STUDY TOUR REPORT

Sydney/ Melbourne
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SPORTS FACILITIES

Purpose

An aim of the trip was to see first hand the operation of base level sporting facilities. This has been of interest to me since spending some time as shadow Minister for Recreation and Sport.

There is no doubt that Adelaide lacks sufficient facilities for grass roots and junior sport. I am aware of teams been rejected entry to competitions due to lack of availability of grounds, teams having to play at ridiculous times, and teams been forced to use sub standard facilities.

Given the demise of Racing at Victoria Park, I have several times raised the possibility of developing it with multiple grounds, for multiple sports, with multi-use, shared facilities and change rooms.

It is very central, easy to access, with reasonable public transport and plenty of car parking. It would also be one way of keeping the area greened, and cared for, adding to the amenity of the public who use the area.

Whilst this would not be the total answer, it would go a long way to solving the sports ground shortage. It would need to be supplemented by additional facilities in the Northern and Southern suburbs.

Potential sports would include soccer, hockey, cricket, football, rugby, lacrosse, baseball and softball. The proposal is limited to "so called" Field Sports.

Given the open nature of Victoria Park, any development should be based on a large turfed area, with great flexibility to adjust to seasonal and varying demand for the various sports.

All goals can be temporary, and I saw in Sydney, how hard wickets for cricket can be situated so as to be in between fields for hockey and/or soccer, so as to fully utilise the areas at different times of the year.

All grounds could be serviced by a low profile building central to the grounds, with even a "basement" level for change rooms to minimise the footprint and height aspect of the building.
There have been proposals to capture stormwater at the Southern end of the site over recent years. The co-location of sporting grounds have a great synergy as far as been able to cheaply deliver water, which would not need to be treated.

Such a proposal would also add to the amenity of the area during the Clipsal car event. Even last year, it was very noticeable that the couple of months the Racing Club hadn’t watered added greatly to the dust nuisance around the Victoria Park section of the course and surrounds.

Any such proposal begs several questions regarding funding, management and control. These need to be addressed. With this in mind I visited Albert Park in Melbourne on a weekend to see how this facility operated.

The relevance of Albert Park is particularly in relation to the number of sports fields. However, it is also home to the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre.

**Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre**

This magnificent facility was built for the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. Not only does it act as an excellent aquatic centre, but also is a huge venue for basketball, squash, badminton, table tennis and volleyball.

Adelaide also “cries out” for such a venue, even on a very minor scale. It was interesting to see the ease with which the facility operated, the standard of the facilities and the extra facilities available to the players.

These facilities must act as a great incentive for young people to play sport.

I was interested to look at the booking systems, the competitions been run, and the fees charged to participate. The facilities are very freely available, at a cost, to all groups and individuals in non-peak hours.

Examples of the off-peak costs are for $31 per hour for indoor basketball court, $18-80 p.h. for a squash court, and $14-40 for badminton.

Memberships are offered, which provide both some free time and discounts as well.

The Centre has a 10 court squash facility, including a glass court for major games. There are 12 badminton courts, 10
basketball courts, the main court having seating for 1800 spectators, 3 volleyball courts, and 27 table tennis tables.

As well, the Aquatic Centre is a magnificent facility, having hosted swimming, diving and water polo at the 2006 Commonwealth games.

There are also adequate catering facilities, sports store and other facilities.

Albert Park Sports Grounds

The main interest to me was the Sports grounds facilities of Albert Park. The lay out of Albert Park, and it’s design around a significant lake, means the lay out is very different to what could be done at Victoria Park.

However, the management, control and usage are all very relevant to what could be done here. One of the reasons we have a shortage of facilities is the fact it is never clear who has responsibility for the provision, care and management of sporting fields.

It is currently a shared responsibility between State Government, Local Government, sporting clubs and associations, schools and local community groups.

Whilst all these groups are currently providing facilities, it is not clear who has the ultimate responsibility to provide much needed extra and adequate facilities, who pays, and who has the ongoing management and maintenance responsibilities.

Albert Park is a brilliant facility. Whilst who pays for the initial work required will require working out, Albert Park does provide a model for management and maintaining the facilities.

Albert Park Facilities

Albert Park has many community facilities, some of which could be evaluated for any development of Victoria Park.

Whilst not central to what I would like to see, such facilities at Albert Park include the lake, several picnic areas, an amphitheatre, golf course, driving range, skate park, playgrounds, kiosk and tennis courts.
There are then 21 ovals or sports fields, in addition to the more substantial Junction Oval, Albert Ground, and Ross Gregory Oval.

This equates to the opportunity for thousands of sportspeople of all ages to participate on any weekend.

The Park is well serviced with public transport, with access to trains, trams and buses.

It also hosts community and fund raising walks and events throughout the year.

The park is of 225 hectares, and is in the municipality of the City of Port Phillip.

**Management Responsibility**

The Primary management Agency for Albert Park is Parks Victoria. It’s overall responsibility is to meeting environmental, cultural and recreational objectives and criteria to ensure it’s enjoyment by current and future generations.

Service delivery is however influenced by a large number of individual groups and individuals. These include amateur sporting clubs, professional sporting clubs and commercial operations.

There are a range of individual bodies which manage venues within the Park. This creates a weakness in that many venues are managed and maintained separately. This can risk co-ordination of events, potential conflicts, and compatibility problems.

On a green field site, such as Victoria Park, this should be avoided. An individual body or authority should be responsible for management, and at least have major input to grounds maintenance.

