

Royal Park Protection Group Inc.

Box 4122 University of Melbourne Post Office

Parkville 3052

Registration No. A0035478L

Contacts: A. Munro (Convenor) 9347-6560 Fax 9349-1406 J. Bell (Secretary) 9347-6953 Mobile 0408-022-408

News Bulletin

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ACTION SUMMARY

Royal Park Land Bill

In a couple of days of high drama, on 27 and 28 May 1999, the State Government pre-empted the legal challenge by the Royal Park Protection Group to construction of the Commonwealth Games 2006 hockey and netball stadium complex in Royal Park. Within 24 hours, without allowing for the usual 2 week adjournment for community consultation, the Coalition rammed the "Royal Park Land Bill" through the Lower House of Parliament. This was on the eve of the winter Parliamentary recess. The unseemly haste with which the Bill was rushed through Parliament is believed to have no precedent, other than for the Members' Superannuation Bill!

The Bill was framed, according to the Government, to "remove doubt" about whether the stadium project could proceed. Section 85 of the Constitution Act was then "varied" to deny the public (including the RPPG) access to the Supreme Court and to deny any claims for compensation.

While arguing forcibly against the Government's denial of citizens' rights to legal redress, the Opposition nevertheless voted with the Coalition to pass the Bill. The Royal Park Land Bill then passed through the Upper House on 3 June unopposed. (The Opposition moved an amendment seeking guarantees that there be "no net loss of parkland in Royal Park", but the motion was lost.)

The Royal Park Protection Group had engaged a team of top lawyers, led by Stuart Morris QC, to seek an enforcement order in the Victorian Civil and Administration Tribunal (VCAT). This was due to be heard on 3 June. (The Order had sought a declaration that the permit for the stadiums was in contravention of the 1987 Planning and Environment Act and the Melbourne Planning Scheme.) The State Government effectively aborted the hearing by requesting an adjournment of proceedings in VCAT. In the meantime, the Royal Park Land Bill had passed through both Houses of Parliament.

Notable quotes relating to the Royal Park Land Bill 1999:

"It's not often that a client of mine gets run over by an Act of Parliament." (Stuart Morris QC, commenting on the fate of the Royal Park Protection Group's legal proceedings 2 June 1999.)

"Due to the importance of this facility to the Public and Major Events such as the 2006 Commonwealth Games and 2002 World Masters' Games, it is appropriate that it is ensured that there is no risk of this State significant project being delayed through any doubts whether the redevelopment complies with the reservation over the land." (Conservation Minister Marie Tehan during the second reading of the Royal Park Land Bill 28 May 1999.)

"The Bill is not what it seems. There is a lot behind the Royal Park Land Bill that has not been revealed. What the bill is really about — which the Minister did not talk about at all — is the legal action that has been put in train by the Royal Park Protection Group. The matter will be heard at VCAT next Thursday... The Bill is about heading off the legal action instigated by the Royal Park Protection Group. The Government wants the Bill rushed through the House before the legal action can be heard. It is obvious that the Royal Park Protection Group ... has seen right through the government's actions ..." (Shadow Minister for Conservation Sherryl Garbutt on the rationale for the Government's introduction of the Royal Park Land Bill 28 May 1999.)

Protest over Impact of Stadiums On Zoo

A RPPG protest meeting to publicise the impact of the stadiums being constructed in Royal Park, next to the western wall of the Zoo, was held on the steps of the GPO at lunch time on 3 June — the same fateful day on which the Royal Park Land Bill was passed in the Upper House of State Parliament and the day on which our VCAT case was to have been heard.

A Cavalcade of Animals (members dressed in animal suits) travelled to the GPO by tram from the Zoo. RPPG Convenor, Angela Munro, and Rod Qantock, Melbourne's No. 1 comedian, addressed lunch time crowds then led the Animal Cavalcade up to the steps of Parliament House. A small number only of the "Zoo animals" was admitted to the public gallery of the Legislative Chamber to hear the passage of the Royal Park Land Bill. (See below next action over Zoo on 27 June.)

Council Planning Committee Opposes Stadiums in Royal Park

In a radical about-face on 7 June 1999 the Planning Committee of the City of Melbourne voted to oppose the stadium development in Royal Park and to liaise with the State Government to find a more appropriate location for the stadium complex. (The previous Council had supported the construction of the Commonwealth Games 2006 stadiums in Royal Park.)

Councillor Martin Brennan spoke about the reasons for opposing the stadium development: the size of the stadium complex; the car parking problems; the lack of consultation over the design; and the absence of any environmental impact statement on the Park and on the Zoo. Councillors Lee, Ristrom and Chamberlin voted with Cr Brennan. RPPG congratulates these Councillors on their stand.

The subject comes before a full Council meeting on Tuesday 22 June 1999. (See below dates for your diary.)

Another Event:

Meeting with Trade Unions and Environment Groups on Stadiums

On 21 May a meeting was held at Trades Hall through the mediation of Leigh Hubbard, Victorian Trades Hall Council, and Martin Kingham of the CFMEU. The meeting included all the major players in the construction of the stadiums in Royal Park in addition to the CFMEU. They were Mulpex (the developer), the Office of Major Projects, and the Department of Sport and Recreation. (These State Government representatives were also on the State Government Land Management Committee for the stadium site.) Also present — in addition to three RPPG reps — were representatives from Environment Victoria and Friends of the Earth.

Important outcomes from the meeting were:

- that RPPG would be provided with detailed measurements and drawings of the stadium complex by the Office of Major Projects;
- that we would have continuing consultation with Government and Unions about plans for construction of the Athletes' Village for 7,000 on the Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital site and the underground freeway/tollway link between the Eastern and Tullamarine Freeways; and
- another meeting would be held on 21 June at Trades Hall.

Diary Dates — Important Future Action

Members are requested to note these important dates:

Monday 21 June: RPPG Committee Meeting (all welcome): 7:30 pm North Melbourne Library Meeting Room 2.
Topic: Saving heritage buildings on the Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital site.

Tuesday 22 June: City of Melbourne Council meeting 5 pm Council Chamber, Town Hall Swanston Street, Melbourne. There will be a crucial vote on stadiums in Royal Park. Martin Brennan will give a presentation. RPPG has requested permission to speak. We would like members there in the public gallery to show support for Councillors Lee, Brennan, Chamberlin and Ristrom and for RPPG! You can phone Julianne Bell 9347 6953 on Tuesday to check time of agenda item.

Sunday 27 June: Kids Save the Zoo 11am at the front entrance of the Zoo. This is a very special event for children. It will be led by Rod Qantock. There will be games, all with a Zoo theme. Come prepared with entrance money for the Zoo to visit the elephants and other animals. Members — bring your children plus friends! The intention is to publicise the impact of the stadiums on the Zoo animals.

THIS WILL BE AN IMPORTANT MEDIA EVENT — WE NEED LOTS OF SUPPORT. Please ring Angela Munro to offer assistance — 9347-6560.

Monday 28 June: RPPG Members' meeting 7:30 pm North Melbourne Library Meeting Room 2.

ABC TV "State Line" Fridays 6pm Watch for a program on the stadiums and Royal Park. The ABC will be filming this week in Royal Park.

Reminder Monday 26 July: RPPG AGM 7:30PM North Melbourne Library.