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Quarterly News Bulletin

October to December 1998

EDITORIAL

A Call to Arms

Royal Park is in a situation similar to that confronting the Queen Victoria Market 20 years ago. A magnificent natural and cultural landscape, part of it disgracefully neglected, faces obliteration. A sporting complex of international stadiums, a sports hotel, Athletes' Village, transport hub, major roadworks and car parks will put paid to the 1987 Royal Park Master Plan's vision of the recreation of a pre-European landscape. This is a defining moment for our largest, inner city bushland park and, indeed, for democracy in Melbourne.

A huge number of people (mostly our members) have been involved over the past 18 months, in a variety of ways, in trying to save Royal Park from the depredations of those charged with its care. We have laboured to ensure that the terms of the Deed of Trust, the Crown Land (Reserves) Act, the Planning and Environment Act and the 1987 Royal Park Master Plan are adhered to. We've been doing what is ordinarily expected of our elected State Government and City Council as **custodians of permanently reserved parkland — namely, acting in the public interest.**

As our earliest correspondence shows, we realised from the outset that the Review of the Master Plan, announced in March 1996, was a crude attempt to legitimise proposed Commonwealth Games Stadiums. The latter were a legacy of the unelected Commissioners, in contravention of the terms of the parkland reservation. The two relevant Ward Councillors, Lorna Hannan and Rosemary Stott, could not be dissuaded from chairing the Review. A glorified public relations exercise, it effectively neutralised the Royal Park 'Magna Carta'.

Dozens of our members participated in working groups preparing detailed submissions to the Review, and many more in the meetings in which positions were negotiated and voted on. Others worked on problems of park maintenance and vegetation loss, exacerbated by competitive tendering. Still others participated in Clean-Up Australia Day, in bird watching and recording, in establishing and updating the web-site, photographic record of the Park and in the design and printing of banners, letterhead, newsletters and posters on innumerable occasions, including North Melbourne's *Spring Fling*.

There has been an army of articulate and passionate letter-writers and talk-back radio callers. Response to our call to members and others, including the Parkville Association, for donations to fund our recent Appeal to the Supreme Court (against the issue of a permit to the Urban Camp Melbourne Co-operative for a sports hotel), was immediate and generous. Through the pro bono representation of Barrister Fran O'Brien and Solicitor, John Breheny, we have exposed the Government's circumvention of legislation and, effectively, produced new case law.

The 'site specific' amendment to the Melbourne Planning Scheme issued by Minister for Planning, Rob Maclellan, on November 9, heralds a critical time for Royal Park. Bypassing the Council as Responsible Authority, (and hence the citizenry) the Minister has fast-tracked the proposed international standard, corporate stadium geared to televised spectator sport, including American grid-iron. The 'footprint' of the three-storey

structure, excluding car parks and roads, is equivalent to a city block — almost half the size of the Zoo, from which it is separated only by a tram line. Though wedged between train and tram tracks, the facility is designed to cater to private motor vehicle access.

The State Government has instructed a compliant Council that car parking is to be 'free' (and hence above ground), presumably to retain the semblance of access to local netball and hockey players. The true cost will be evident, should the project proceed, when another supermarket-style car park rolls out across the parkland.

This development must not and need not proceed. Melbourne's competitive edge in attracting major events may well be centrally located facilities, though in the case of the current Commonwealth Games 2006 bid, there may not be a competitor. Even the outgoing CEO of the Melbourne Bid, Campbell Rose, acknowledged a likely shortfall of \$50m. How many of the 69 Commonwealth countries could bear that loss? In any case, there are obvious alternatives to parkland, such as the Docklands and the Showgrounds. More important, our competitive edge as a livable city relies on our unique parklands. If their rate of loss continues, according to former Lord Mayor, Trevor Huggard, there will be none left in 31 years. How much more fiscally and environmentally responsible to use appropriately zoned land and facilities, such as at Waverley Park.

Hence the alliance we have forged with 16 local councils and the Save Waverley Group in the outer and south east metropolitan region. The injection of \$25.4m for a hockey and netball stadium and related revenue must modify AFL assessment of the viability of its facility. As local press (and local polling) over the past year testify, retention of Waverley is a hot issue and there are swinging seats at stake.

So it is likely that the State Government and the Commonwealth Games Bid Committee will move swiftly to effect the latest park grab. The Christmas New Year holiday is a tempting time to strike. We stand ready with legal and political remedies, metropolitan and international. In the meantime, **we call upon members to prepare to stand up and be counted in resisting an unjustified and undemocratic assault on our parkland and our community. We trust that you will answer that call.**

May I convey my appreciation and that of the Committee for the contribution of skill, effort, money, equipment, advice and moral support which we have received from individual members and from many organisations — environmental (including Save Albert Park), academic (Melbourne University and RMIT), Indigenous and party political (Greens and Democrats). Our final thanks go to our champion on Council — Councillor Kevin Chamberlin.

We wish members a happy Christmas and a well-deserved rest (we hope) in the New Year.

Angela Munro (Convenor)

ACTION REVIEW

Commonwealth Games 2006 Stadiums in Royal Park

Project Fast-tracked with Amendment 305L — 9th November 1998:

Construction of the stadiums plus car parks and access roads in Royal Park has been fast-tracked by State Planning Minister Maclellan who, on 9 November 1998, made a site-specific amendment to the Melbourne Planning Scheme (305L) to "facilitate the development of the new State Netball and Hockey Centre in Royal Park". Thus, he bypassed the City of Melbourne (the Planning Authority and Manager of the Park) and circumvented any expression of community opposition to the project. The prime purpose of the amendment was stated to be that "the new centre will form an integral part of Melbourne's Bid to host the 2006 Commonwealth Games". The amendment refers only to "land in the vicinity of Brens Drive, Royal Park, Melbourne", thus offering limitless scope for expansion into the Park. Agenda 21 December edition website (produced by Maclellan's Department of Infrastructure) reveals that "*Construction of the \$24.5 million State Netball and Hockey Centre at Royal Park is expected to start in early January*". This is only two weeks away.

