Regional Crown Reserves such as Bondi Beach, Long Reef, Narrabeen Lagoon, Harbord Lagoon and Reserve, Knapsack Park and Yarramundi Reserve (all until April 2011 were the domain of the Department of Lands). NSW State Forests and NSW State Parks have opened some of their properties to recreational activities, all with broad user catchments. Examples are Cronulla State Park - a coastal park focused on surfing activities, and the Cumberland State Forest in West Pennant Hills which provides recreational and educational activities. Since 1997, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has been adding regional parks to its portfolio, with regional parks distinguished from national parks by the range of permitted uses. Regional parks offer a variety of leisure opportunities to complement the primary aims of protection and conservation. There are 9 NPWS regional parks in the Sydney region ranging in size and character from Parramatta Regional Park (4.56 ha) to Berowra Valley Regional Park (3885 ha). Since the 1960s, a separate suite of regional parks in the Sydney metropolitan area has emerged from a range of unique circumstances, each with its own special legislation and governing entity. These comprise some of Sydney's major open space assets within the built up area such as the 640 ha Sydney Olympic Park (operated by the Sydney Olympic Park Authority, created 2001) and the 5280 ha of the Western Sydney Parklands (Western Sydney Parklands Trust, created 2006). This grouping includes two former sand and gravel quarry sites: Chipping Norton Lakes (Chipping Norton Lakes Authority, created 1977) and Penrith Lakes (Penrith Lakes Development Corporation, created 1980). New trusts have also been established for the older large parks in the region, specifically Centennial Parklands (Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust, created 1983) and Parramatta Park (Parramatta Park Trust, created 2001).

Large national parks occupy extensive areas of less developable land on the sandstone plateaus, harbour foreshores and river valleys of the metropolitan area. These include Sydney's most iconic and oldest parks: Royal National Park in the south, Kur-ring-gai National Park in the north, and Blue Mountains in the west (now a key component of a World Heritage Area proclaimed in 2000), as well the Lane Cove and Georges River National Parks. In recent years, the NPWS system has expanded to include smaller parcels across the Cumberland Plain. Typically these lands are redundant defence sites and contain extensive areas of endangered ecological communities. Several former Commonwealth defence sites, managed by the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, also now comprise a significant percentage of publicly accessible green space around Sydney Harbour.

The chances for creation of completely new national parks and other large regional spaces in Sydney are now seriously restricted by land and fiscal constraints, but opportunities are periodically created where redundant lands are made available. The most significant pipeline in Sydney revolves around the release of decommissioned Commonwealth Government sites for public use. Examples are the former internment camp, migrant hostel and military training facility which became Scheyville National Park in 1996 and the former Australian Defence Industries land transformed into the 900ha Wianamatta Regional Park in 2008. The Commonwealth announced its intention to transfer nearly 200ha of land at Malabar Headland to the state government in the late 1990s, a process now coming to fruition with current lessees, including a long established rifle club, having been given notices to quit before the end of 2011.

CURRENT GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK AND STRATEGIC PLANNING POLICY

This description of Sydney's greenspace conveys a typology defined as much by governance as by environmental character. In this second section we develop our discussion of planning, provision and management of greenspace in metropolitan Sydney as distributed across local, state and federal levels of government through an array of responsible authorities, trusts, and government agencies. Our main interest here is to convey the extent or lack of coordination at a metropolitan scale.

Local

At the local level, open space provision occurs primarily through the land use zoning process. Local councils identify and propose land for recreation and environment uses in their Local Environment Plans (LEPs). Once this zoning is approved by the Office of Strategic Lands (OSL), currently within the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure, councils are then responsible for the acquisition, planning, development and management of these lands. While most, if not all, councils have a parks department or equivalent, there is no requirement for councils to develop a formal open space strategy. However, through the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework instituted in 2009, councils can address open space in their Community Strategic Plan (covering ten year timeframes) as part of their social and environmental reporting. As a result, the strategic focus on open space varies from council to council, with the range of approaches reflecting the landscape assets and demographic characteristics of particular areas, as well as the expertise and resources of individual councils.

