

News Bulletin

June 2001

A Message from the Convenor

Despite promises that a new era would dawn for protection of our parks and gardens under the Bracks Government, Royal Park is still under threat from many quarters. Threats include the proposed construction of the 2006 Commonwealth Games Village on the "Parkville site"; continued uncontrolled operation of outdoor sports lighting on the State Netball and Hockey Centre (SNHC); attempts to expand carparking for sporting facilities; City of Melbourne plans to reinstate more sports fields; plans for a freeway-in-a-tunnel link from Alexandra Parade to City Link through Royal Park (nominally on hold); and more high rise developments on the Park perimeter.

The Royal Park Protection Group (RPPG) is still managing to keep most of these threats at bay. One battle we have not yet won is over the installation of SNHC stadium lighting. We continue, however, to make representations to the State Government to have the SNHC lights shielded to control the obtrusive light spill and glare which degrades the Park, affects the Zoo, destroys residential amenity of surrounding suburbs and blots out the night sky. Our campaign to have the Commonwealth Games Village relocated to a more appropriate location is gearing up again. RPPG is represented on the *Northern Central City Corridor Study* and so is ideally positioned to monitor freeway/tunnel plans. Progress has been made by the four groups (North & West Melbourne Association, the South Parkville Environment Group, the Parkville Association and RPPG) working with the City of Melbourne on the Royal Park Master Plan in revegetating and regenerating the Park. Because we stood our ground, helped by Councillor Kevin Chamberlin, the old netball courts and hall have been demolished and the area returned to parkland - not resumed for carparking. With the announcement of big business candidates in the City of Melbourne elections, we are starting a public campaign to require candidates to declare their "green" credentials.

Over the past year or so, we have expanded our contacts with resident and environment groups, public transport and anti-freeway coalitions plus students and unions. Assistance offered to other organisations has meant that, in turn, RPPG is helped when a crisis arises. Our wider community contacts assist with RPPG campaigns such as "Green Games 2006" aimed at persuading the State Government to stage environmentally sustainable Commonwealth Games in Melbourne in 2006.

But to continue to operate effectively, RPPG needs urgent financial support. RPPG is an independent organisation and is not in the pocket of any vested interest or political party. We speak out, without fear or favour. RPPG does not receive any funding from developers or construction companies nor do we receive gifts in the form of computers, photocopiers or

such like. We receive only a small grant from the City of Melbourne to reproduce our quarterly newsletter. Otherwise, RPPG relies entirely on its members. RPPG Committee members give enormous amounts of their time and personal resources.

We are, therefore, calling on you for help. Save Royal Park from being transformed into one big sportsfield and carpark divided by a freeway. Help us support fellow resident and environment organisations. Help us to "keep the bastards honest." After all, your environment and your City are at stake. *Please renew your membership for the coming financial year 2001 to 2002 and, if possible, provide a donation.* See attached form. Enquiries: Ms Margaret Finger, RPPG Treasurer, Ph: 94810401.

Julianne Bell, Royal Park Protection Group Convenor

Is a Freeway Back on Batchelor's Agenda?

On Wednesday 23 May 2001 a packed meeting at Collingwood Town Hall heard Transport Minister Peter Batchelor speak about the new study initiated by the Bracks Government - the "*Northern Central City Corridor Study*." This was established, ostensibly, to investigate "transport and land use issues within Melbourne's busy inner northern suburbs" and "to solve problems of traffic congestion."

Minister Batchelor used the meeting to try to quell a revolt from his community advisory committee (on which RPPG is represented) over the fact that he had banned the Public Transport Users' Association (a peak body advocating improved and expanded public transport) from participating in the Study. Community representatives had resolved, unanimously, to ask the Minister to include the PTUA. He refused, thus drawing the charge that the Government is a captive of the roads lobby.

The chief issue preoccupying the community forum was the issue of whether the VicRoads pet project, promoted by the Kennett Government, of extending the Eastern Freeway through Carlton, Parkville and Royal Park to the Tullamarine Tollway was really behind the Study. This was denied emphatically by the Minister. Speaker after speaker from inner north communities (defined as Abbotsford, Carlton and Carlton North, Clifton Hill, Collingwood, Fitzroy and Fitzroy North, North Melbourne, Parkville and Princes Hill) concentrated on the need for improved public transport. A contingent from the outer eastern suburbs warned that the Scoresby Bypass, when opened, would pump a huge volume of traffic bound for the city into the inner north. Forum participants declared that the Government must solve the public transport needs of the outer east as well as the inner north. *The Melbourne Times* is to be commended for excellent coverage of the story in three editions in May and June.

Minister Batchelor had pronounced that the advisory committee would become unwieldy if he permitted the PTUA, or any other new members, to join the committee. The RPPG then decided to try to solve the dilemma. After consulting with the other participating community organisations, we decided that our representative, Colin Smith, RPPG Deputy Convenor, would stand down to allow Dr Paul Mees, President of the PTUA and senior lecturer in transport planning at the University of Melbourne, to represent the RPPG on the advisory committee. (Dr Mees is a member of RPPG and long-time spokesperson for RPPG interests.) Thus, we arrived at a "win-win" situation - RPPG has a transport expert representing our interests, a walkout by the Study committee (disgruntled with the exclusion of the PTUA) has

been avoided, the Study Team appears satisfied and the Minister has made no comment. The Study is now proceeding.

