

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ROYAL PARK PROTECTION GROUP (RPPG)  
GIVEN AT THE AGM ON 1 DECEMBER 2010**

The past year has been reasonably “quiet” on the park front. One of the reasons is that the community no longer knows what is going on with administration of parks, including Royal Park, in the municipality of Melbourne. It is regrettable that former Lord Mayor John So disbanded the Parks and Gardens section, sacking the Director and Deputy Director. He also disbanded community consultative committees including the Royal Park Master Plan Implementation Advisory Committee and its sub committee, the Vegetation Management Committee which enabled a number of local groups - the RPPG, the Parkville Association and the North and West Melbourne Association - to have ongoing input to the planting and regeneration of the Park.

Issues over the past year included:

- Dispute over zoning of areas for Dogs off leash in the Park. After years of RPPG lobbying the City of Melbourne (MCC), a policy banning dogs in the Australian Native Gardens, together with other wetlands and environmentally sensitive areas with wildlife, was passed and it was finally gazetted in October 2010. This was only achieved through RPPG making submissions to the Council and the matter being raised in the forums of the above Royal Park Committees. This issue had caused considerable rancour with the dog owners wanting freer access for their dogs in the park. On this note I would like to share a recent experience I had when I was in Vienna/Munich earlier this year. I found it amazing that many people in these cities living in apartments had dogs. Dogs accompany their owners on the public transport system, on streets, in cafes, in the parks and in fact almost everywhere. Without exception I did not see an animal misbehaving. The streets were clean! I have since looked up the regulations in Munich for dog ownership and it seems that there are no particular requirements for animals to be trained although some breeds are to be muzzled in certain locations. To me it seemed that as our city becomes more populous that having responsible dog ownership is not at odds with safety in our parks if the owners take responsibility for their animals. This should be the focus for any future expansion of the “dogs off leash” discussion. It should be noted that there is virtually no surveillance of existing dog control regulations in Melbourne.
- Park usage - “surveys” by the MCC to the local community. These surveys were carried out by the MCC (and a number of councils across Melbourne) with the intent to gather community input to future planning for local park facilities. The focus was on what facilities should be provided however the language of the survey and the limited distribution are unlikely to yield a “quality” outcome. The results of the survey are not known. RPPG maintain that the 1998 Royal Park Master Plan should still be used as the basis for management of the park instead of ad hoc ideas being promoted.
- Royal Children’s Hospital (RCH) – the construction continues.

Improvements in the park have been:

- Start of replanting of the Australian Native Garden. The continuation of community planting days is a great environmental educational benefit and the MCC is to be commended for continuing with these days several times a year. The Wattle Day at the end of August was the most recent planting day.

Continuing issues:

- The plan for the East West Link tunnel through the park. We had thought was behind us but recent events would placed it firmly back on the agenda of the Brumby Government. The WestLink was spoken as being the first stage of the East West Link through the park. In the Age of 30 November 2010 Sir Rod Eddington reveals he and other business organisations such as VECCI are lobbying the Baillieu Government to construct the East West Link. We know that Baillieu is committed to development of rail lines so it is to be hoped that the East West Link will not be considered a priority by the new State Government. It is a great tragedy that the continuing lack of foresight by our elected “governments” allows our city to be backed into a corner where only short term “knee–jerk” reactions exist.
- RCH and return of parkland. The Government has promised to return the “old” part of the hospital to parkland once construction is complete, that is demolish the huge cream brick H Block and the Nurses home. Of particular concern is the fact that under the PPP agreement the contract for the new hospital allows the developer construct a private hotel on the park. This is not for the parents of sick children as they (the parents) are accommodated within the Hospital. It is a private development on public land. The Sheraton chain has been given this privilege. The massive growth of Melbourne will bring into sharp relief the “inadequacy” of the original planning document prepared as the basis for the new RCH. This document allowed for a small population growth in Melbourne and therefore based the design on the same number of beds in the new RCH. We now all know the reality of our population boom! The danger is that there must be “people” whispering about how it would be advantageous to keep the whole of the original site for an “expanded” hospital. We must keep our vigilance up on this.

I would like to end by thanking all our RPPG members, friends and allies for assisting over the years with all the hard work involved in rallies, protests, blockades, publicity stunts attending meetings and keeping the Government and Council under constant surveillance . I would like to end with a well known quote *"Your parks are your breathing spaces. Guard them, cherish them. Parkland is valuable and greedy eyes see the money in it. So you must always be on the alert. Hang onto your breathing spaces in this developing and already over-congested city. Protect your parks from the pressure of political concrete."* (Patrick White at a 1972 Rally, Centennial Park, Sydney.)

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