In 2008, the NSW State Government introduced a standard template for land use zoning in an effort to simplify and standardise the classification of all land uses across all local government areas (LGAs) in the state. In this new template, open space is designated as either environment or recreation. While both categories refer to public land, land in the environment category has high ecological value and may require restricted uses and protected areas. Recreational land is considered to have lower ecological value and provides facilities for physical and community activities.

A second effort to encourage a consistent approach to planning is a new policy guidance document, the *Recreation and Open Space Planning Guidelines for Local Government* (NSW Government, 2010b). Effectively a generic framework for strategic planning adapted to open space, these guidelines are an outcome of the 2005 Sydney Metropolitan Plan and an update of the previous guidelines, published in 1992. Significant variations from the previous guidelines are evident, particularly with regard to the standards of provision. In the new guidelines, a catchment based standard of provision has replaced the population-density based standard. The document also calls attention to current trends which are influencing the planning and design of open space. These include a wider diversity of both activities and participants; a broader range of usage periods; heightened concern for protecting the natural environment; increased awareness of the connections between physical activity, health and access to open space; and an increasing demand for quality, safety and universal access in recreation facilities (NSW Government 2010b, p 21).

Regional

Regional coordination across local government boundaries is limited to the activities of the Regional Organisations of Councils and the Catchment Management Authorities. Neither of these agencies has specific responsibility for open space, but both have progressively advanced the implementation of regional vegetation corridors through the Green Web-Sydney project (Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils, 1997). This project was first sponsored by the Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils in 1997 and aimed at protection and enhancement of biodiversity, habitat and ecological connectivity. Since 2003 the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority has overseen the project, strengthening regional coordination.

State

The NSW State Government has a multi-pronged approach to open space articulated through various instrumentalities, funding programs and policy frameworks. Core responsibilities are devolved to a variety of state agencies, the number and nature of which have shifted from time to time according to political priorities. The election of a new Liberal Government in April 2011 has resulted in the consolidation of several offices responsible for open space into the Department of Premier and Cabinet: the Department of Planning and Infrastructure (including the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority); the Office of Environment and Heritage (which includes the Parks and Wildlife Group – formerly NPWS - the NSW Heritage Office and Botanic Gardens Trust); the Office of Western Sydney; Parramatta Park Trust; Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust; and the Western Sydney Parklands Trust. While it is too soon to know if this consolidation will lead to synergies and collaboration, on the surface it appears to provide greater coherence to government structure and focus responsibility within an agency directly reporting to the Premier. Anomalies seemingly remain. The outlier among planning and land development agencies is the Sydney Olympic Park Authority which is situated in the Department of Education and Community. Moreover, other agencies with responsibilities for greenspace of regional significance lie outside the Premier's circle: State Forests and Crown Reserves currently reside in the Department of Primary Industries and State Parks has moved to the Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services.

Significant support in the acquisition of open space is conducted on behalf of state agencies and councils by the Office of Strategic Lands (OSL). OSL is a land management office which approves, acquires, manages and transfers land identified as required for development in statutory plans (strategic plans and LEPs) across the Sydney region. End-uses of land acquired by OSL include regional open space, large scale infrastructure projects, and sites for special events or purposes. Since the 1950s, OSL through the Sydney Region Development Fund (and its predecessors) has acquired 35,000 hectares of land, representing an investment of \$4.3 billion (DoP 2005). With regard to provision of regional open space specifically, OSL assists local councils by acquiring land designated for regional open space on their behalf and transferring it when councils are ready to assume responsibility. Currently OSL has \$690 million of lands designated as outstanding for acquisition for regional open space, and in 2011-2012 OSL has a \$25 million target to extend regional open space in Sydney and across regional NSW, a significant decrease from the annual \$30-40 million budgets in recent years.

The NSW State Government, through the Sydney Region Development Fund (SRDF), also administers two special funding programs aimed at the enhancement and extension of existing local open space in Sydney: the Metropolitan Greenspace Program (MGP) and the Sharing Sydney Harbour Access Program (SSHAP). These programs provide competitive funding to local councils for projects that meet the stated criteria. Currently the MGP funding is set at \$2.5 million annually and targets projects which contribute to the Regional Recreational Trails Framework. The SSHAP funds local projects within the designated catchment such as new and upgraded foreshore paths, pontoons, etc. State funds have to be matched dollar for dollar by LGAs.

