

sustainable settlement

urban design

Play in the Urban Landscape



Australian Institute
of Landscape Architects

National Policy Statement

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) recognises the vital role of play in all aspects of children's development, and its functional importance in supporting a happy and healthy childhood.

This policy sets out a vision for play in the context of the Australian landscape. It is intended to provide a framework for individuals and organisations to reflect upon, review and update their provision for play opportunities for children, young people and communities across the range of natural and built environments they inhabit and care for.

Children's Right to Play

The right to play and access informal recreation is contained in Article 31 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, ratified by Australia in 1990.

Under this convention, the Australian government has a duty to provide and promote opportunities for recreational play and leisure activity for all children and young people up to the age of 18.

The AILA's Vision for Play

The AILA's vision is for all children and young people to be able to enjoy a range of stimulating, challenging and health-promoting outdoor environments, designed to support the exploration and development of their abilities close to where they live.

A Definition for Play

For the purposes of this policy play is defined as: children and young people following their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons, having fun while respecting themselves and others. Play is a generic term applied to a wide range of activities and behaviours that are satisfying to the child, created for the child, and freely chosen by the child. As children grow older they are more likely to describe these informal recreational activities in ways other than "playing". This policy applies equally to all ages of children.

Design Priority

Designers should recognise that children 'play' anytime and anywhere, not just in purpose built play areas.

Design solutions, even if 'play' is not mentioned in a project brief or a given priority, should reinforce that opportunistic play is just as important as that allowed for in designated playgrounds.

Urban streetscapes and other public places should enable young people to 'play' (do what they like to do) safely (for themselves and others) within the public realm e.g. perch at elevated levels to observe the world going by.

Designed For Play

Well-designed, high quality outdoor environments, that provide for play by children and young people, can:

- Develop a sense of independence, self-reliance, self-esteem, self-respect and resilience.
- Test boundaries and possibilities.
- Discover a balance between risk and personal safety.
- Foster respect for other people and the environment.
- Expand their understanding and appreciation of the world they live in.
- Build personal and community well-being via focus on healthy growth and development opportunities.
- Enjoy learning through discovery.
- Imagine, explore and extend choices for varying play outcomes.

Play Objectives

The following objectives apply to all types of play provision in the public realm. The objectives are broad statements, intended to guide how play values and play principles can be incorporated in any outdoor environment in Australia. Such outdoor environments should be planned, designed and managed to:

- Be as inclusive as possible - i.e. supporting equality of access & provision of play opportunities for children and young people of all ages, abilities, backgrounds, cultures and genders, as well as supporting needs of accompanying carers/guardians.
- Aspire towards a 'community of play' approach across the broader settlement network – i.e. it is laudable to provide a one-off play area for one gender or age group, if this is balanced with other play facilities for everyone in the area.
- Incorporate appropriate & inclusive community consultation processes.
- Incorporate best-practice sustainability approaches – including consideration of impacts of climate change on resource use & availability, materials & construction techniques, and ongoing maintenance & evaluation procedures.

Designated Play Areas

Play areas should not just be the purpose built variety. However when required, designated play areas, including but not limited to playgrounds, should be planned, designed and managed to meet the broader Play Objectives (above) as well as the following specific objectives :

- Optimise physical access within the broader settlement network – i.e. play opportunities should be located within walking distance of where children live, and close to transport links.
- Provide for a broad range of imaginative, cognitive, social and physical types of play, catering within budgets to achieve as much diversity and variety of play opportunities as possible. Constructive play with loose parts is highly valued.
- Be thermally comfortable, integrating appropriate trees wherever possible as part of broader urban/regional green infrastructure strategy.
- Respond to, support and respect associated landscape context and character.
- Be close to supportive facilities e.g. car parks, toilets, transport, drinking water, path networks, BBQs etc.
- Optimize drive-by surveillance & support user perceptions of safety.
- Balance user safety with appropriate & stimulating age-based activity challenges.
- Meaningfully integrate, wherever possible, with associated social infrastructure facilities frequented by children - e.g. cafes, libraries, community gardens, community centres, entertainment precincts, schools, childcare centres, public parks, museums, churches etc.
- Comply with relevant certification & planning requirements, including current Australian Standards & Codes.

This Policy statement is part of the AILA's Sustainable Settlement suite of Policy Statements on Australian Landscape Architecture, the profession committed to the creation of meaningful and enjoyable outdoor places and to the sustainable management of our built and natural environment.

More details on AILA National Policy Statements: www.aila.org.au/policies

All queries on National Policy should be directed to the AILA's CEO.

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