

NATURAL TURF ALLIANCE · WOMEN IN TURF, TURF NSW

Why We Fight for Grass

Community power, real evidence, and the case for living turf

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naturalturfalliance.org

How we came to be

2020-2022

Isolated resident groups fight single fields — Gardiner Park (Banksia), Willoughby, Lane Cove, Ku-ring-gai — each believing it is a one-off local dispute.

The pattern

Same story everywhere: no genuine consultation, marketing claims standing in for evidence, and costs that only surface once construction has already started.

Today

More than 20 member groups across Greater Sydney and regional NSW, working alongside the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, the Total Environment Centre, and scientists

Source: [Natural Turf Alliance — About](#)

CASE STUDY

What communities were seeing

Norman Griffiths Oval, Ku-ring-gai

\$3.3m

2021 estimate

\$20.2m

Cost by April 2026

6×

Blowout multiple

\$4.4m

Ordered payout after contract
termination

Contractor terminated over environmental incidents and design failures. Community group notified the Minister for Local Government of a possible Local Government Act breach — the field is still unfinished.

Source: [ABC News](#) · [Sydney Morning Herald](#) · [Natural Turf Alliance](#)

When the surface fails

Turf Australia's own fact sheet: infill has melted on players' boots in extreme heat, and fields built on a 1-in-100-year floodplain carry roughly a 1-in-5 chance of flooding within a 20-year synthetic shockpad lifespan.

Gardiner Park, Banksia

A 20m Depression-era sandstone wall — part of the park's own heritage listing — collapsed after heavy rain linked to the synthetic upgrade, triggering formal remediation.

Mitchelton Oval, Brisbane

Kedron Brook floods lifted the club's 2-year-old \$1.5m synthetic pitch like a carpet. Rebuilding needed a \$2.97m disaster-recovery grant.

Chatswood High School

The surface deteriorated within about a year, scattering plastic fragments across the basketball court, gutters and nearby streets.

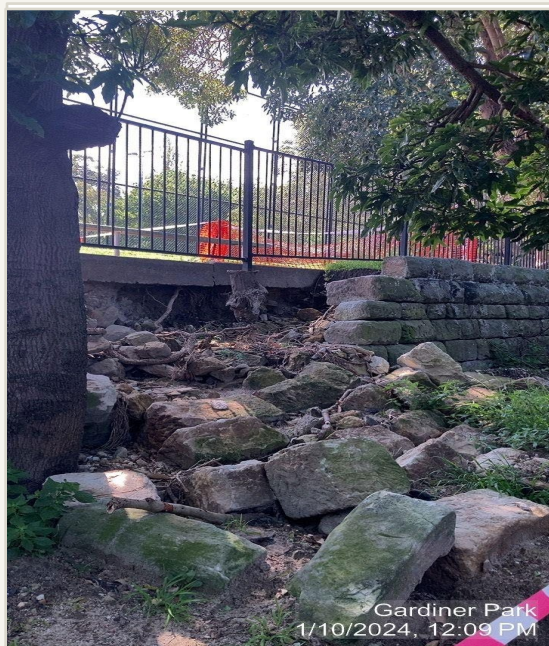
“AUSMAP's Sydney shoreline monitoring found synthetic grass debris increasing roughly tenfold at Rose Bay (2022-2025), reaching up to 2,500 blades per m² at Tower Beach, Botany Bay.”

Source: [Bayside Council](#) · [The Guardian](#) · [Nine News](#) · [AUSMAP](#) · [Turf Australia](#)

ON THE GROUND

When the surface fails

Gardiner Park, Banksia



Mitchelton Oval, Brisbane



Chatswood High School



Councils: steward or culprit?

THE ROLE

- Custodian of public land
- Approval authority for new fields
- Recipient of state infrastructure grants

THE CONFLICT

- Applicant and assessor in the same project
- Grant funding rewards synthetic conversion
- Rarely resourced to run truly independent environmental review

“Councils are too often project proponents first, independent decision-makers second.”

When communities became litigants

Friends of Gardiner Park Inc v Bayside Council [2022] NSWLEC 22

Residents challenged a synthetic conversion in a heritage-listed park on a floodway feeding Botany Bay. The Land and Environment Court ultimately dismissed the case — but the challenge forced independent scrutiny, drove sustained media coverage, and fed directly into the later push for statewide guidelines.

Also on the record: Callan Park

A formal Alliance submission opposed two proposed synthetic fields on this state heritage harbourside parkland — on heritage, stormwater and lifecycle-cost grounds, citing the council's own admission that microplastic fibres could reach the Parramatta River in major storms.

Source: [NSW Caselaw](#) · [Sydney Morning Herald](#) · [Natural Turf Alliance](#)

Fighting for guidelines that actually bite

2023

NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer review

Independent review finds evidence gaps on chemicals, heat and end-of-life management.

2024

Amanda Cohn MLC motion passes NSW Parliament

Formal support for best-practice natural turf design and maintenance.

2024-26

Division 5.1 Addendum (NSW Planning)

New public-open-space synthetic fields now require heritage, heat, biodiversity and flood-risk assessment, plus an end-of-life plan.

The gap: these guidelines were drafted to exclude schools and other government land.