Another of the important roles of the state government, in terms of its influence on open space policy, is the direction and overall framework it sets through its strategic plans at the state, regional and sub-regional level. At all levels current strategic planning and policy is focused on simultaneously improving economic productivity and enhancing the quality of life. These aspirations reflect the National Urban Policy (2010) which is framed around four aims: productivity; sustainability, liveability and governance. Liveability is defined as “the way the urban environment supports quality of life and well being of communities” (Australian Government, 2010, p 48).

The NSW State Plan (2010) also addresses liveability, with the more specific aim of building stronger communities. The aim is for NSW to be a “socially inclusive society” in which opportunities to participate in communities are provided, improved and expanded. Increased access to parks is here set alongside promoting participation in cultural activities and organised sports. Specific objectives include improved access and walking tracks, increased marketing and community involvement, as well as collaboration between tourism and national parks managers.

Like the State Plan, the current Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036 is framed around issues of liveability, economic growth, transport and housing (NSW Government, 2010). A distinct shift in emphasis since the previous Metropolitan Strategy (NSW Department of Planning, 2005) is evident. The 2010 plan describes a sustainable city as socially equitable, economically viable and environmentally robust with one of its nine primary strategic directions being to achieve equity, liveability and social inclusion. Greenspace here is conceived as type of ‘social infrastructure’ contributing to the quality of life, health and wellbeing of metropolitan residents. Just three explicit aims are identified:

- Develop Western Sydney Parklands as a major asset for Western Sydney
- Local government to undertake open space planning processes in accordance with updated *Recreation and Open Space Planning Guidelines for Local Government*, to deliver parks, playing fields and public spaces that suit new multiple uses
- Provide and enhance regional open space in the Sydney region

The contrast in treatment with the 2005 Metropolitan Strategy is dramatic. Extensive documentation there was provided as to how open space could support all the broad aims of the Metropolitan Strategy (liveability, competitiveness, fairness, environmental protection and improved governance). “Parks and Public Places” were constituted as one of seven major core strategies which were translated into an inventory of three objectives, six initiatives and seventeen actions. Even more dramatic is the shift away from the physicality of open space as an “integral and active component of the urban framework” evident in earlier strategic plans (Evans and Freestone, 2010, p 228). The re-positioning of open space as a component of social infrastructure and services rather than a distinct strategic aim of the planning process in its own right represents a marked contrast to the treatment in most other metropolitan strategies in Australia and an historical shift for NSW metropolitan planning.

CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

Having attempted to come to grips with the overall governance of greenspace in Sydney, what strategic and policy challenges are presented? Drawing in part on discussions with key stakeholders, three perspectives are considered below: spatial (equitable standards of provision and environmental protection); conceptual (vision and objectives); and governance (administrative structures and funding mechanisms).

Spatial

No comprehensive spatial-statistical analysis exists to document in detail the distribution, provision and accessibility of local or regional open space across the Sydney region. In 1947, 1962, 1972 and 1982 the predecessors of the current NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure undertook surveys of open space in the metropolitan area. The surveys aimed to establish “a basis for policy decisions at the state and regional level and have also supplied the data necessary for open space planning at the local level” (NSW

Department of Environment and Planning 1985, p 7) These surveys are a useful record of not only the changing quantitative provision of open space during the postwar period but also the shifting definitions and theoretical approaches which have underpinned the provision and management of open space. The Department of Planning did develop a GIS based survey in 2003 but this remains unpublished.

Given the emphasis in the State and Metropolitan Strategy on access to open space, an inventory seems imperative. International approaches consider such spatial knowledge the foundation of assessing equitable provision and access (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, 2004; Harnik, 2010). Indeed, in the absence of such an inventory, it will be difficult to assess the effectiveness of the new guidelines for open space planning (NSW Government, 2010b), particularly with regard to their contribution to achieving an equitable distribution of open space across the region. A critical question arises here: how can resource allocation decisions be optimised without such an inventory to highlight metropolitan patterns? The OSL is responsive to council requests, but funding proceeds largely on a case-by-case basis on a priority basis rather than through a systematic acquisition program. The scale and timing of intervention in the property market can be skewed toward windows of opportunity defined by the negotiability of land sales, with large purchases favouring just one location and consuming substantial amounts of the entire available budget. The MGP and SSHAP are similarly limited by the absence of a link to any bigger picture. These are spatially defined self-contained programs effectively disconnected from either the Metropolitan Strategy or, to date, any of the ten subregional strategies covering the metropolitan area.

