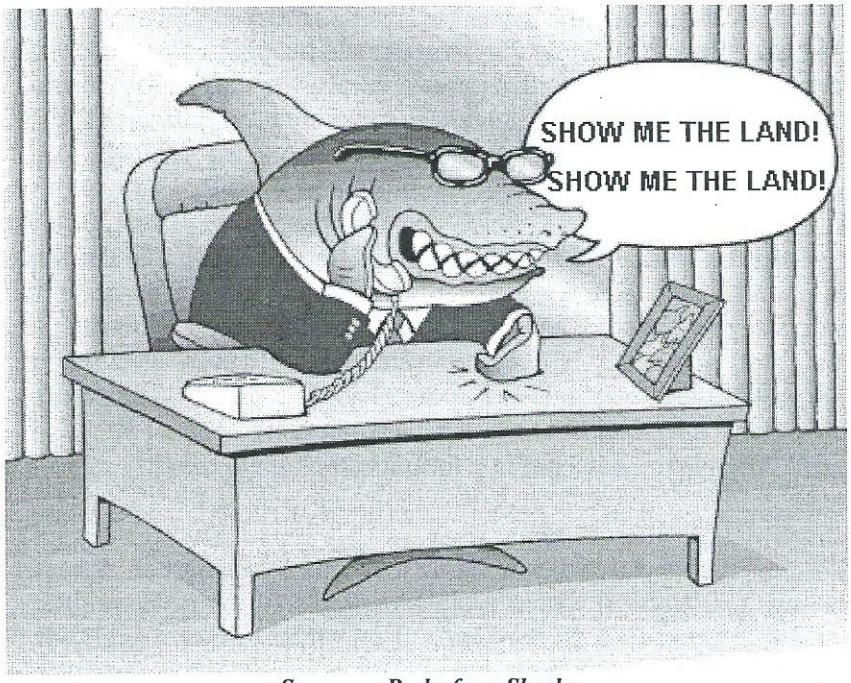

Save your Parks from Sharks

ROYAL PARK PROTECTION GROUP INC.

NEWS BULLETIN – JULY 2009

What Ever Happened to Royal Park?

The Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc, of which the Royal Park Protection Group Inc. is a member, has lent us their logo for this newsletter. Unfortunately we have failed to save Royal Park from "shark" attack. Over the short space of the past 13 years first the Kennett Government, then Premier Bracks and his operative Bronwyn Pike MP, Member for Melbourne, plus compliant past and present Melbourne City Lord Mayors and Councillors, have presided over the progressive carve up, degradation, clear felling and concreting over of Royal Park, previously one of the glories of Marvellous Melbourne – set aside by our first visionary Governor Charles La Trobe.

Construction of a multitude of developments include: concrete super-market style carparks round the Zoo for the Zoo (including the VCAT approved expansion at the north entrance); super tram stops; bike paths; a bus parking bay on Brens Drive for the Urban Camp; the State Netball and Hockey Centre plus carparks, ostensibly for the 2006 Commonwealth Games; and a mega, private real estate residential development "The Parkville Gardens" on the former Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital (RPPH) site, used for a few weeks for athletes' accommodation for the 2006 Commonwealth Games. In addition, the Federation style Heritage listed buildings of the RPPH, restored at taxpayers' expense and promised for community use, have been included in the Parkville Gardens, divided into units, handed over to the developer Australand and then sold for up to $800,000 a unit.

Currently still under construction is the $1 billion plus new Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) , which has involved alienation of a huge section of south Royal Park to the west and north of the original hospital. Over 7 hectares, additional to the original 4.1 hectares hospital footprint, have been alienated for the "project construction site", without guarantees that any land will be handed back to the park. In addition a 2,000 underground carpark for the expanded hospital is being built under the Park and, apparently, under a PPP deal a private hotel is to be built on the new hospital complex. The Mercy Health development, an aged care facility, is now being built on the former RPPH site. Although we believe that original contracts show approval for only a 100 aged care bed "social housing" facility, this aged care facility has 140 beds. Additionally a Mercy Place multi storey apartment complex is being built with 53 units for private sale, priced up to $600,000, and has use of a wing of the heritage buildings on the site. A "retail hub" is to be built for the flats and the aged care facility with consulting rooms. Also a Catholic chapel.

Thanks to the extended campaign last year up to December 2008 by RPPG with a coalition of community allies, extension of the Eastern Freeway - through under or over Royal Park, planned by Sir Rod Eddington as part of the $18 billion "East West Link" will now not proceed. It has been quietly deleted from the Victorian Transport Plan.

