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**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ROYAL PARK PROTECTION GROUP (RPPG)
GIVEN AT THE AGM ON 17 NOVEMBER 2005**

Tonight we are holding our eight Annual General Meeting for the Royal Park Protection Group. This report constitutes an overview of events of the past year in relation to Royal Park but firstly I would like to mention something about our origins.

It is now actually nine years since members of the Parkville Association first met in the College Church Hall Parkville opposite the Australian Native Garden in Royal Park to form a new group to deal specifically with the emerging threats of development in Royal Park.

Although the threats of destruction to Royal Park were still distant dark clouds on the horizon we had a taste of what was to come as, following the sacking of the Melbourne City Council, Kevan Gosper was installed as Chief Commissioner. His inaugural act was to clear fell 13 hectares of Royal Park woodland around the Melbourne Zoo for the creation of a concrete, super market style carpark. His memorable comment on an inspection of Royal Park was "there's an awful lot of vacant land round here". This extraordinary act of vandalism had its immediate consequences as in the absence of a protective tree cover a windstorm wreaked immense damage on the Zoo and many of its heritage plantings inside the walls. The day the bulldozers moved in to raze historic Marconi Crescent with its avenue of historic 100year old Moreton Bay figs was the day that the Royal Park Protection Group was born.

This concept of parklands as Terra Nullius – free land there for the taking - appears an article of faith in the bastions of white fella power. It was the philosophy of the Kennett Government and is entrenched in the Bracks Government. It seems that our heritage of magnificent inner city parks, including Royal Park, a legacy of Governor Latrobe and our city's founding fathers cannot survive the onslaught by powerful groups with interlocking sporting business, construction, gambling and political interests. Within the last twenty years every single park in inner Melbourne has been or is about to be destroyed.

RPPG still sticks by its mandate which is "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; and 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."

Apart from the Grand Prix the hosting of the Commonwealth Games has proved the biggest force for death and destruction of parks and especially Royal Park. The State Netball and Hockey Centre, established ostensibly for the Commonwealth Games, is a Taj Mahal for elite sports but in reality is a white elephant with huge unconcealed running costs. Construction of the Games Village (in reality a private real estate development by Australand and the Citta Property Group) was on the former Royal Park Hospital site always part of Royal Park and, in our view, legally should have been returned to parkland once the Hospital was closed.

Over the last year our energies have been directed to attempting to minimise and control the damage done by construction of the 2006 Commonwealth Games Village on the Royal Park site. As forecast by RPPG it was found that the 6,000 athletes and officials would not fit on the site. The State Government therefore expanded the 20-hectare site to take in 7 hectares of Royal Park – the wetlands and the Ross Straw Field – for a "breakout area" or exercise area and to the 5 hectares or so

of neighbouring sites. Thanks to RPPG some agreement was reached over protection of the Park and restitution after the Games. A huge area of Royal Park will be alienated however for 6 months – being locked down and surrounded by double security fences.

RPPG is virtually the only group – apart from the Protectors of Public Lands Victoria that has taken any interest in the draconian Commonwealth Games Legislation. Despite the PR hype and spin about protecting the public from the terrorism threat security at the Games Village is in our view inadequate and we have been morally bound to speak up and make representations to Parliament, regarding it as our civic duty to warn Government. Dr Barry Clark will make a separate report on this. The standing of RPPG in the community and in Government was really established by our submission to the Auditor General on the inappropriate location of the Games Village, the deficiencies in the tender process and also the contracts. We now rely on the advice of our lawyer and find this more effective than demonstrating to gain attention. The Auditor General's report on the review of the tenders and contracts is about to go before Parliament. We were the only group to make substantial submissions on the subject were possibly instrumental in getting the review established. Our personal view of the "Parkville Gardens" (the real estate development being used for the games Village is that it is one of the biggest housing scandals in Victorian history.

A recent and potent threat to the Park comes from the expansion of the Royal Children's Hospital. Health Minister Bronwyn Pike presided over a sham consultations series, which could ultimately see the RCH expand west into Royal Park and ultimately occupy the whole frontage of Royal Park along Flemington Road and Gatehouse Street. The Government has treated the community with contempt by attempting to delude us over the so-called consultations.

Our thanks go again this year to Kevin Chamberlin who has for many years been a great mentor of RPPG and has led the fight to halt the alienation of parkland especially Royal Park. We have been devastated that he is no longer on Melbourne Council to speak for the local communities and that he is not wearing the Mayoral robes. Thanks also go to Tom Pikusa, our barrister, who led us in a previous appeal to the Heritage Council, made an excellent submission on our behalf to the Auditor General on the Games Village and continues to advise us on planning and land tenure issues. Thanks to Rod Quantock our Deputy who could not be here tonight and to the extraordinary members of our Committee, a number of whom were elected last year. In particular Dr Barry Clark has been extraordinarily generous with his time. He was quoted in Parliament last Tuesday and his work on the security of the Games Village debated at some length. The State Opposition continues to give us support by raising issues in Parliament particularly about the Games Village.

Thanks should also be given to Age writer Kenneth Davidson for his penetrating articles on the loss of parkland in Melbourne and the confidence trick practised on the community over the RCH and the fact that the Government was attempting to make the public feel that they had a say in the process.

While the motto of Save Albert Park is "we will never give up" RPPG's motto is "we will never shut up". Hence we have a relatively high profile in the media despite our small size and despite the fact that we are relatively impecunious. We often quote Patrick White and this should be over every park lover's mantelpiece – "Protect Your Parks From the Pressure of Political Concrete".

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