Vision

The lack of accessible, transparent detailed spatial data and seeming diminution of the importance ascribed to open space in the 2010 Metropolitan Strategy highlights the absence of a true metropolitan vision in relation to greenspace. While individual agencies and stakeholders point to specific achievements, there is no coherent or coordinated mechanism by which these actions interrelate with each other. Efforts to bring a degree of coherence to an overview of metropolitan Sydney's greenspace system have not achieved their full potential. For example, the NSW Government, with 17 agency partners, recently created a website, Sydney Parks and Reserves, to serve as a popular portal (www.parksandreserves.nsw.gov.au). Our research suggests that awareness of the website and the project that created it is low, even amongst key stakeholders. The Sydney Parks Group was established in 1998 to provide a strategic approach to urban park research on behalf of several key entities including the Department of Planning, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust, Parramatta Park Trust and Sydney Harbour Federation Trust but appears to have effectively gone into abeyance in 2006 (Sydney Parks Group, 2006).

International research points to the effectiveness of strategic plans in strengthening advocacy and political will for greenspace development and maintenance (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, 2004; Harnik, 2010). Here again, our research reveals a low degree of greenspace advocacy, and indeed no singular green space champion, in the Sydney metropolitan region. Contributing to this may be the diminishing profile of open space within the metropolitan strategy and the new guidelines for local open space which set out, in effect, an instrumental rather than a strategic approach, and thus downplay the importance of vision and advocacy. The exception in NSW is the NPWS whose acquisition aims and objectives are referenced to national and international strategies for protecting biodiversity and adapting to climate change. The thread of this alignment is known as the CAR framework, the aim of which is to achieve a system of reserves (at the scale of the bioregion) that is 'comprehensive, adequate, representative'. Across the state the NPWS strategy for achieving CAR is establishing nodes, building up reserves and, especially within Sydney, fine-tuning (NSW NPWS 2008).

The shift in open space discourse from a distinct entity in its own right to a component of social infrastructure has productively highlighted the importance of broader concerns for health, social equity, and the physical liveability agenda for communities promoted by new bodies such as the Premier's Council for Active Living (PCAL) established in 2004. But a major concern is that open space may lose its longstanding purchase on planning's agenda, its strength as both a physical component and political priority, and therefore the importance attached to funding needs. The subtle de-visioning of open space into "a second order problem" might also obfuscate some emerging real issues as Searle (2006, 2011) and Byrne (et al 2010) have highlighted, notably the lack of both regional open space and inferior provision of local open space in many areas. Per capita provision of local open space is already below desirable norms in both inner and middle ring suburbs with demand pressures intensifying the carrying capacity of existing open space rather than increasing supply. Outer area councils are much better endowed with regional open space but they also face funding problems in developing adequate recreational and sporting facilities for burgeoning populations.

Another issue in this area is the gap between the known benefits of contact with nature and the current approach to land use zoning in NSW. The approach to open space in the current NSW Metropolitan and

State plans is clearly underpinned by acceptance of the evidence that greenspace provides a wide array of interrelated benefits. And yet, the land use zoning standards introduced in 2008 limit the classification of open space to either environment or recreation—with most environmentally zoned land the purview of the NPWS. This perpetuates a dichotomous approach to open space provision—open space is either culture or nature—rather than the integrated approach implicit in state policy. This tension between cultural and natural resource provision is also an issue within NPWS as it expands its portfolio to relatively smaller parcels with more neighbours. In recent years, the NSW NPWS has reconsidered access to its holdings, acknowledging, as one stakeholder put it, that “access builds constituency for nature.” Experience to date is proving that integrating conservation and recreation opportunities can be difficult. For example, in 2007 the Western Sydney Conservation Alliance challenged successfully the NPWS classification of the former Air Services Australia site at Cranebrook near Penrith (181 ha) as a regional park. The regional park status was converted to Nature Reserve—a classification which elevates ecological concerns and restricts human access and activities.