Of grave concern is the fact that, as the present Council under Lord Mayor Robert Doyle has downgraded the care and protection of city parks and cut funding to the community, Royal Park will accordingly suffer. (See over.)

"This is my Land, this is your Land, this is our Land, this is not Australand's" Banner at protest over loss of RPPH site.

Breach of Royal Park Master Plan by City of Melbourne: As members may recall Lord Mayor John So sacked the Director and Deputy Director of Parks and Gardens plus a number of staff to save funds. In March this year Council terminated the Royal Park Master Plan Implementation Advisory Committee (RPMIAC) on the grounds that the implementation of the Master Plan was complete. This is far from the truth. In April we saw the extraordinary departure from the Royal Park Master Plan by staff. The hill top in West Parkville with views of the Macedon Ranges was, in the Master Plan, to be kept clear. RPPG heard that staff planned to plant 120 forest eucalypts – Red Ironbarks. This species is not indigenous to Royal Park, was not included for this location in the Master Plan and will obscure the magnificent views. It is entirely unsuitable for a picnic area as the trees are prone to "limb drop". RPPG plus other community groups' members appealed to Councillor Cathy Oke to request staff to put the planting on hold until future discussions could be held. Staff apparently ignored her instructions and went ahead the next day and planted 120 Red Iron Bark Trees. In June RPPG made a submission to the "Eco-City Committee" on the agenda item on Master Plans and included our complaints but have had not response. Members formerly of RPMIAC supported by RPPF and the North and West Melbourne Association have put in a formal complaint to the City of Melbourne over this breach of the Master Plan,

Establishment of a Phoney Parks Advisory Committee: RPPG understood from Cr Cathy Oke from the May Council Committee meetings that Council was to establish a Parks Advisory Committee. By the June meeting it had morphed into a "Community Engagement Committee" It was then further altered when the CEO Cathy Alexander spoke to explain that it really was a committee to help set up consultations in the community. The Lord Mayor also had a go at explaining. So there is now no central Parks Advisory Committee as promised when the individual parks committees including Royal Park were terminated.

State Netball and Hockey Centre: Obtrusive Hockey Lights: RPPG has a representative on the SNHC Advisory Committee. At the beginning of May installation of new lights was discussed and RPPG presented the Executive Summary of Dr Barry Clark's latest research paper on the health risks associated with exposure to powerful light at night which includes increased risk of breast and prostate cancers. (As 2/3 of the Zoo is flooded with light when the hockey lights are on then the animals' health is also at risk.) The State Sports Centres Trust is to be advised. This is serious because it puts the SSCT on notice of risk to health of users and staff of the Centre.

Issue of Certificates of Appreciation to Royal Park Protection Group Inc. Volunteers: Representatives of the Royal Park Protection Group Inc. – Rod Quantock and Julianne Bell - were invited to an afternoon tea on 11 June 2009 hosted by Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner, Federal Member for Melbourne "to acknowledge the important role that volunteers from the Royal Park Protection Group make in strengthening the well being of our local community." Moreover we were presented with "Certificates of Appreciation" for "our outstanding contribution to the community." Compare the scant recognition to community groups has ever been given by the City of Melbourne!

Report of the Parliamentary Environment and Natural Resources Committee Inquiry into Melbourne's Future Water Supply: The report was released in June 2009. It contains a section of RPPG Convenor Julianne Bell's submission to the Committee on 2 February 2009 on Sewer Mining (Page 204) which would be a means of supplying the City of Melbourne with recycled water for all its parks and gardens. (The Committee's recommendation is to pursue sewer mining projects.)

RPPG Next Meeting Time: 11:30 am **Date:** Saturday 1 August 2009
Venue: Walmsley House Royal Park corner of Gatehouse Street and Royal Parade Parkville.
Transport: Park in Gatehouse Street; tram up Elizabeth Street to Royal Parade. Get off at Gatehouse Street. Train to Flinders Street then tram as above.

Rejection of RPPG's Application for a 2010 Community Grant: As RRPG Committee members were ill and away overseas RPPG submitted our application by email. This was not accepted as only postal applications were specified. It is extraordinary as many organisations including the State Government accept online submissions and by email. It appears to us an excuse to cut back on grants.

Membership Renewals
Please support RPPG and renew your membership. We need you; especially as we do not have a grant to operate, plus Royal Park remains under siege from many quarters. See attached form. You can pay direct to the Bank.

This notice was printed with the support of the City of Melbourne through the 2009 Community Grants Program.