Action in the Park — Counting Trees to be Axed — 23rd November 1998

Following Ron Walker's controversial statement made on radio 3AW on 20 November that "not one tree will be removed from Royal Park" with the construction of Netball and Hockey stadiums, members undertook a tree count. We marked with white ribbons the 500 or so trees to be axed. Along the lines of

100-year-old Moreton Bay fig trees and she-oaks we tied "NO STADIUMS" signs on white crosses. The white cross, white ribbons and the slogan "NO STADIUMS" have become the insignia of the RPPG campaign. The City of Melbourne undertook a tree count and came up with the figure of 495 trees threatened with destruction (299 trees and 85 shrubs "definitely" to be axed). 60 trees on the perimeter of the site were not included in their count.

RPPG Public Meeting on Project — 30th November 1998

RPPG organised a public meeting for a briefing on the stadium project and for a viewing of a set of plans (only obtained on 24 November 1998). Sports Minister Reynolds declined to send a delegate from the Department of Sport and Councillor Peter McMullin, Chair of Council Planning Committee, similarly declined. (The excuse given was that the Council would run an "information program" on the project for the State Government). Speakers included Melbourne Councillor Kevin Chamberlin, the Hon. Barry Pullen MLA for the ALP and Bronwyn Pike, endorsed ALP candidate for the State seat of Melbourne. The large meeting passed a number of resolutions calling on the State Government and the Council to relocate the sports stadiums from Royal Park to a more appropriate site — but not in public parkland.

RPPG Alliance formed with "Save Waverley Park Group" — December 1998

An alliance was forged with "Save Waverley Park Group" and 16 outer and south-eastern councils in an endeavor to have the new stadiums proposed for Royal Park relocated to Waverley Park. This AFL football ground is threatened with closure when the Docklands stadium opens.

Parks Day Rally — 13th December 1998

The focus of this "Parklands Picnic", organised by RPPG with the support of the Parklands Defence Council and Save Albert Park, was the threat to Royal Park from the Stadiums project, also threats to other Victorian Parks. The meeting was held in College Church Hall in Parkville, instead of in Royal Park west on the site of the planned stadiums, owing to heavy rain. "Anzac Hall" near the rally site in Royal Park was vacant on the day but was locked. This proved our point that it is used exclusively by a private group — the Urban Camp — and the public do not have free access to the building, contrary to the purposes for which Royal Park was set aside.

The meeting, attended by over four hundred, was a great success despite the wet weather. Joy Murphy representing the Wurundjeri, traditional owners of the land, welcomed the gathering to Royal Park. Speakers on the loss of Melbourne's open spaces and people's parks and the demise of democracy in Victoria included former Lord Mayors of Melbourne — Trevor Huggard and Councillor Kevin Chamberlin; Bronwyn Pike (ALP endorsed candidate for Melbourne); Senator Lyn Allison (Democrats); and Darryll Cavanagh, President of "Save Waverley Park". Rod Quantock, Melbourne's comic genius chaired the "Open Mike" session during which representatives of parks under threat took the floor. Tom E Lewis accompanied by two other musicians played inspiring aboriginal music on didgeridoo. The "rally" had excellent TV coverage from the ABC and Channel 9, as well as ABC radio news and 3AW news.

Media Campaign

RPPG has attracted extensive media coverage on the issue of the stadium project over November and December. In the print media this included *The Age* (a Saturday feature as well as other articles); *The Melbourne Times* and *The Leader* (weekly coverage); the *North Melbourne News* December edition (feature article); and *Landscape Australia* Summer edition (feature article). In the electronic media RPPG was covered by ABC and Channel 9 TV (rally); multiple news bulletins on ABC Radio National and 3LO, also 3AW and regional radio stations (rally and public meeting); 3AW three interviews; and 3CR regular interviews.

RPPG Appeal on Urban Camp Case in Supreme Court

The Appeal was finally heard in the Supreme Court after several deferrals, but the case was dismissed. A full account will be included in the next newsletter. RPPG is seeking advice as to further legal action on the case.

"Anzac Hall" (the building used by the Urban Camp) was added to the State Heritage Register as a notable example of an Army recreation hall. It was built for the Australian Army Encampment in Royal Park in 1940. RPPG submitted the nomination to Heritage Victoria.

FUTURE ACTION

Park Watch

Members who visit west Royal Park every day whether to walk, jog, walk dogs, cycle, or observe birds are asked to volunteer to assist RPPG in this present crisis. We need observers who will alert us the minute construction work on the stadiums commences in the Park. The site in west Royal Park is on Brens Drive around the State Hockey Centre and Council "Tree Services" Depot. (An ironic touch). Please contact Julianne Bell to assist on 9347-6953 or if you see construction work commence. Or phone Angela Munro on 9347-6560.

Park Action

Members will be advised by the RPPG telephone tree if construction on the stadiums commences and will be asked to gather at the site to bear witness to the destruction of our Park. This will be a media event so we need a big crowd of members, friends and supporters to demonstrate our opposition. This could be in the first week of January 1999.

Walk for Waverley, 21st February 1999

You can help relocate stadiums from Royal Park to Waverley Park by supporting the "Save Waverley Park Group" and joining the "Walk for Waverley" on 21st February. Members will be given more information in the New Year.



Threatened She-oaks in Royal Park November 1998. Courtesy *The Melbourne Times*.