

1 May 2024

Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
Locked Bag 5022
Parramatta NSW 2124

By email to: syntheticturf@planning.nsw.gov.au

NSROC Submission – Synthetic Turf in Public Open Space Guidelines

Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (NSROC) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the *'Synthetic Turf in Public Open Space: Guidelines for Decision Makers'* (the Guidelines). It is acknowledged that the guidelines have been informed by the Synthetic Turf Study in Public Open Space Report (2021) and the subsequent reports prepared by the NSW Chief Scientist in 2022 and final report in 2022.

NSROC is a voluntary association of eight local councils who have come together to collaborate and promote a united voice on key issues in our region. Our member councils are Hornsby, Hunter's Hill, Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, Mosman, North Sydney, Ryde and Willoughby. Collectively, the NSROC member councils service an area of 639km² with a population of 633,978. We work together on policy and operational matters to drive efficiency and to enhance our region. This submission has been prepared with the input and support of our member councils but should be considered draft until it is formally endorsed by the NSROC Board.

NSROC is deeply concerned that the capacity of sports facilities will not meet the needs of the growing population in our region. We note the reference to our now superseded Regional Sportsground Strategy Review and Regional Plan for Synthetic Sportsgrounds on page 25 of the Guidelines. It is disappointing that no NSROC staff were consulted prior to its inclusion in this document.

In late 2023, NSROC released our *'Review of Supply and Demand for Sports Facilities in the NSROC Region'*. This report demonstrates an increased shortfall of over 220Ha to 2036. The increase in supply/capacity of 26% needed by 2026 and 40% by 2036 quoted in the Guidelines has blown out to 40% by 2026 and 49% by 2036. This shortfall does not take into account the more recently proposed increased housing density across our region which will exacerbate the problem. NSROC acknowledges the need for more housing and is firmly of the view that it must be delivered alongside new and upgraded infrastructure such as schools, sporting facilities and waste management. The full Review of Supply and Demand is available on our website at <https://nsroc.com.au/reports-and-submissions/>

NSROC is aware that a number of its member councils have made detailed comment on the Guidelines. As the local authority responsible for delivering and managing active recreation infrastructure they are best placed to provide this advice. NSROC is not aware of any direct consultation with councils prior to the release of the Guidelines.

NSROC makes the following key points in relation to the Guidelines:

Decision Making

The current guidelines are specific in that they only address long-pile synthetic sports fields with little to no reference to other applications of synthetic grass in public spaces such as tennis courts, bowling greens and general landscaping. Overall, the document fails to achieve its stated outcome of assisting decision makers who may be considering synthetic turf rather than natural turf. It does not take a holistic view of all the different surface types (synthetic, natural, hybrid and hard surface) nor does it provide an objective framework to assist decision makers to effectively consider the different options.

Field Capacity

A core consideration for decision makers is the carrying capacity that a surface provides. The guidelines currently propose a field capacity for a well-engineered and well-maintained natural turf field of up to 45-60 hours per week. This figure is significantly above the current practice in local government setting where, despite significant increases in investment for maintenance and application of advice of industry experts including soil scientists for turf field construction, natural turf field capacity has been found to be much more limited.

A more robust analysis of carrying capacity for the different surfaces is required to ensure decision makers are really informed when determining what is the most suitable surface.

NSROC supports the development of guidelines to aid decision making on the use of synthetic turf in public places, noting that the final decision rests with local councils. NSROC and our member councils look forward to engaging closely with the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure to finalise the Guidelines. If you require more information or wish to provide further updates about the process, please don't hesitate to contact me at mmontgomery@lanecove.nsw.gov.au or by phone on 0401 640 823.

Yours sincerely

Dr Meg Montgomery
Executive Director
Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils