

# Manuka Oval wants its events louder, lighter and later

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Manuka Oval is seeking government approval to operate more loudly, with more lighting, and later into the night.

A government email chain obtained by the Kingston Barton Residents Group under Freedom of Information legislation shows Manuka Oval is seeking an amendment to the Environmental Protection Act in order to get around its current noise and light restrictions.

Oval management has already fielded numerous complaints from residents relating to light and noise emitted from the oval during big matches – not to mention parking and congestion around the site. It admitted it was already "testing the limits" of its current restrictions.

It now wants to operate under some of the same conditions as an outdoor concert venue, hosting increasing numbers of live-broadcast and international sporting events that include music, and sometimes fireworks, as part of the spectacle.

Correspondence between Manuka Oval's operator, Territory Venues and Events, and the Environment Protection Authority last month shows the operator is keen to host larger events that would likely breach its current management plans, which it claimed were outdated.

Territory Venues and Events general manager Liz Clarke wrote to the EPA on April 8, arguing that the existing noise and light management plans were lodged in 2013 and the oval's potential to host large and live televised events was unforeseen at that time.

"At the time the plans were prepared, the known annual major matches to be played at the venue were four AFL games and the Prime Minister's XI Cricket match," Ms Clarke said.

In 2015, the venue has hosted four major televised cricket events, including three Cricket World Cup matches, the annual PM's XI and the final of the Big Bash League.

Ms Clarke said "the number of televised cricket events at the venue in 2015 has been unprecedented ...As international and significant national-level matches, they are attracting a high level of community support and patronage, as well as providing a significant economic and tourism benefit to the ACT."

"It is the ACT government's objective to seek further national and international sporting content for Manuka Oval. As such I would welcome a review of both the Noise Management and Light Management Plans with an opportunity to reassess current limitations and the potential for granting an Environmental Authorisation and the use of the event credit system."

Ms Clarke noted that the televised national and international one-day format cricket matches were the events "testing the current scope of the Environmental Protection ACT."

These events – usually scheduled for prime-time broadcast – sometimes ended at 11pm.

"They are increasingly being promoted and delivered as entertainment events, using amplified music during breaks in play and the occasional use of pyrotechnics," she said.

Another less formal email from one of her staff members included in the email chain puts it more bluntly: "It is the entertainment element that is giving us grief within the regulations."

Residents have lodged a succession of formal complaints over parking, noise and lighting issues at the Oval.

The group said it was a surprise to learn Manuka Oval was seeking exemptions from light and noise restrictions, given the level of community angst about some of the bigger events even under their current restrictions.

"This amendment would allow Manuka Oval to host numerous events outside of environmental regulations for sporting events and hosting these events under concert-like conditions will have an impact on the amenity of surrounding suburbs," said group president Rebecca Scouller.

She noted there was deep unease about the move and promises of consultation – given the government's failure to consult over the old Canberra Services Club site.

Currently both Telopea Park School and the Manuka Occasional Childcare Association are fighting moves to move the childcare centre onto the school's tennis courts to make way for the Club on MOCCA's prime Manuka premises.

Ms Scouller also noted that the recognition by Manuka Oval management that the Oval cannot host one-day events within agreed light and noise management plans should be the trigger for community consultation.

"We ask that this amendment be placed on hold until there is community consultation."

A spokesman for ACT Chief Minister Andrew Barr said any application for an Environmental Authorisation would be subject to public notification and consultation.

"The government wants Manuka Oval used more often for events and this change would assist in that goal. The venue will never be the MCG or SCG but it will be used more in the future. Additional events support the local economy, particularly Manuka and Kingston traders."