

Royal Park Protection Group Inc

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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ROYAL PARK PROTECTION GROUP (RPPG)**GIVEN AT THE AGM ON 12 NOVEMBER 2001****Introduction:**

Tonight we are holding our fourth Annual General Meeting and are celebrating not just the survival of our Group but our contribution to fending off developments, which could see Royal Park swallowed up for ever. This occasion gives us the opportunity to pause and reflect on the events of the past year, the lessons learnt and so plan our future strategies.

In the past year, Melbourne has seen a further assault on its urban parklands, waterways and open space. What was started under the Kennett Government is now being continued under Bracks. A number of these environmental threats have come from the proposed construction of the 2006 Commonwealth Games venues and village on, or in the neighbourhood of, our major city parks (Yarra Park, Melbourne Park, Albert Park and Royal Park). They also come from the proposed expansion of the freeway network in Metropolitan Melbourne.

In relation to the assault on Royal Park, we have witnessed - since the last AGM - the completion and opening of the first of the 2006 Commonwealth Games facilities to be built in Melbourne – the Royal Park State Netball and Hockey Centre. These are international standard stadiums complete with high intensity, outdoor lighting whose obtrusive light spill and glare impact adversely on the Park, the Zoo and surrounding residential/suburban areas. The SNHC itself was built on 8 hectares of land alienated from the middle of the Park, under the Royal Park Land Act 1999. The menace still looms of a car invasion. Parking in the SNHC is inadequate and appears poorly managed and so SNHC visitors vie for Royal Park carspaces with Zoo visitors and other sports groups. (See below also).

The new threat, soon to materialise, is the Games Village, which the State Government appears intent on constructing on the former Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital site, in the environs of Royal Park. This presents a very real danger to the Park (with its newly established vegetation and natural habitat precincts) as it could result in irretrievable damage by having a Village for 6,000 on its borders, then a residential development for around 1,500. The widening of park roads is envisaged and even provision of public transport as well as a giant bus terminus (See below).

The threat to Royal Park from the extension of the Eastern Freeway through Royal Park has preoccupied members of the Group since the Bracks Government showed a revived interest in the project last year. We are, however, hopeful that solutions to the traffic congestion of the inner north may be found in the course of the Study now in progress and the freeway/tunnel option through Royal Park dropped. (See below). The revegetation projects undertaken by the City of Melbourne as part of the implementation of the Master Plan is in some respects a good news story but the fight continues to ensure funds are spent on replanting rather than the barbeques and carparks. (See also below).

RPPG was concerned last year over the Bracks Government action to sack the City of Melbourne Council and restructure the Council. This saw the removal of the Ward Councillor system. Now no one Councillor is directly responsible for Royal Park. The passage of the *Commonwealth Games Arrangements Act 2001* saw erosion of our civil rights. The Bracks Government removed the right to dissent and to protest peacefully over the 2006 Commonwealth Games venues. The proposed *Peaceful Assemblies Bill* to be reintroduced in August 2002 also affects the right to dissent. Thus environmental groups dissenting from the Government over major developments planned for Melbourne may well be the targets of these Acts.

The Royal Park Protection Group continues to campaign with the assistance of solid alliances with other community groups, peak environmental organisations, trade unions plus support from a number of the new Melbourne City Councillors and State Parliamentarians (with the exception of Labor Ministers and MPs). We have the backing for our campaigns on the Green Games of the Australian Greens. The use of email appears to facilitate ready communication between groups and has engendered new spirit of co-operation between groups working on a range of interconnected issues. A special mention needs to be made of some of the friends of Royal Park. Councillor Kevin Chamberlin has long been a champion and defender of Royal Park. Rod Quantock, is a well known community activist and patron of parks and has been MC at many of our Royal Park protests and rallies. Paul Mees is representing RPPG on the Northern Central City Corridor Study. Peter Goad has created our impressive banners for our rallies (some of these are on display tonight). Bob Symington has given us support and excellent advice over promotion of Green Games for Melbourne. Barry Clark has provided remarkable expert assistance over the Royal Park stadium lights, over questions of light pollution, green house gas emissions and matters astronomical.

RPPG values our alliance with Save Albert Park with whom we are campaigning over Green Games for Melbourne and also Parkville Association whose members are similarly concerned over the possible location of the Games Village in Parkville and the obtrusive stadium lights.

