

## **Return Boomanulla Oval to community control**

Boomanulla Oval in Narrabundah is a special place for the Canberran Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It has been a cultural and sporting centre for the community for 40 years.

Since 2015, the Oval has been controlled by the ACT Government. The ACT Labor Party promised the Oval would be returned to community control before the 2016 election and again in 2020. In their 2020 Parliamentary Agreement, the ACT Labor Party and the Greens committed to returning the Oval to the community (Point 9.5).

For more than eight years, the ACT Government has failed to deliver on its promises to return the oval to community control – a priority for the Canberran Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

### **What we want:**

- **The ACT Government to finally honour long standing promises to return the Oval to community control, by August 2025 at the latest.**
- **The ACT Government to provide all necessary resources and timely support to ensure that Boomanulla Oval's lease is handed back to the community with sufficient ongoing funding to sustain the Oval into the future.**

### ***A bit of history...***

Boomanulla has been an important place for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to meet for sporting events, celebrations, NAIDOC events, mentoring for young people, funerals, weddings and other gatherings of the community.

It was established in 1984 with support from the late Charles (Charlie) Perkins, then Secretary of Aboriginal Affairs, and the Oval's lease was the first asset handed over to the community in the ACT.

In November 2014, the directors of Aboriginal Corporation for Sporting and Recreational Activities (ACSRA) which had successfully managed the oval until then, wrote to the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations requesting that ACSRA be placed under special administration due to their concerns about the corporation's viability.

In his statement when placing ACSRA under special administration, the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations said:

*'Boomanulla Oval stands as a cultural and sporting icon in Canberra. It means a great deal to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The people do not want to lose the Oval...'<sup>1</sup>*

ACSRA's financial difficulties appear to have resulted from the cessation of funding from the Commonwealth Government in July 2011. The ACT Labor government at the time refused to step in to provide funding support. Sadly ACSRA was wound up, the Boomanulla Oval lease was passed back to the ACT Government and the Oval fell into disrepair.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oric.gov.au/publications/media-release/registrar-get-boomanulla-back-game>

In mid-2016, the ACT Government released a request for tender 'to assess the interest, capability and experience of the successful proponent to take over management of Boomanulla Oval.'<sup>2</sup>

Winnunga Nimmityjah engaged a reputable planning and design company to develop a strategic plan for the sustainable Indigenous management of Boomanulla Oval and submitted a bid. The plan included having an education, training and employment facility, a cultural education and keeping place, sports facilities, and low-cost housing in the blocks behind the Oval. Winnunga invested considerable time and resources in their proposal.

The request for tender was cancelled without explanation from the ACT Government, although it committed to undertake infrastructure improvements to Boomanulla.

### ***Boomanulla Oval now***

The ACT Government has rehabilitated the Oval. It is managed by ACT Transport and City Services and can be booked for use through the Department of Sport and Recreation.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (Elected Body) worked in collaboration with Transport and City Services during the upgrade of the oval and its amenities. Recently, the Elected Body located its office there, and it holds all its meetings and events there.

In February 2024, Elected Body held a consultation day at the Oval to ask community members what sorts of activities they would like to see happening at the Oval. The vision of the Elected Body and Transport and City Services is for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to work towards community control, including establishing a new Aboriginal organisation to manage the Oval.

Speaking at the 25<sup>th</sup> annual ANTaR ACT David Hunter Memorial Lecture in March, 2024, all three Aboriginal speakers, Selina Walker (Ngunnawal Traditional Owner), Kim Davison (Gugan Gulwan CEO) and Julie Tongs (Winnunga Nimmityjah CEO), called for the Oval to be returned to community control as a matter of urgency, to help bring the community together and provide valuable activities for youth and families.

The ACT Elected Body's priority in their August 2023 Hearings Report was the transfer of management of Boomanulla Oval -and Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm - to the community. Their 2023 goal is that within 2 years, the full operational and strategic management of Boomanulla Oval will be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-controlled. This needs to happen by August 2025.

### **Further reading**

'Closing the gate' on Indigenous sport - ABC News 20 July 2011  
<https://citynewsqbn.com.au/2023/seven-years-on-indigenous-ovals-fate-languishes/>  
<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/5996381/charlie-perkins-fought-for-it-indigenous-community-wants-it-back/>  
[ATSIEB Report on Hearings 14–16 August 2023](#)

You can watch the David Hunter Memorial Lecture 2024 on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p96QhZlr38g>

To contact ANTAR ACT: <https://antaract.org.au/contact-us/>

Authorised by Janet Hunt on behalf of ANTAR ACT.

June 2024

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://citynewsqbn.com.au/2023/seven-years-on-indigenous-ovals-fate-languishes/>