Source: [NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer](#) · [NSW Planning](#) · [Amanda Cohn MLC](#)

The environmental reality

~130,000t

Synthetic turf to landfill in Australia every year

0.1kg-several t

Microplastic shed per field, per year

0

Large-scale synthetic turf recycling plants in NSW

No disclosure

Mandatory rule for PFAS, PAHs or heavy metals in turf products

Source: [RE4ORM Recycling](#) · [CEBIC Victoria](#) · [RSC microplastics study, 2026](#) · [AUSMAP](#)

The human health reality

87°C

Synthetic turf surface temperature measured on
a Sydney summer day

42°C

Natural turf, same conditions

Skin contact burns can occur within seconds once a surface passes about 48°C. Western Sydney University field studies found synthetic turf sitting above that threshold for hours on a normal summer afternoon.

We are precise about this: not proof that every field causes harm, but a measurable heat and burn hazard, plus real chemical-composition uncertainty — reasons for precaution, especially for children.

“When a surface can become measurably more dangerous than the grass it replaced, the burden of proof belongs with whoever proposes it.”

Source: [Western Sydney University](#) · [NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer](#)

THE EVIDENCE

The human health reality

Heat Levels - Safe Healthy P...
safehealthyplayingfields.org

SYNTHETIC TURF Skin Injury References

EXPOSED SKIN/BODY EFFECTS

105 °F* (heat index)
cancel sport
115 °F
burns, heat stroke

122 °F**
<10 MINUTES
injury/burn
131 °F
2nd degree burn

140 °F
3 SECONDS
2nd degree burn
5 SECONDS
3rd degree burn

162 °F
human tissue
destroyed on
contact
may cause
nerve damage

Banksia Weather (beta)

View the current warnings for New South Wales

Change location Start typing Find Me Postcode or lat/lon

26.9 °C

Lowest Highest
22.1 °C 27.9 °C
7:29 am 12:28 pm

Forecast
issued at 11:42 am AEDT on Monday 6 February 2023

Rest of Monday 20 °C 28 °C

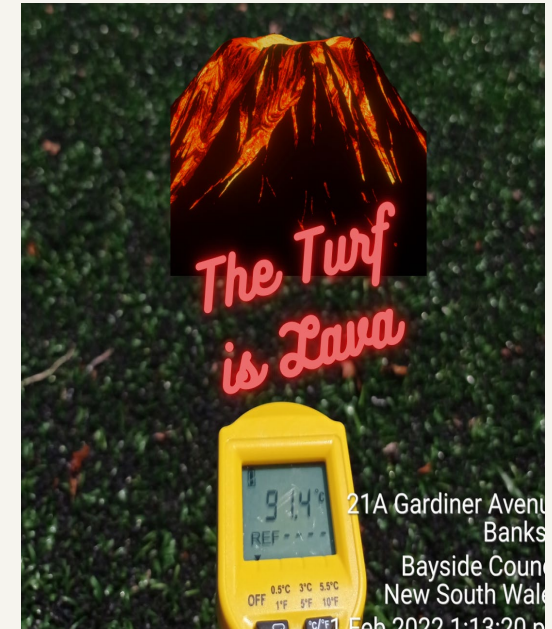
When will it rain?

Synthetic

Concrete

Grass

21 Gardiner Avenue
Banksia
Bayside Council
New South Wales
16 Feb 2023 12:26:14 pm



Why we fight for grass

Cooling

Evapotranspiration lowers air temperature — not just surface temperature.

Living soil

Root systems support soil health, drainage and biodiversity, not compacted ground under a carpet.

No plastic pathway

No fibre shedding, no microplastic runoff, no PFAS uncertainty to manage.

Improves with design

Soil renovation, efficient irrigation, the right grass species, sensible load management.

Well-managed natural turf isn't nostalgia — it's the higher-performing, lower-risk option, properly resourced.

What we continue to do

Evidence base

286 sports fields mapped across 32 Greater Sydney LGAs, tracking synthetic density and grant funding patterns.

Formal submissions

Planning objections at Callan Park and Norman Griffiths, plus ongoing input on school turf policy.

Parliamentary briefings

Budget Estimates questions on the schools guidance gap and synthetic turf's end-of-life waste.

Coalition-building

20+ member groups, linked to the Nature Conservation Council, Total Environment Centre and national plastics reform.

Source: [Natural Turf Alliance](#)

What we need from you

WITH YOU — THE NATURAL TURF INDUSTRY

- Independent whole-of-life data on heat, water, cost and biodiversity that councils can't dismiss
- Investment in maintenance capability — soil science, irrigation efficiency, groundskeeper training
- A shared voice challenging synthetic as the automatic "default" choice

FROM SYNTHETIC MANUFACTURERS

- Mandatory chemical and PFAS disclosure before any product is approved for public land
- Producer-funded end-of-life collection and reprocessing — not councils or schools
- Independently verified recyclability claims, not marketing promises

Source: [Turf Australia — Turf Waste Summary](#)

Pollution



CLOSING

Grass is infrastructure

Climate

Cooling

Children's play

Biodiversity

Community

infrastructure — all at once, for free, for decades, if we invest in it properly.

We're fighting for a future where sport thrives without asking communities to accept hotter, more disposable, more polluting public land.

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