Our Objectives Reaffirmed:

RPPG reaffirms our objectives as set out in our constitution, which are:

- i. *To protect, regenerate and conserve the Royal Park as a unique, indigenous, central city park for present and future generations, consistent with principles of the 1987 Royal Park Master Plan;*
- ii. *To oppose alienation of parkland by government, commercial, sporting and other bodies to ensure public access consistent with the terms of the establishment of the Royal Park.*

Key Campaigns

Green Games for Melbourne 2006

This campaign was announced at last year's AGM by Bob Symington, then Director of Green Games 2000 for the Sydney Olympics and launched by Rod Quantock. Since then our campaign has faltered having met the intractable opposition of the Bracks Government, which has taken no interest in emulating the achievements of the Sydney Olympics 2000 – famous as the first green summer games in history. The Government has failed to implement a legislative framework for incorporating ecologically sustainable development guidelines for the construction of Games Venues and Village and for staging the Games along the model of the Sydney Olympics 2000. The coalition of RPPG with environment and community groups has failed to persuade the Government otherwise, despite an extraordinary lobbying campaign over the *Commonwealth Games Arrangements Bill*, in which we briefed many of the Lower House MP's on the subject of Green Games and virtually all the Upper House MP's.

In September this year the Government introduced this Bill to Parliament - with no advance public consultation or notice - to fast-track it through the Lower House. The purpose of the Act was said to 'give certainty' to the construction of Games facilities but in reality to ensure the MCG redevelopment is expedited. The Act, reminiscent of the Grand Prix Act, bypasses the checks and balances of democratic processes and deprives citizens of their rights.

Not only does this represent an extraordinary suspension of ordinary process, it exempts Commonwealth Games 2006 venues from planning, environment, heritage, building and coastal management Acts plus residential tenancies and local council controls. Unlike the Sydney Olympics it contains none of the ESD (Ecologically Sustainable Development) guidelines or environmental benchmarks provided for the Sydney Games.

A rally held on 18 September 2001 at Parliament was organised by an alliance of Royal Park Protection Group, Save Albert Park, the Greens and the Parkville Association. 'A magna carta' of our demands was presented to Sports Minister Madden after the rally. The Environment Liaison Office representing peak environment groups (the Australian Conservation Foundation, Friends of the Earth, Environment Victoria, Victorian National Parks Association and the Wilderness Society Victoria) wrote, similarly, to the Premier and Ministers Madden and Pandazopoulos opposing the Commonwealth Games Arrangements Bill. They also advocated that ESD Guidelines be incorporated into the legislation and that an independent organisation be set up with a 'watch dog' role modelled on the Green Games Watch 2000 set up for the Olympics.

The coalition of groups made a submission to the Parliamentary *Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee* on the unsatisfactory aspects of the Commonwealth Games Arrangements Bill. This was raised in Parliament but the Bill was not amended. Representatives of the coalition lobbied the Opposition firstly with a view to the introducing ESD guidelines to the Bill. The Shadow Minister for the Environment proposed to the Lower House that the Bill be amended to give Melbourne Green Games but the Government refused. The Opposition in the Upper House referred the Bill to the 'Committee stage', which meant that Sports Minister Madden was questioned over one day or so on virtually every clause in the Bill. The Bill passed the Upper House on 11 October 2001 – unamended. Unfortunately, the Opposition was not prepared to delay the passage of the Bill.

Given the Government has now refused to take any measures to ensure that ESD bench marks are mandatory for construction of Games facilities, the RPPG has recently written to Trades Hall Council and Victorian unions to urge the unions take on promotion of Green Games for Melbourne, like their NSW counterparts.

Location of the Games Village

The Royal Park Protection Group (RPPG) has been campaigning for over two years to have the Games Village located on an appropriate site such as Docklands or the Showgrounds, not in Royal Park. (The Jolimont Railyards has only been recently suggested as a possible location).

The Kennett Government originally selected the 'Parkville site' at the time when bids were being made for the 2006 Commonwealth Games. Following representations by RPPG together with other community groups and unions the Government agreed that the heritage buildings of the Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital would be 'respected' in any redevelopment of the site and significant trees retained. The Kennett Government also agreed to undertake a feasibility study of the 'Parkville site'. Accordingly a number of projects were undertaken including a comparison between the 'Parkville site' and Docklands. Significant questions were raised over the suitability of the 'Parkville site' which were revealed in an investigative report published in the Sunday Age of 17 September 2000. The projects were completed, as we understand, by the Office of Major Projects when the Bracks Government came to power. The only study released to the community was a heritage assessment of the historic Hospital buildings.