Sporting facilities can be booked through the City of Port Phillip. Ovals can be hired for $100 per day by community groups or not for profit organisations, or $150 for corporate use.

The City provides access to a Public Liability Scheme which does not cover participants but does protect third parties.
Summary

Adelaide needs more sporting fields and ovals for grass roots, and particularly, junior sport.

Horse Racing leaving Victoria Park creates an opportunity. A significant number of fields requires a large area of land. Victoria Park is a very level area, which is very cost effective for development of sporting fields.

The co-location of fields and flood mitigation storage makes a lot of sense.

One body should have responsibility for taking season and short term bookings for all fields and ovals. A scale of fees should be set, taking account of what is paid elsewhere, what is affordable and makes a reasonable contribution to the maintenance of the facilities.

This body needs an agreement with the Motor sport board regarding the periods of time various areas would be out of use due to the race.

Public liability issues need to be addressed and all users made aware of what cover is given, and their residual responsibility.

Such a booking authority could be a unit within Recreation and Sport, Sports SA or City Council, and should be appropriately recompensed.

Initial Funding

I strongly believe the initial set up funding should come from State Government. Given the large funding grants to our major sporting bodies, this is not a huge ask.

Some modelling would be required as to the on-going costs of watering and maintaining the grounds and what revenues can be raised.

The advantages are obvious and have been documented elsewhere. We hear much about obesity, diabetes and the advantages health wise of exercising and playing sport.

Also, there is a strong co-relation between sports and our young staying out of trouble with the law.
As the likely participants come from a range of Local Council areas, the State Government is the only obvious funder. I believe that a priority for sport in South Australia at the moment is to ensure we have good basic facilities for junior and grass roots sport.

The successful Active Club Grants have been good in improving our existing facilities, and I encourage a continuance and expansion of that program.

However, we also need to grow the number of sporting fields and other facilities in Adelaide and in those regional areas where there is pressure on existing facilities.

A decent facility at Victoria Park could become a central focus for SAPSASA field sports and other Carnivals, where a central location is of great value and logistical importance.

**Development and Maintenance of Grounds**

Decisions would need to be made regarding who to develop the grounds and maintain them.

These should be separate decisions. The on-going maintenance could be done by a small unit dedicated to the fields, or outsourced to either the Adelaide City Council, or even S.A.C.A.

**M.C.G.**

Given the Stadium debate, and criticisms of our existing facilities I visited the M.C.G. to look at their latest developments. It has certainly become a great stadium, and many of the new facilities are excellent.

Obviously their corporate and member facilities are excellent, and the catering has been upgraded. AAMI stadium has served S.A. very well, and probably the biggest difference I noticed was the catering and hospitality for the general patron.

Obviously, patrons are demanding better facilities across Australia, but viability, funding and what patrons are willing to pay are all vital factors in any future decisions.
Discussions with stadium managers have also made me very aware of the importance of the cost of actually opening a stadium. Due to security issues nowadays, and other issues, break even financially now demands a reasonable crowd.

**River Murray Issues**

The River Murray crisis has divided the Basin States. There is an absolute reluctance at all levels in the Eastern States for there to be a National approach.

The agreement signed reflects the attitude I have experienced in discussions at this time and over the last 2 years. It also re-enforces my experiences over 12 years of involvement.

That all climaxes in the frustration that the Governments of the Basin States and the Federal Government have signed off on an agreement which will only make management harder and more self interest focussed.

No one in Victoria or N.S.W. is willing to think and act big picture. They do not care at all about the Lower Lakes, and would argue we don’t care about some of their issues. And they are probably right.

The hoax served up to Australians that we now have a national independent authority sums up everything wrong with River Management for as long as I have been involved.

The so called Independent Authority has NO decision making powers. The biggest change created by the agreement is the powers given to the Basin Officers Group – a group made up of the senior State and Federal Officials – each answerable to a Minister.

The Authority has no power – it takes its marching orders from the Federal Minister, the Ministerial Council and the Basin Officers Group.

The States have not referred powers, and the bureaucracy has become more powerful.

It is very disappointing that some of those commentating on the River have read the Government releases rather than taken the time to read the agreement.
The Independent Authority is a workhorse – not a decision maker. Victoria have had some massive wins, and there is no doubt will increase their share of wealth from the Murray system as a result.

The MOU and COAG agreement lock us all in to a crazy agreement on the Victorian Food Bowl Project. This will in future years be seen as an absolute embarrassment to the other states who signed.

I have been closely following this Project. Most of the savings recognised are from seepage. We have heard the recent rhetoric of ground and river water been connected and one resource – something those who understand the system have known for years.

Yet we now have a situation where savings from seepage are to be given back as new allocations to Victorian irrigators. The plan is that the Murray receives 100 gigalitres of water, out of total savings of 425 gigalitres.

The other 325 gigalitres are to be allocated to Melbourne Water, tributaries and wetlands of the Goulbourn, and new allocations to irrigators.

As most of the 425 gigalitres is seepage, it is highly unlikely that the Murray will receive an extra drop of water, and in fact highly likely that despite National funding, this project will result in far less water for the Murray.

The price of getting a National sign off has been huge, and the Victorians are laughing – in the short term.

No new allocations should be made from the Food Bowl Project until the 100 gigalitres for the Murray is proven and assured.

Similar measures should apply to all infrastructure projects, and new allocations need to be very carefully considered given the degree of over-allocation.

Rob Kerin MP
MEMBER FOR FROME
29 July 2008