Governance

The period from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s emerges as a vigorous period for open space planning and policy in metropolitan Sydney with highlights including the creation of Sydney Olympic Park, the resource-intensive creation of the Western Sydney Parklands, and the prioritisation accorded open space needs in the 2005 Metropolitan Strategy. Since then significant changes have occurred. The Department of Planning and Infrastructure effectively lost its open space team to the Land and Property Management Authority which was disbanded in April 2011. The Office of Strategic Lands now returns to the Department of Planning but will strength and vision return with consolidation?

Currently the provision and management of regional open space occurs at the state level and tends to fall across several ministerial portfolios, but with an overall re-concentration from early 2011 within the Office of the Premier, as noted earlier. Whether the agencies concerned will seize the opportunity to more explicitly interconnect their separate visions and operations will largely depend on champions within the group. The current roles of the various state departments, authorities, offices and trusts involved in greenspace acquisition, management, development and rehabilitation across the metropolitan area were described to us by one senior manager as “complementary but distinctive”. These bodies were created by separate pieces of legislation carrying various prescribed rights and obligations, particularly financial, which may work against forging strong synergies within an overarching governance system.

At the local level, there is limited coordination across LGAs, indeed limited opportunities to bundle resources, experience and expertise. Instances of cross boundary collaboration are largely prompted by opportunistic funding opportunities. For example, the Commonwealth’s Natural Heritage Trust program supported foreshore track improvement work by North Sydney and Lane Cove work on Gore Creek, but this program closed in 2008. Projects in the Green Web-Sydney program, managed by the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority, offer ongoing potential. A representative example is the improvement of the biodiversity corridor of the Cabramatta Creek wetland as a joint venture between several councils in south-west Sydney.

The provision of regional facilities is difficult in the current government structure of governance and contributions. The perennial questions are who pays, who manages, and who uses? Complicating responses are the infrastructure funding rules for developer contributions under Section 94 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* which tend to be geared to improving localised rather than regional facilities servicing a wider catchment (Searle, 2011). Funding overall is arguably the biggest policy challenge. Explaining the need for the new local government guidelines on open space, the Metropolitan Strategy stresses the need for all actors “to develop innovative design and management approaches to ensure open spaces remain suitable as an area’s population changes and urban renewal influences a neighbourhood’s character and density”(NSW Government, 2010a, p 204). In discussing the need to provide new regional open space, the plan also suggests that there are issues with equitable distribution and sustainable resourcing of regional parks. But as was the case in 2005 (Searle, 2006), little is offered in terms of new resources. Government agencies at all levels managing land are struggling to maintain sites due to a lack of funding (Goh and Williams, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Metropolitan Sydney boasts some tremendous, indeed iconic, open space assets. These have been endowed through a variety of historical circumstances and perhaps that very diversity of mechanisms is what has created an appealing array of types of greenspace. Previous metropolitan strategies, particularly in the late 1940s and late 1960s, offered visionary models and mechanisms for meeting regional leisure needs (Searle, 2006). Other capital cities like Brisbane, Adelaide and Canberra (along with world cities like New

York) continue to prioritise greenspace and landscape in their metropolitan plans. While there are innovative recent examples of greenspace planning across the Sydney region, they are not manifestly integrated or emphasised within the current metropolitan strategy. One key stakeholder described Sydney's open space assets as, "a jigsaw of green with many missing pieces."

As the city enters the second decade of the 21st century, questions are raised as to its preparedness for facing the demands in ensuring the continuing accessibility, quality and quantity of greenspace for a population estimated as growing to 6 million by 2036 (NSW Government, 2010a). The current priorities are unapologetically jobs, public transport, affordable housing, and urban renewal. That the current metropolitan strategy has repositioned open space from an end in itself within this pantheon to a secondary component of the social infrastructure required to deliver "liveability" makes it no less a political imperative. But with little realistic prospect of major gains in a mature land-locked metropolis, the increasing push to urban consolidation, a shrinking public purse, and no strong lobby group for urban parks, the issue of how Sydney can smartly augment and manage its open space at a regional scale is now emerging as a critical policy challenge.

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