

Royal Park Protection Group Inc.

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News Bulletin

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GRAND OPENING OF STATE NETBALL AND HOCKEY CENTRE

THE ROYAL PARK

The Hon Steve Bracks, Premier of Victoria, is to officially open the State Netball and Hockey Centre (SNHC) Royal Park on Friday morning 16 March 2001. (There is a rumour that the Queen may put in an appearance given that it is The Royal Park).

The opening will go ahead (18 months behind schedule) although the Centre is unfinished and far from ready for opening. This raises questions as to the legality of the Centre. The overflow carpark (with 300 of the total 650 spaces) is unusable; the obtrusive lighting, which spills into the Park, the Zoo, surrounding residential suburbs and the night sky, has not been fixed. No environmental controls over the operation have been drawn up and no transport controls are in place to prevent traffic chaos throughout the Park. No strategies exist to promote public transport. Moreover, visitors and players have been directed to use the carparks around the Zoo and on one of the sportsfields, thus competing with Park users and Zoo visitors. Unless the State Government intervenes urgently to salvage the situation, then the operations of the SNHC will be out of control.

RPPG INVITES YOU TO ATTEND THE SNHC OPENING

It is essential that we have a crowd at the opening. We need to point out to the Premier that the SNHC is an environmental disaster and that it is an affront to parks and environmental groups, also to Labor Party members who have supported a number of resolutions put to ALP Branches throughout Victoria condemning the stadium lights.

Time: Arrive if possible by 9:30 am Friday 16 March

Address: State Netball and Hockey Centre Brens Drive, Royal Park Melways Map 2A 1H.

Parking : The SNHC hard surface carpark next to the Netball stadium is to the north of the site.

Bring: Banners/placards in case we need to remind the Premier - examples: "Fix the Lights", "Turn Off the Lights", "No More Park Grabs", "Hands Off Royal Park", "Fix the SNHC

Carpark", "Stop Environmental Vandalism", "Promote Public Transport for Sports Events"
Bring walking shoes to tour the SNHC site.

A quote for the day follows: "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 1972 Rally, Centennial Park, Sydney.

SNHC Operations Plan

Like the ill-starred Federation Square started by Kennett and continued by Bracks, the development, construction and now the operation of the SHNC has been marred by monumental incompetence and bungling. The environmental lunacy of locating a huge, international-standard sporting complex with 34 metre light towers in the middle of Royal Park, next to Melbourne Zoo and within cooee of a residential suburb has fast become apparent.

Planning Minister Thwaites approved the Melbourne Planning Scheme Amendment C 26 on 5 May 2000 to legitimise the construction of the SNHC stadium light towers (someone had forgotten to issue a permit). According to the conditions of the permit, an "operations plan" for SNHC was required to be in place before use of the Centre could commence. One would have thought that the plan's fundamental objective would be to set operational limits on the emission of noise and light so as to preserve amenity in the vicinity of the stadium complex. Also one would have thought that it would have contained reasonable environmental controls to prevent adverse effects on the Zoo, Royal Park, surrounding residential areas and the night sky. But no! A poorly drafted business or management plan was produced instead, fast tracked without the Advisory Committee setting eyes on the final document and signed off by the Minister in January this year.

The SNHC was to provide 650 carparking spaces (350 spaces on hard surface and 300 in the overflow carpark). It has been discovered that the large overflow carparking area is unusable being, as we understand it, structurally unsound. The Office of Major Projects has stated that it might not be ready until October 2001. Early on, the City of Melbourne was blamed for damaging a sprinkler system so that the grass would not grow and so use had to be postponed. Now the truth is out and the fault is the contractors. The fact remains that the Office of Major Projects (responsible for the construction) had two years to check faults on the site. Attention is already turning to the Park for use as a carpark. A minor battle has been fought over use of the old netball courts for a temporary SNHC carpark. These are to be demolished and returned to parkland by way of compensation for land alienated to build the SNHC. The City of Melbourne has said that parking there will not be permitted beyond the 1 March 2001.

SNHC Light Pollution

No conditions have been set over the SNHC outdoor lighting, which is now operating every night until 11 p.m. (Saturday night and Sunday nights were finish at 8 p.m. and 9 p.m. respectively but are to be extended).

The preface to Amendment C26 states that the effect of the SNHC lights on the Zoo will be no greater than the effect of the former State Hockey Centre lights. (The SNHC has been built on the site of the former State Hockey Centre, demolished in April 1999). The previous measurements on record with the Melbourne City Council state that the vertical plane illuminance just above and inside the Zoo wall was .7 lux or less. Anyone with a reliable light meter can see at a glance that the spill values now from the SNHC lights, which are from 1 to 24 lux, are greater than the light spill from the former State Hockey Centre. The light spill into the Zoo now extends much further than previously. Plus the total amount of light involved is hundreds of times more than existed previously in the former State Hockey Centre.