The Government advertised in October 2001 for expressions of interest to be submitted to the Government for the construction of the Games Village. Developers were advised that while they might nominate other sites within 5 kilometres of the CBD, the Government's 'preferred site' is the 'Parkville site'. The equivocal position taken by the Government has led RPPG to the view that the choice of the 'Parkville site' by the Government is a *fait accompli*. A project team in the Office of Major Projects has been drawing up plans to locate the Village here. As far as we know the OMP is not doing this for any other site. On 30 August 2000 the project team went to the extraordinary lengths of flying a hired mini zeppelin at varying heights of 12 to 20 storeys above the Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital site. The purpose of the exercise was to assess the possible impact on the neighbourhood and Royal Park of the high rise apartments proposed for the Games Village accommodation on the site. The Melways Melbourne street directory (latest edition dated November 2000) shows the site as the Commonwealth Games Village.

The Government has a policy that 20% to 30% of the Games Village accommodation should be allocated for "welfare housing". We consider, however, that the 'Parkville site' is completely unsuitable for a residential development and that the Government would be consigning 500 or so high need, lower income citizens to life in an isolated ghetto, remote from community support.

The RPPG made a submission to the City of Melbourne Environment and Planning Committees on 4 and 6 September 2001 respectively on our opposition to the 'Parkville site' for the Village. Council supported our position. Our reasons were: isolation of the site and lack of any shops, public facilities and community services; unsuitable neighbours (high security Turana youth prison, CSL and a proposed Zoo effluent discharge pond ie the new wetlands opposite the village site); the 20-hectare site is too small to fit a Village for 6000 athletes; the high rise tower block accommodation (12 to 20 storeys) proposed for the site (next to a freeway) as a solution to space constraints is unsatisfactory (especially unsuitable if for high-need, lower income clients); difficult car access and no nearby public transport; transfer of public land into private hands – part of the deal to build the Village; light glare, noise and pollution from the Tullamarine Freeway (City Link) next to the site; loss of amenity for West Parkville and Brunswick residents with a small suburb next door; threat to heritage buildings on former Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital site; damage to Royal Park with a small suburb constructed on its boundaries; and locating the Village on this site is contrary to ESD Guidelines for staging Green Games.

The State Government appears to have been engaging in 'dirty tricks' to fend off criticism of the choice of the 'Parkville site'. In late September the Premier's Media Unit circulated an 'Information Kit' on the Commonwealth Games Arrangements Bill to Labor MP's. This leaked document contained a section, written by Sports Minister Madden's staff, countering the arguments used by the RPPG to oppose the Government's support for the 'Parkville site'. A spokesperson for the Government admitted that the Kit contained inaccurate, misleading information. In late October Minister Pandazopoulos wrote to ALP Branch Secretaries explaining the Government's preference for the 'Parkville site.' The latest proforma or standard letter sent by Minister Madden's spin doctors to citizens opposing the 'Parkville site' for the Village gives assurances that you don't have to worry as the Village is not actually IN Royal Park. (It is just across the road).

At no stage has an EIA been undertaken. At a recent meeting Minister Pandazopoulos made the statement that 'the location of the Village would be decided by market forces' and that it would be up to the developers to incorporate ESD benchmarks in their Village development; it was to be all self regulating; and there would be no mandatory controls. An advisory committee is to be set up, as provided for under the recent Act. It appears that the City of Melbourne has not been invited to participate although any of the sites like to be chosen are within the City of Melbourne's boundaries. Information is not available as to the sites specified by developers who have put forward expressions of interest. It is regarded as 'commercial in confidence'.

Outdoor Lighting on Netball and Hockey Stadiums in Royal Park

The campaign to have the outdoor lighting on the State Netball and Hockey Centre remedied has been in progress since the light towers with high-intensity lights went up on the hockey stadium and the outside netball courts were installed in July 2000.

A key requirement for the SNHC sports lighting design was that the light spill into the Zoo had to be no greater than that experienced from the former State Hockey Centre. The contract documents included this requirement and also the requirement that the light spill had to be minimised by means such as external shields even if this resulted in a loss of lighting efficiency.

Unshielded sports lighting which was installed by the contractor appears to produce up to 30 times more spill than the actual former value of the old State Hockey Centre. Enforcement action through VCAT was found not possible because quantitative limits for light spill were somehow not included in the planning permit conditions. In fact there seems to be no mention of light spill at all! Repeated and often detailed complaints by RPPG, the Astronomical Society of Victoria, other groups and individuals about the excessive spill and glare continue to be ignored or denied dismissively by the Government and by the Melbourne Council. The area of Royal Park affected by light spill now appears to be literally hundreds of times greater than hitherto.

