

5.2 **Mayoral Minute No 33/2011** **Synthetic Grass Playing Fields**

BACKGROUND

During the last winter, ground closures due to wet weather impacted the availability of sportsfields throughout the season. Both the parents of our junior players as well as senior players pay significant fees to their governing bodies and associations to engage in their chosen sport on the weekends. The availability of fields obviously impacts their value for money.

Also, our fields are being used beyond their carrying capacity and we are desperately trying to maintain these fields with limited resources and in very short timeframes between the different sporting seasons. With any periods of wet weather, it becomes increasingly difficult to implement our maintenance schedules for these fields.

Further, codes such as soccer are being increasingly played in the summer season, be it casual use by a group of friends on a regular basis, or more organised competitions. This reduces the opportunity of the grounds to recover during the turf-growing season.

Synthetic playing surfaces are becoming increasingly popular; they provide improved access to sportsfields in inclement weather and allow greater levels of use whilst maintaining a high quality playing surface. Synthetic surfaces provide in the vicinity of 60 hours use per week for up to ten years, subject to maintenance program requirements associated with warranties and certification standards. A grass playing field used for a similar timeframe would be in very poor condition and at risk of not being fit for purpose. As we are aware, especially in Warringah, many of our grounds are overused, particularly with the availability of lights. As a result our grounds are left in poor condition.

Synthetic surfaces have rapidly improved and now allow for a range of sports to be played such as cricket, rugby and soccer. It is also anticipated that in the near future football codes including League and AFL will sign off on the use of these synthetic surfaces.

Council is developing an improved sportsfield renovation program and additional funding (more than in any previous year) is being used to try and improve our fields. That said, the grounds do not and will not ever reach their full potential because of the growing demand for their use. I might also add that we are restricted in providing further fields for our growing population.

Following discussions with the Recreation and Open Space Strategic Reference Group, it was decided that there may well be a need to reconsider our priorities in relation to active sports and essentially our ground maintenance. Further to that, some informal discussions with various sports about the potential of synthetic playing fields, and increasing the availability of synthetic playing surface to address the growing needs of our community, has seen broad support.

Some other advantages of putting in multiple synthetic playing surfaces include taking the pressure off many other grounds in the area for use by other codes in particular. It also offers far more flexibility and accountability (financially and otherwise) to both Council and sporting clubs. Games can be played in wet weather and other games that may still need to be cancelled can be rescheduled at other times to catch up. It allows for sustained growth and some commercial opportunities, via futsal competitions for example, to take the pressure off ever increasing fees and maintenance costs. In addition, there may be increased opportunities for major sponsorship of grounds with increased use.

To expedite a report for the 2012/13 budget process, and to put us in the best position for State and Federal funding, I put forward the below recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION

- A. That Parks Reserves and Foreshores prepare a report identifying potential sites for synthetic surface playing fields
 - B. That the report identify opportunities and constraints for potential sites, and costs associated with developing and operating the synthetic surfaces and supporting infrastructure
 - C. That the report identify potential funding sources including the Sportsfield Rectification Levy and State and Federal grant funding programs
 - D. That Council write and make application to the State and Federal Government requesting a commitment to funding of the project
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Michael Regan
MAYOR