The glare of the stadium lights shine into the windows of Parkville residences over a kilometre away and can be seen from backyards in Footscray and North Melbourne. Public servants working late in Nauru House on Collins Street report seeing the beacons of light in Royal Park, normally a dark space on the city's horizon.

Dr Barry Clark, light pollution expert and scientist of international standing, took extensive light technical measurements on 28 November 2000, 3 December 2000 and then on 1 February 2001 when the stadium lights were switched on for testing. He therefore disputes the claims by Government Ministers that there will be no greater light spill from the new SNHC lights than there was from the former State Hockey Centre.

Quotable quote on the stadium lights: "My colleague the Minister for Planning...commissioned an independent review of the proposed lighting towers...the new lighting masts which are higher but more focused than the previous ones, will not increase light spilling to the Royal Melbourne Zoo boundary." Conservation and Environment Minister Sherryl Garbutt MP in a letter of 14 June 2000 to RPPG.

OTHER MAJOR CAMPAIGNS AND ACTIONS

Meeting with Sports Minister Justin Madden on 27 February 2001

RPPG representatives met Minister Madden to discuss the SNHC. At the meeting we discussed critical problems relating to the operation of the State Netball and Hockey Centre. These were: provision of carparking for SNHC visitors; management of SNHC traffic in Royal Park; the rectification of SNHC outdoor lighting to control obtrusive light spill and glare; control of excessive noise; and an upgrade of public transport to move crowds to both the Melbourne Zoo and the SNHC.

Failure of Ward Councillor to Represent Universities Ward

Councillor Rosemary Daniel, Universities Ward Councillor, refused to attend Council meetings last year claiming that she was being harassed by other Councillors. She is now back attending one Council meeting a month, thus qualifying for all allowances. She has however resigned from Committee meetings and refuses to have Ward meetings with residents and community groups. The RPPG has been effectively disenfranchised and has no Council representation on Royal Park. We rely on the good offices of other Councillors to represent our interests. Cr. Daniel is not standing again when the next Council elections are held in July.

Opposition to More Carparking in Royal Park

RPPG has been campaigning over the past year, resisting construction of carparks proposed for the Brens Pavilion area by the Council who declared it was "too hard" and have shelved it for the next Council to deal with. The "sportsmen" who use the three sports fields around Brens Pavilion have demanded formal asphalt carparks with 110 spaces round "their" Pavilion. They refuse to consider walking 100 metres to the carparks round the Melbourne Zoo. We had considered that, if implemented, the proposal would: result in loss of prime parkland with damage and possible destruction of mature trees (including English elms which the Council is supposed to be protecting); represent alienation of Crown Land for a specific purpose use by small groups of seasonal sports players; show up the Council for failure to control years of illegal parking in parkland; fly in the face of recent Council policies over reduction of carparking in parkland; ignore huge community opposition, including local residents, to more carparking in Royal Park; spend an extraordinary \$350,000 plus of ratepayers funds ignoring the vast investment of \$7.9 million in 1996 on carparking round the Zoo (100 metres from Brens Pavilion); and reveal the Council's inability to solve traffic problems through trials before undertaking expensive road works. RPPG has asked that "black traffic spots" in Macarthur Road be investigated.

Royal Park Master Plan Implementation Committee

RPPG together with other community groups is working with the City of Melbourne on the revegetation of the Park. The Australian Native Garden Regeneration Project is soon to be implemented. An information session will be held in the ANG on a Saturday morning by Council staff, the landscape architects involved and the community groups including RPPG who are on the Vegetation Committee.

Other Action:

These include: meetings with legal representatives over possible legal action to rectify the SNHC lighting;

a submission to the State Government on the "Representation Review" that is the reform of the City of Melbourne and a meeting with Local Government Minister Bob Cameron and working party; a meeting with Senator Bob Brown to discuss action over Green Games for Melbourne in 2006; and input to a new City of Melbourne study on transport and traffic problems in Royal Park which is to include a focus on the means of moving large crowds by public transport to the Zoo and the SNHC.

Membership Renewals

This is the definitely the last call for many former subscribers to the Royal Park Protection Group. If you have not done so, could you renew your 2000/2001 membership? Members with email please include the address.

Contact Julianne, Convenor on 98184114 or Margaret Finger, Treasurer on 9481 0401. We urgently need your financial assistance with our campaigns.