

How green are our Games?

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Sydney won the 1993 bid to host the 2000 Olympics largely on the strength of its promise to deliver a 'Green Games.' Sydney 2000 Olympic Bid's Environment Committee (comprising Greenpeace Australia and other environment groups) drafted the *Environmental Guidelines for the Summer Olympic Games* to help green the Olympic movement and to encourage host-city showcasing of environmental technologies and practices.

However, most environment groups were ambivalent about the Sydney Games, recognising the potential for short-term economic and political opportunism to override community values and environmental responsibility. They proposed a watchdog to monitor development and help maximise environmental achievements.

Green Games Watch 2000 (GGW) was established in 1995 with State and Federal government funding. It is a coalition of NPA, the Australian Conservation Foundation, National Toxics Network, Nature Conservation Council and Total Environment Centre.

GGW's major aims have been to ensure:

- environmentally sustainable development (ESD) and coordinated planning in the provision and management of Olympic facilities
- government and industry accountability and adherence to the *Environmental Guidelines* through GGW's annual performance audits
- use of international best practice to showcase Australia's environment industries

- mainstream application of ESD principles, stimulated by the Olympics, to ensure long-term benefits to NSW
- strong relationships with government and non-government stakeholders
- ongoing representation of community concerns.

As the \$3.5 billion Sydney 2000 Olympics is the world's largest application of ESD principles, and its lessons are applicable to urban development generally, it is worth looking at its particular successes and disappointments.

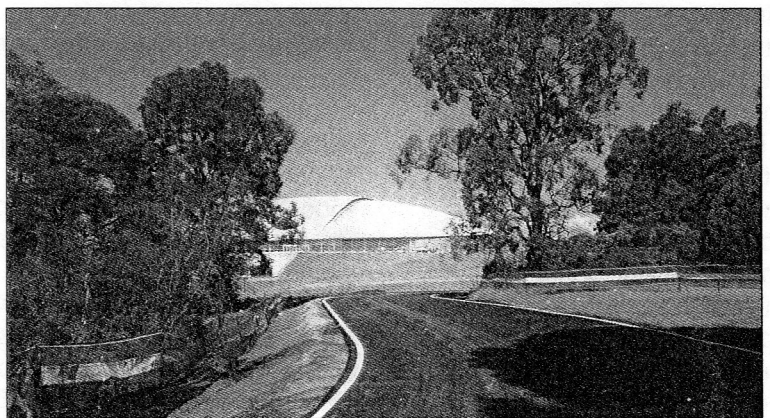
Environmental successes

- Olympic Coordination Authority's (OCA) tendering policies required environmental credentials and commitment
- working examples of ESD in large-scale and housing developments
- increasing mainstream use of ESD design and construction skills
- lifecycle assessment of construction materials in some projects, widespread use of recycled timber, and 90% of construction waste recycled

- use of Green Power and/or solar energy applications
- innovative water recycling system at Homebush Bay site
- integrated pest management favouring non-chemical means
- cutting-edge treatment of dioxin wastes and bioremediation of other toxic wastes
- biodiversity enhancements – widespread use of indigenous plant species, Haslams Creek wetland restoration, habitat recreation for green and golden bell frogs in the Homebush Bay Brickpit, Millennium Parklands
- emphasis on public transport access to Homebush Bay venues.

Environmental disappointments

- inadequate community consultation
- government-approved removal of threatened vegetation to construct the Criterium Cycling Track at Bankstown Velodrome
- use of unsustainably sourced turpentine at the Regatta Centre
- insufficient and short-term public transport access to western Sydney venues
- failure of the 3,000-car VIP fleet



Criterium Cycling Track: cut through a threatened ecological community

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to include any of the promised LPG vehicles, and failure of the 3,800 Olympic bus fleet to include any more than 24 CNG buses

- environmentally irresponsible Olympic merchandise
- use of PVC plastics
- widespread use of ozone-depleting refrigerants for air conditioning
- failure to clean up dioxin-polluted Homebush Bay sediments
- unsafe dioxin storage under plastic sheets
- unclear post-Olympic management responsibility for Millennium Parklands and toxic landfill areas
- uncertain Olympic waste management performance – inconsistent systems across venues, insufficient trials and public education, and reduced input control.

Barriers to ESD implementation

Many factors compromised delivery of a Green Games.

Minimal environmental interest was shown by the NSW Olympics Ministry or the scandal-distracted International Olympic Committee, and there were only four staff in SOCOG's Environment Group.

ESD commitments were progressively weakened. Although the *Environmental Guidelines* were incorporated into legislation, weak linkage to other meaningful benchmarks enabled OCA and SOCOG to devise their own watered-down versions. Their refusal to establish specific targets minimised accountability for not achieving environmental excellence.

The division of Olympic organisers into two groups (venue construction by the OCA and event management by SOCOG) hindered cooperative communication.

Environmental monitoring and accountability were further hindered by systemic secrecy; the extension of Commercial in Confidence; the weakness of NSW Freedom of Information legislation;

and OCA and SOCOG's obstructiveness to environment groups by withholding information and/or funding, and blocking site visits and liaison with project personnel.

The Olympic development consent process differed from the NSW norm to reduce community participation and environmental accountability. Olympic legislation ensured that no development was 'designated' and that full environmental impact statements were replaced with shorter statements of environmental effects. It removed local council power to alter Olympic proposals and community rights to appeal decisions to the Land and Environment Court or hold a public inquiry.

Corporate conservatism and entrenched professional networks reduced innovation in design and technology, and insufficient early coordination of ESD solutions across projects and venues saw sustainable options become technically or financially impossible.

Planning recommendations from the Olympics

The Sydney 2000 Olympics will improve understanding of how to plan, construct and stage venues and events with less environmental impact, and this should be incorporated in Australian legislation.

Urban planning lessons from Sydney's Olympic preparations highlight the need for:

- effective environmental targets and timetables
- transparency, clear lines of accountability and genuine community consultation
- incorporation of ESD principles through integrated site and regional planning
- consistent legislative empowerment of ESD objectives across each level of NSW planning policies (GGW's *Draft SEPP for ESD in the Greater Metropolitan Region*

(1998) is an excellent guide)

- improved and accessible ESD knowledge resource, with an upgraded government-coordinated Green Products Data Base to facilitate a national process for environmental assessment of building materials
- government application of accurate lifecycle costing to all public sector projects, using extended manufacturer or developer responsibility to incorporate currently externalised environmental costs.

Conclusions

The Sydney Olympics can be considered the 'semi-green' Games in terms of environmental performance, compliance with the *Environmental Guidelines* and as measured against world best practice. They *will* be greener than any previous summer Olympics, which were all environmentally disastrous, but will fall far short of being 'bright green' as an environmentally sustainable event.

The biggest operational challenges during the Games will be transport and waste management. GGW has lobbied hard for improvements to the latter and for their mainstream application at all NSW public events in the future.

GGW justifies its tough assessments of the Olympics environmental preparations by asserting that achievements should be maximised closer to best practice as a positive Olympic legacy, and as a means to address the global environmental crisis.

For a more comprehensive account of Sydney's Olympic environmental performance, community concerns and detailed proposals to advance ESD beyond the Games, visit our website at www.greengameswatch.org

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