

Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc.

Submission to City of Melbourne Extraordinary Committee Meeting 25 January 2007 on the Crisis Facing Melbourne's Parks and Gardens

Introduction: I am making this submission on behalf of the Royal Park Protection Group and the Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc (a coalition of 75 Victorian environment groups, heritage and community organizations) to this emergency meeting of Council.

We welcome the recognition by the Council that the parks and gardens are now in a dire condition due to the impact of major events staged at such venues and what is said to be the worst drought in Australian history. Council officers' reports do not reflect the gravity of the situation nor are they suggesting radical enough solutions to rescue Melbourne's parks and gardens. (It is recognised that Council officers only had a couple of days notice to provide reports.)

Damage to Parks and Gardens by Events: Over the past five years or longer Council has permitted the progressive commercialisation of public parks and gardens for events, which are - in short - killing them. Even before the drought was declared our parks and gardens were being damaged by inappropriate events with which attracted large numbers. The prime example is the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show. This started life as a relatively modest event but has now expanded into a Trade Fair and has been progressively damaging the Carlton Gardens, part of the Exhibition Building World Heritage Precinct. Other parks and gardens affected are: the Treasury Gardens, the Domain and the Yarra banks. By way of contrast the successful Australian Garden Show is located at the Caulfield Racecourse - a most appropriate location for such a large-scale event. We know that it is proposed that The Big Day be relocated to Flemington Racecourse for the 2008 event, recognition that Princes Park is not an appropriate location.

The public has been gagged from protesting or opposing these events as an amendment to the planning scheme put through by then Planning Minister Hulls having been initially suggested by Melbourne Council removed the public's third party appeal rights. This has been a factor in eliminating public debate and comment.

Recommendations: We call on the Council to put on hold significant major events in Melbourne's parks and gardens and to arrange to locate them in appropriate venues; and to defer new projects in parks until a comprehensive sustainability plan can be developed including water resources and the development of water recycling projects.

We recognise that The Big Day Out event is to be held this Sunday in Princes Park so no action can be taken about relocation. (We have only received verbal assurances that the event is to be moved to Flemington Race course in 2008.) In view of the fact that arrangements are advanced for the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show in the Carlton Gardens we would hope that, in relation to the 2007 event, Council act to move the outdoor exhibits from the sensitive Carlton Gardens to the hard surface area to the west of the Exhibition Buildings as has been proposed by numbers of Councillors and community groups for years (in fact since the Show started.)

We applaud the commitment of the Council to proceed with the Princes Park Water Recycling Project and urge that it be expedited to ensure that recycled water become available as soon as possible for Melbourne parks and gardens, Melbourne Zoo and Melbourne University. Proposals for this project have been around for years and failed because of disagreement on funding. We hope that Melbourne Council and City West Water can come to a satisfactory arrangement with the Federal and State Governments over joint funding. The Federal Government announced billion dollar water initiatives today. The Council report recommends under "time frame" for the project that 12 months be allowed for community consultation but the community has been consulted and is behind the project. (Only one community representative expressed opposition but she has since resigned and moved interstate.) Our organizations attended the briefings but neither is recorded in the report.

Council has proposed that a major capital works project costing \$3 million involving construction of a free carpark for Zoo visitors (commuters allowed to use it also) at the North Entrance to the Zoo. This is stage three of a carpark costing \$9 million, which was built 9 years ago. No agreement has been reached concerning parking meters to recoup the extraordinary cost. About 150 trees are to be planted and will require about 30 litres of water each a week. We recommend that the Zoo northern entry carpark project be put on hold in view of water shortages with the drought. The project did not progress in 10 years so can wait another year or so until water recycling projects come on line.

Lord Mayor John So might be the most popular Lord Mayor in the world but Melbourne has slipped from its top position as the world's most liveable city. The parks and gardens are a key factor in the city's "liveability" claim. The loss would mean the loss of our chief attraction. Australia is now one of the least popular tourists countries so we cannot afford to lose our attractions. The public look to Council to save our parks and gardens for the next generation of Melburnians.

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