It is also relevant that not only the sports lighting but also the other outdoor lighting at the SNHC has proved to be extraordinarily wasteful. As an intrinsic feature of their design, for example, about a hundred opal-dome lights on the building walls send as much as half of their total light output uselessly above the horizontal. Most of this light energy ends up in outer space, hardly a desirable action given the increasingly serious global warming result of excessive fossil fuel use for electricity generation. The total energy consumption of the SNHC appears to be much greater than that of all of the former hockey and netball facilities it replaces at Royal Park. Complaints about this have also been ignored or dismissed by the Government and Council. The profligate use of the demonstrably wasteful lights continues apparently unabated. Now, the City of Melbourne is being pressed to allow installation of even more lighting in the area, this time on a path between the SNHC and the Zoo.

Nothing short of rectification of the light spill problems seems likely ever to make the matter go away. There appears to be sufficient justification for a judicial enquiry or similar to be set up.

The RPPG staged a protest over the need for the lights to be rectified when the lights were officially switched on for testing on 3 December last year. We also protested at the official opening of the SNHC on 19 March this year with the message "Fix The Lights".

The RPPG was appointed by Sports Minister Madden to be represented on the SNHC Advisory Committee. It was at this forum that we raised our concerns about the obtrusive outdoor lighting and the need for the lights to be shielded. The State Sports Centres Trust – the authority to whom the Chair of the Advisory Committee reports - apparently resented the criticisms levelled at the operation of the SNHC by the RPPG. In February 2001 the RPPG was virtually threatened defamation thus demonstrating the adversarial attitude of the State Government to community groups. The SNHC Advisory Committee has failed to deal with the problems raised by RPPG. Buck passing appears to be the way to dispose of problems – the SNHC Advisory Committee maintains that questions over light pollution has to be referred to Government Departments of the Office of Major Projects or the DOI. These Departments, however, maintain that the SNHC Advisory Committee should address these problems.

The adversarial attitude by the State Government to community groups such as the RPPG was well and truly bourn out by the incident at the launch of the SNHC on 16 March 2001. The Convenor of the RPPG who had an official invitation was prevented from entering the building and in fact was roughly pushed aside when speaking to the Premier. The police were called to block the entrance. No other guest was debarred from entry even though several people had entered without invitations.

At a meeting on 27 February 2001 Minister Madden commissioned the RPPG to report on the operational shortcomings of the SNHC. Detailed reports on the "*Environmental Shortcomings of the State Netball and Hockey Centre 'Operations Plan 2000-2001 and Suggested Improvements'*" (by Dr Barry Clark) on the "*Traffic, Transport and Parking Shortcomings of the State Netball and Hockey Centre 'Operations Plan 2000-2001' and Suggested Improvements'*" (by Julianne Bell). No reply was ever received to these reports and the Minister's staff confessed that the reports had been 'mislaidd'. While this may be an example of Government incompetence, it is clearly evidence of the contempt expressed by the State Government for community groups.

The latest action to have the City of Melbourne recognise that the SNHC outdoor lighting fails key planning conditions and appears to breach the provisions of the Environment Protection Act 1987 Act plus the application of the Health Act 1958 has failed. The CEO has simply stated that officers of the council have been up to check the lights and have observed 'no nuisance exists'. At the same time he admits that the officers were not qualified to judge. RPPG has to assess whether to take the matter to a Magistrates Court to force the City of Melbourne to act over the obtrusive SNHC lights. The State Government gives no indication that it plans to remedy the lights. It appears increasingly that answers to the questions can only be properly answered by a judicial enquiry.

Other Important Campaigns

Opposition to Extension of the Eastern Freeway through Royal Park

In April 2001 Transport Minister Batchelor announced the Northern Central City Corridor Study would be undertaken. The purpose of the Study was said to be an investigation of the transport and land use issues in Melbourne's inner north.' The Royal Park Protection Group was 'appointed to a 'Community Reference Group' for the Study. Trouble appeared when the Minister 'sacked' Dr Paul Mees, President of the Public Transport Users Association from the CRG. As a revolt threatened to derail the Study, the RPPG representative - Colin Smith - offered to step down. Paul Mees has taken over as the RPPG representative and the Study has proceeded. At a packed meeting on 24 May 2001 at Collingwood Town Hall, community groups questioned Minister Batchelor on the real reason for the Study. They speculated if it was simply to put through the Kennett Government and Vicroads pet project of a freeway (whether above ground or in a tunnel) through Carlton, Parkville and Royal Park. The juggernaut of a Study has rolled on and we are hopeful that real solutions can be found to the traffic congestion in the inner north. It appears that the Study will now examine the implications of the freeway extension in the outer East including the Scoresby freeway for increased traffic volumes in the inner north. The Study has confirmed earlier findings that only 5% of traffic off the Eastern Freeway is headed for Tullamarine Freeway, thus countering the argument for a freeway/tunnel through Royal Park.

Curbing the Carpark Expansion

The old netball courts and hall in west Royal Park have now been demolished and the area is to be returned to parkland. This was promised by the State Government in return for land alienated for the SNHC. The RPPG backed by Melbourne Councillor Kevin Chamberlin had to battle to prevent the State Netball and Hockey Centre from resuming the area for carparking. A major concern is that under *the Commonwealth Games Arrangements Act* any land can be alienated and any roads constructed in relation to Commonwealth Games facilities.

Restructure of Council and Election Campaign for Melbourne City Council

From November 2000 the RPPG campaigned to try to have the lame duck Ward Councillor Rosemary Daniel resign due to her failure to represent the interests of her Ward, which included

Royal Park. She was absent from Council for 6 months claiming 'harassment' by fellow Councillors. The RPPG had input to the 'Kirner review' of the Council in March 2001 and also the 'Representational Review' of the City of Melbourne' called by Local Government Minister Cameron after the State Government had effectively sacked the Council. The RPPG played an active role in the election campaign in July 2001. We were the only group to have sent questionnaires to all candidates to investigate their 'green' credentials and their policies on a range of issues. The results were published in an advertisement, which we took out in The Melbourne Times.

Care for Royal Park

The RPPG is committed to the 'greening' of Royal Park (what is left of it) and promotion of appreciation of it as 'Bushland in the City'. We are an active member of the Royal Park Master Plan Implementation Committee together with other community groups working on the revegetation and restitution of the Park. The RPPG is appreciative of the expert skills of the professional consultants and in-house staff of the City of Melbourne now working on the revegetation projects and on the Vegetation Sub Committee of the Implementation Committee. We are prominent in the promotion of community planting days, for instance, the Spring Planting Festival on 7 October 2001 and the public information day concerning the revegetation of the Australian Native Garden held on 7 April 2001. We continue to support the City of Melbourne's 'passive recreation' programs of kite flying and star viewing in Royal Park.

Continuing Action

- Heading the list as a priority is the need to control the SNHC stadium lighting given the impact of obtrusive lighting spill and glare on the Park, the Zoo and surrounding residential suburbs. In the absence of a judicial enquiry by the State Government, at the very least the RPPG will have to pursue the City of Melbourne in the Magistrates Court over its refusal to order abatement of the nuisance of the lighting spill and glare of the SNHC lights.
- The control of the stadium operations needs to be addressed. Reasonable attempts to influence the operations through the SNHC Advisory Committee have not been successful. A concerted campaign has to be mounted together with the case for the rectification of the SNHC stadium lights.
- It is hoped that the campaign for the Green Games can be handed to the unions to pursue. ESD benchmarks must be implemented for the construction of the Games facilities. Time is running out as the redevelopment of the MCG will start soon.
- The Government must be lobbied to select a suitable site for the Games Village, not the Parkville site. It is hoped that the unions can also pursue this issue.
- The plan for the extension of the Eastern Freeway through Royal Park will have to be monitored through the Northern Central City Corridor Study.
- The focus of the RPPG must continue to be on the restitution and the revegetation of the Park for so long neglected. RPPG will continue to attend the Royal Park Master Plan Implementation Committee and the Vegetation Sub-Committee, not only to contribute to the revegetation projects but to monitor inappropriate developments such as those proposed by the SNHC and Sporting associations.
- The suggestion made in the past for RPPG to promote the establishment of a network of environmental, trade union and local government groups for Green Watch 2006 to act as an independent environmental watch dog could again be taken up.

And finally I would like to quote from Partrick White's injunction to the rally held in Centennial Park in 1972 "Protect your Parks from the Pressure of Political Concrete". It is just as worthy an objective as it was nearly 40 years ago.

Julianne Bell

Convenor

Royal Park Protection Group

12 November 2001