Banners strung up on Collingwood Town Hall for the forum said it all – "Hands Off Royal Park", "Public Transport Works - Bypass Batchelor" and "Public Transport - No More Freeways" (see photo below).

Protest at the launch of State Hockey and Netball Centre - 16 March 2001

On 16 March 2001 the Premier of Victoria opened the State Netball and Hockey Centre (SNHC), although the Centre was unfinished and far from ready for opening. The overflow carpark (with 300 of the total 650 spaces) was unusable (and still is) and the obtrusive lighting, which spills into the Park, the Zoo, surrounding residential suburbs and the night sky, had not been fixed (and still hasn't). No environmental controls over the operation had been drawn up (and still haven't) and no transport controls were in place to prevent traffic chaos throughout the Park (and still aren't). No strategies existed to promote public transport (still no strategies released). The operations of the SNHC remain, apparently, out of control. Note that during a heavy rainstorm in the following week the SNHC netball hall leaked and was closed for days. And the Premier boasted about "state of the art" technology!

Despite the early hours of the opening - 10:30 am - and on a weekday, a band of RPPG members managed to stage a demonstration with demands for the State Government to fix the lights, fix the carpark and to promote public transport for sports events. Police had given "permission" for the RPPG protest and for reps to speak to the Premier. RPPG received police commendations for good behaviour - the same could not be said for SNHC staff!

Although the RPPG had received an official invitation to the launch, the SNHC Manager and a number of State Sport Centres Trust employees barred the RPPG Convenor from entry and advised they would use the police if necessary. Although locked out from official proceedings, the RPPG Convenor managed to meet the Premier and the Sports Minister and discuss SNHC operational problems. The fact that the RPPG (the only community group on the SNHC Advisory Committee) was banned from the official opening was even more extraordinary given that Sports Minister Madden had requested the RPPG - only several weeks before - to prepare a report on the operational problems of the SNHC. (The report was subsequently provided to the Minister). This incident, involving as it did harassment and attempted intimidation of a community group, is particularly alarming having taken place under a Labor Government. Earlier in the year, RPPG was virtually threatened with defamation by lawyers acting for the Sport Centres Trust Chairman for daring to criticise SNHC operations. Free Speech Victoria proposes to take up the issue of bullying and attempts by Government to silence community groups such as RPPG.

Other Events

The Royal Park Master Plan Implementation Committee: RPPG, together with other community groups, is working with the City of Melbourne to revegetate Royal Park. An Open Day in early April was held to publicise and explain the Australian Native Garden

Regeneration Project. Attended by well over 50 people it was a most successful community information day. In June RPPG participated in community planting days in Royal Park.

Meeting with VicRoads: On 29 May RPPG met with VicRoads NW Region Manager and staff in order to pursue the issue of the apparent increase in heavy truck traffic through Royal Park and to discuss solutions for residents. Also discussed was the impact of the opening of the SNHC on traffic in the Macarthur Road - Elliott Avenue corridor, failure of SNHC management to implement traffic controls and failure of the State Government to develop public transport solutions for moving people to major events at the SNHC. VicRoads was asked to take action over traffic hazards caused by SNHC obtrusive lighting. Traffic counts in the Park have started.

Meeting with local MP's: On 1 June, RPPG met with Bronwyn Pike, Member for Melbourne, and Glenyys Romanes, MLC, in a further attempt to persuade the State Government to take action to rectify the obtrusive SNHC stadium lights. Also RPPG wrote to the City of Melbourne CEO in April asking for City of Melbourne lawyers to investigate taking legal action over the detriment to residential amenity created by the SNHC stadium lights.

What's On?

Wednesday 20 June 7:30 p.m. Professor Bill Russell speaks on his study. *"Melbourne's Northern Gateway - an Integrated Approach."* Organised by Friends of Merri Creek at Northcote Library, 32-38 Separation Street, Northcote. Phone: 92402394

Monday 27 June: 7:30 p.m. RPPG monthly meeting at North Melbourne Library 66 Errol Street, Nth Melbourne.

ROYAL PARK PROTECTION GROUP INC

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

1 JULY 2001 – 30 JUNE 2002

Name:

Address

_____ Post Code _____

Phone: (H) _____ (W) _____

Fax _____ Email _____

_____ Members @ \$10 each (\$5 concession) plus donation \$ _____ total \$

Cheque enclosed for \$ _____ Please send receipt: Circle Yes No

Objectives of RPPG:

In accordance with our Constitution, members are asked to sign agreement with RPPG objectives, which are as follows:

(1) 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;

(2) 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.

I hereby agree to the objectives of the Royal Park Protection Group Inc.:

Signed:

_____ Date: _____

Telephone Tree:

RPPG has an extensive telephone network to keep members informed of activities.

Would you like to be kept advised of our events, meetings, activities etc? Circle Yes No

Royal Park Protection Group Inc.

PO Box 197 Parkville 3052

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