

Royal Park Protection Group Inc
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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ROYAL PARK PROTECTION GROUP (RPPG)
GIVEN AT THE AGM ON 30 NOVEMBER 2006

Tonight we are holding our ninth Annual General Meeting and celebrating, if that is an appropriate word to use, the tenth birthday of the Royal Park Protection Group Inc. In September 1996 a small group of Parkville residents met in College Church Hall to discuss emerging threats to Royal Park, chiefly the proposal by the then City of Melbourne Chief Commissioner, Kevan Gosper, to clear-fell ten hectares of parkland round the Zoo, including historic Marconi Crescent and its avenue of Morton Bay fig trees, for construction of vast super market-style concrete carparks. We then adopted objectives for the Royal Park Protection Group (RPPG): 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". We often remind the world that Queen Victoria established Royal Park for "the pleasure and recreation of the people of Melbourne." (i.e. not for private/commercial and sectional interests.) The irony is that Victorian founding fathers, who laid out Melbourne, recognised the need for open space and parkland yet governments starting with the Cain Government have treated Royal Park and other city parks with contempt as terra nullius – as vacant land there for the taking.

At the time we established the Royal Park Protection Group, we did not fully realise that this was the beginning of wholesale land grabs by Government and insidious, piecemeal alienation and destruction by stealth by the Melbourne City Council (the so called "responsible" authority) of parkland. The introduction of compulsory competitive tendering saw (according to our jaundiced view) the era of "make work" projects for Council bureaucrats and contractors resulting in the loading up of parkland with unnecessary infrastructure (toilets, picnic tables and benches, barbeques, paths, roads, lighting, playgrounds, carparks.)

The Big Steal list for Royal Park includes: car and bus parks (10 hectares for Zoo visitor/city commuter carparks + 2 hectares for the new Zoo North entrance carpark + the new Urban Camp bus park on Brens Drive + hectares for bitumen commuter cycle paths); a mega sports stadium (8.1 hectares for the State Netball and Hockey Centre); private real estate development (20 hectares with of government land of the former Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital site for the "Parkville Gardens" used as the Commonwealth Games Village for 2 weeks); and coming up soon – expansion of the Royal Children's Hospital (10 hectares in South Royal Park on Flemington Road) and unknown hectares for the proposed extension of the Eastern freeway through the heart of the Park. However worthy the cause of alienating another piece of Royal Park the fragmentation has meant that the grand vision of the original Mater plan for a bushland park in the middle of Melbourne can never be achieved. Unfavourable comparisons can be made with New York's Central Park, London's Hyde Park and even Perth's King Park. .

Over the past year preparation and staging of the 2006 Commonwealth Games occupied our attention. Only a few aspects of the most disturbing aspects of the Games can be mentioned here. RPPG battled alone to have flawed Commonwealth Games legislation amended to reduce the impact on Royal Park and city parks. Also the denial of civil liberties and crack down on homeless during the Games. RPPG was the whistle blower who alerted the Auditor General over two years ago to what we regarded as the a series of scandals and the favourable treatment given the

developer of the Parkville Gardens but also the bureaucratic planning debacle over the provision of accommodation for Games athletes and officials plus the security bungalows. We drew attention also to the blow-out of costs for the Games. The obsession by the Government and importance placed on major events became clear.

The extension of the Eastern Freeway is the next major battle looming. It has never really gone away. Bracks Cabinet is considering a "scoping paper" on the extension of the Eastern Freeway through Fitzroy, Carlton, Parkville and Royal Park to join up with City Link (the erstwhile Tullamarine freeway section.) An off ramp is planned which will traverse the new wetlands in west Royal Park and will impinge on the 20 hectare residential development The Parkville Gardens which was rented out for the Commonwealth Games Village in March this year. The Greens took this report seriously as they held are holding a public meeting on the Wetlands site before the election at which Richard Di Natale stood as the candidate for the seat of Melbourne. As you may be aware a State Government review was the Northern Central City Corridor Study which went for over two years 2001 to 2003 at great public expense rejected the proposal for an extension of the Eastern Freeway. Only 12.75 % of traffic off the Eastern Freeway is headed west for City Link - most is headed for the City. At over \$1 billion it was not seen as economically viable. A recommendation was made for a rail line down the Eastern Freeway. This was even costed. The model was taken from Perth - their new rail line has been a great success.

While thanks go to all our members and the current RPPG Committee, gold Royal Park Logie awards should be presented to special RPPG friends. These include Brian Stafford, landscape architect, for his vision of Royal Park as a bushland inner city park (expressed in his original 1987 Master Plan); Angela Munro for her work as the first RPPG Convenor; Rod Quantock for his leadership on the field of Royal Park battles and blockades; Brian Walters SC eminent lawyer and senior Green for his advice; Paul Mees for his contribution to RPPG on traffic and objections to the extension of the Eastern Freeway; Kevin Chamberlin, former City Councillor and Lord Mayor for his backing for Royal Park causes; Mary Kehoe and Michele Summerton for their work on heritage sites in Royal Park including the former Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital; Barry Clark for his brilliant scientific insights into the detrimental effects of outdoor sports lighting and his long term advice and assistance on light pollution and the environment plus Games Village security; Kenneth Davidson, Age financial writer, for his exposé of the Commonwealth Games and the Games Village debacle, and Tom Pikusa, barrister, for his excellent advice.. We could name MPs and Melbourne City Councillors for wooden spoon awards but will omit in case they are judged as defamatory.

Unless future Government legislates to retain public lands in public hands and iconic parks and heritage sites in public ownership then the future for Royal Park looks bleak. In fifty years it will be but a memory amongst the elderly.

Julianne Bell
Convenor RPPG
30 November 2006