

Background Paper

Identification of Priority Dryland Ovals for Potential Reactivation

Purpose

The ACT Government is investigating options to increase the availability of sport and recreation facilities across Canberra. As part of this work, a review of the Territory's [32 dryland ovals](#) has been undertaken to identify locations that may have the greatest potential to complement existing sporting infrastructure and support future participation in organised sport.

Following an initial assessment, five dryland ovals have been identified for further investigation:

- Lyneham 1 Neighbourhood Oval
- Weston Neighbourhood Oval
- Spence Neighbourhood Oval
- Narrabundah 5 Neighbourhood Oval
- Torrens.

These sites have been selected as potential candidates for future reactivation and formal sportsground booking, subject to future funding and further planning.

Background

During the Millennium Drought (1996-2002), a number of irrigated sportsgrounds across Canberra were decommissioned to reduce water use and were converted to dryland ovals. These sites have since continued to provide opportunities for informal recreation and community use.

The 2023 Urban Open Space Land Management Plan established a strategic framework for assessing opportunities to reactivate selected dryland ovals where there is demonstrated community need and strategic benefit.

To date, Higgins 1 has been successfully reactivated as an irrigated sportsground following a \$2.6 million investment in 2019-20. A partial reactivation trial is also currently underway at Melba District Playing Fields to better understand delivery approaches, costs and operational requirements.

At present, no Capital Works funding has been allocated for the reactivation of additional dryland ovals. The identification of priority sites is intended to inform future planning, and investment decisions should funding become available.

Multi-Criteria Analysis Approach

A multi-criteria analysis (MCA) was undertaken to assess the relative suitability of the Territory's 32 dryland ovals for potential future reactivation. The MCA was designed to provide a consistent and evidence-based method for identifying sites that could most effectively support organised sport while complementing existing recreational infrastructure.

The assessment considered the condition of existing infrastructure and the level of investment likely to be required to bring each oval online for formal sporting use.

Key criteria included:

Criterion	Consideration
Parking	Availability and adequacy of parking to support organised sport activities and users.
Barriers and Vehicle Access Control	Existing barriers, fencing, bollards or other infrastructure that prevents unauthorised vehicle access and protects playing surfaces from damage. Consideration was also given to the condition of these assets and the level of investment required to secure the site for formal sporting use.
Toilets	Availability and condition of public toilet facilities, or the ability to provide amenities to support future users.
Change Rooms	Presence, condition and proximity of change room facilities required to support organised sport.
Irrigation	Existing irrigation infrastructure, water connections and the scale of investment required to establish and maintain quality turf surfaces.

Why were these criteria used?

These criteria were selected because they represent the base fundamental infrastructure requirements needed to support regular sporting use and formal field bookings.

Sites that already possess some supporting infrastructure generally require less investment and can potentially be delivered more efficiently than sites requiring entirely new facilities.

In addition to the infrastructure assessment, consideration was given to how individual sites could complement existing nearby sporting facilities, provide additional field capacity in growth areas, and support future community demand.

Why These Five Ovals Were Identified

The five shortlisted ovals demonstrated the strongest overall alignment with the assessment criteria and strategic objectives of the review.

Importantly, the identified sites are not intended to replace existing sportsgrounds but rather expand the network of available playing fields and provide additional booking opportunities for sporting organisations where capacity pressures exist.

The selection of Lyneham, Weston, Spence, Narrabundah and Torrens reflects a combination of factors, including:

- Their ability to complement nearby sporting facilities.
- Existing infrastructure that may reduce future reactivation costs.
- Opportunities to increase sportsground capacity in their local area.
- Strategic alignment with future recreation and community needs.

- Potential to provide broader community benefit through enhanced recreational opportunities.

Next Steps

The ACT Government is now engaging with sporting organisations, local stakeholders and the community to gather information about how the identified ovals are currently used and how they may be used in the future.

Community feedback will help inform any future planning work and ensure local knowledge is considered before any decisions are made regarding potential reactivation.