



Parramatta River
Catchment Group



LET'S MAKE OUR RIVER
SWIMMABLE AGAIN BY
2025



Reference: 032-20SJ

10 September 2020

The Hon. Rob Stokes MP
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Email: sydneyparksvision@dpie.nsw.gov.au

Re: Greater Sydney Open Space and Parklands

Dear Mr Stokes,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Greater Sydney Parklands Discussion Paper. The Sydney Coastal Councils Group (SCCG) and the Parramatta River Catchment Group (PRCG) would like to provide a joint submission.

The SCCG and PRCG are collaborating together to deliver a Greater Sydney Harbour Coastal Management Program (GSHCMP) which is a requirement under the *NSW Coastal Management Act 2016*. This CMP aims to improve and sustain waterway health through greater collaboration, consistency and leadership at a catchment scale. It will build on the great work already being done by a range of key stakeholders to improve waterway health including PRCG's Masterplan for making Parramatta River swimmable again by 2025.

Further information on the CMP is available at:

<https://www.sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au/projects/greater-sydney-harbour-coastal-management-program/>.

We believe that our vision for the GSHCMP greatly aligns and supports the draft vision for the Greater Sydney Parklands. We therefore strongly recommend that appropriate consideration is given to the issues we raise in this submission in refining the vision and setting out a plan of action for its rollout. Our particular focus for this submission is on the need for greater consideration of our waterways in developing this plan of action given their importance for recreation for not only Sydneysiders but also national and international visitors.

1. Our communities highly value our waterways for recreation

The Discussion Paper recognises the value of our waterways for recreation stating that of those surveyed, about 50% enjoy outdoor recreation involving water at least once a week. However, it identifies that feasibility and travel are the biggest barriers.

This survey is consistent with the Marine Estate Management Authority's Marine Estate Community Survey for the Greater Sydney Region (2014) which identified that Sydneysiders highly value the marine estate for a variety of reasons including:

- feeling part of a community - they feel a sense of belonging to the marine estate which is an important benefit to the community as a whole as well as individuals within in it
- feeling a part of nature - they feel a part of the marine estate with recreational fishers and divers in particular see this as an important benefit.
- those in western suburbs view the coast as an escape - even though they live further away, they still regularly interact with the marine estate.

The survey also identified the perceived threats to these values which included crowding issues, increases in litter and pollution, and unmanaged recreational fishing. A range of policy initiatives are seeking to reduce these threats including the NSW Government's Marine Estate Management Strategy, the PRCG's Masterplan for making Parramatta River swimmable, and the Greater Sydney Harbour CMP.

Councils on the foreshore of Sydney Harbour have also recognised the importance of waterways for their community and identified these in their Community Strategic Plans. This has led to the development of measures being adopted in their Local Strategic Planning Statement's (LSPS) to improve the recreational value of waterways. This has included provisions to increase adoption of water sensitive urban design in the catchment and development of litter strategies to reduce marine debris. These water quality objectives identified in Councils LSPS will be supported and enhanced through the development of a GSHCMP.

It is therefore recommended that the Greater Sydney Parklands action plan has a stronger focus on the value of our waterways and their foreshore for recreation and leverages and supports the work of the Marine Estate Management Strategy, the PRCG's Parramatta River Masterplan and the GSHCMP.

2. Need greater appreciation of a true *integrated* 'blue green' outcome for parklands and more clarity

The Discussion Paper also highlights the need for quality multi-purpose open space and parklands that are connected, green and resilient. We ask as an overall recommendation, there be a greater appreciation of:

- how the water cycle compliments urban greening considerations
- how there should be a greater appreciation of the 'blue-green' grid reflected in land use management and policy and planning reform.

This is due to the importance of waterways (both constructed and natural) forming the strategic level framework for a connected green urban form and most of the Green space in an infill context being closely associated with waterways. Considered water cycle management is also a core consideration for the sustainability of vegetation and as a facilitator of activity and amenity.

Modelling undertaken by Sydney Water and the Sydney Harbour Estuary Processes Study prepared for the GSHCMP development, shows that diffuse stormwater pollution remains a major contributing factor to poor water quality in the Parramatta River and Sydney Harbour. This is projected to further deteriorate as densifying growth continues in the urban catchment. However, urban development and Parklands that embrace blue-green infrastructure¹ and innovative management of stormwater has the ability to arrest this

¹ Green infrastructure is the network of green spaces, natural systems and semi-natural systems including parks, rivers, bushland and private gardens that are strategically planned, designed and managed to support a good quality of life in an urban environment. GANSW, 'Draft Greener Places Policy', 2017 (<https://www.governmentarchitect.nsw.gov.au/resources/ga/media/files/ga/discussion-papers/greener-places-discussion-draft-2017-11.pdf>, viewed 18 May 2020)

trajectory, improve water quality and provide greater likelihood of future water based recreation.

It is therefore recommended that there be a greater appreciation of the importance of waterways and water management is the success of a connected blue-green parklands

The Discussion Paper outlines three high level strategies to achieve the vision which we support. However, policy reform is required if the promotion of blue green infrastructure is to minimise the impact of stormwater runoff on the waterways, through reduction in runoff quantity and increasing passive filtration for sites.

Various recent state government strategies² recognise that, to assure the future state of the iconic Parramatta River and Sydney Harbour and to provide a place where people will happily live and work, broader investment in blue-green infrastructure is required. Such infrastructure can provide:

- high quality open space (reflected as point of importance by the Productivity Commission³) for a growing population
- tree canopy coverage to meet the Greater Sydney Commission’s targets for urban cooling
- enhanced waterways which provide public amenity whilst protecting aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity.

The SCCG and the PRCG are strongly advocating for a future environmentally sensitive, greener urban form and water sensitive open space and parklands. Figure 1 illustrates how maximising green space forms part of our strategy to protect our receiving waterway environment.

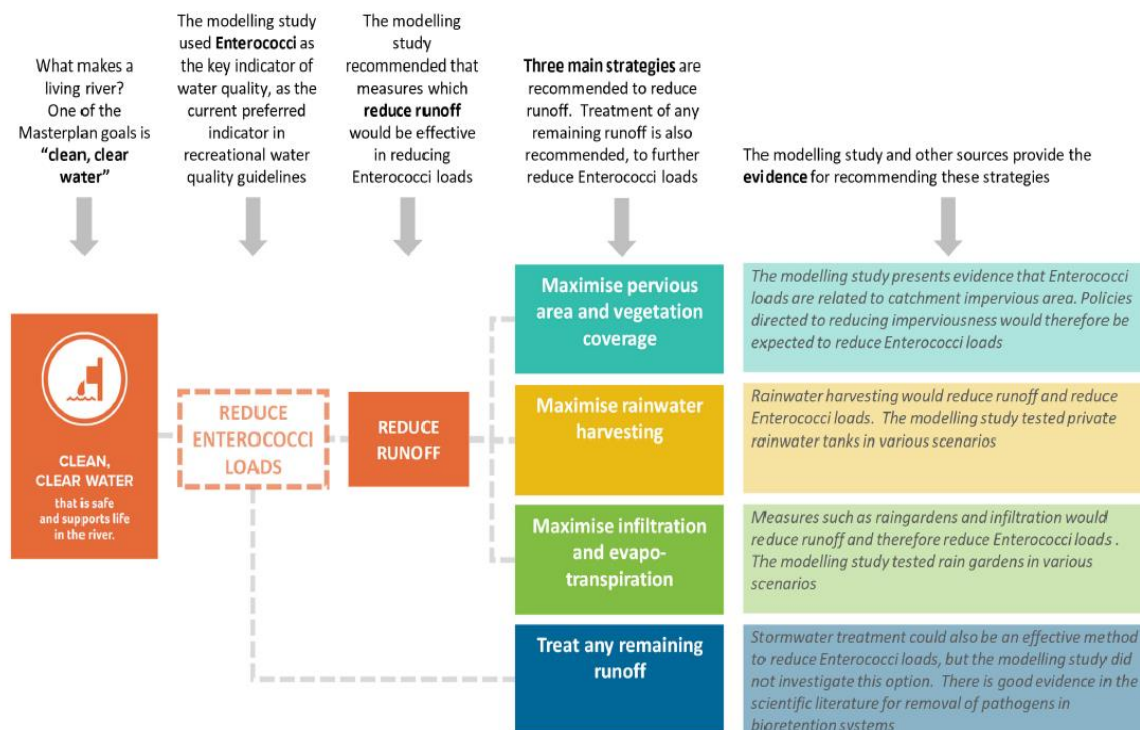


Figure 1: Strategies for improving water quality

² The Greater Sydney Region Plan: A Metropolis of Three Cities, DPIE Draft Blue-Green Infrastructure Strategy, 2020.

³ <http://productivity.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/Contributions%20Review%20Terms%20of%20Reference.pdf>

It is imperative that all these new strategies are reflected in robust policy and planning reform.

3. Greater clarity needed on the new agency to be established and how it will interact with Councils

It is recognised that the formation of a new agency to manage Greater Sydney's open space and parklands is seen as a consolidation of existing trusts and agencies. However, clear guidelines and transparent processes outlining what statutory power it will have with regard to development of strategy and providing guidance and leadership to councils will be required. The SCCG and PRCG collectively represent 18 local councils and would welcome collaboration through a steering committee that has input into setting out a plan of action for its rollout.

Exploration of how the relationships between local councils and state government can enhance the management of open space and parklands is essential to ensure Council's local knowledge and community aspirations are appropriately considered. Provision of mechanisms that facilitate sustainable funding to support blue-green infrastructure and connectivity are also required.

A new agency needs to be supported by transparent processes and strong monitoring and reporting framework.

4. Better responsiveness to climate change is needed

As outlined above, a clear response to creating a blue green grid in the Greater Sydney Region will also lead to smart and resilient open space and parklands, 'keeping' Sydney green and captivating. However, a clear response to climate change also needs to be articulated as a core outcome of this 'vision' as adapting to and mitigating climate change.

There are key opportunities that respond directly to climate change in other government documents that could be used, for example:


- develop climate adaptive design responses for blue green space and ensure outcomes work towards mitigating the impact of climate change;
- create increased habitat in the urban form utilising the green grid as a strategic basis.

Clear leadership, direction and collaboration in climate change mitigation and adaptation will be key to achieving the '50 year Vision'.

The SCCG and PRCG agree that the '50 Year Vision for Greater Sydney's Open Space and Parklands' requires a clear and strategic way forward if we are to meet the needs and expectations of Sydney's growing population. We welcome collaboration and sharing of the detailed work that both the SCCG and PRCG have done to date on the development of a GSHCMP and the implementation of the Parramatta River Masterplan, specifically the work we have done on recommendations for [planning reform](#).

We thank you once more for the opportunity to comment on this important piece of work. We would like to also re-emphasise the opportunity to work closely together moving forward to pursue a green, liveable and environmentally sustainable Greater Sydney Region.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joyce".

Sarah P Joyce

Executive Officer (SCCG)

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "N. Graham".

Nell Graham

PRCG Coordinator