

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO METROPOLITAN PARKS

History: Since the commencement of the previous liberal government in 1992, hence the forming of Parks Victoria. The "traditional" Metropolitan Parks, previously managed by the Board of Works/Melbourne Water, have progressively and rapidly gone backwards.

Since 1904 there has always been a defined Vision, clear direction and a well planned approach to the "development" of a network of strategically located Regionally significant parks. On ground visitor facilities commenced in the 1970s and a massive environmental protection and rehabilitation project has continued until around 1992. From the 1970s to the middle 1990s there had been a well planned and managed Metropolitan Park System.

However new management styles of the early 1990s and the establishment of Parks Victoria has seen the Metropolitan Parks vision lost, a decline in quality management with a dominance toward National Parks. Metropolitan Parks funding has been significantly reduced and direction dropped from critical and previously strategic development and management plans of Metropolitan Parks.

The Metropolitan Parks are for all of Victorians but particularly the millions of Melbournians who pay the extra rate funds for the Metropolitan Parks System. The previous and responsible management authority worked passionately toward the original approved vision. The Vision was established to guide and ensure the "newer" metropolitan parks would be seen as being still viable and cherished by the community as are the original parks of inner Melbourne 100+ years on i.e. Fitzroy Gardens etc.

The real vision and goals for Metropolitan Parks were communicated too and in general strongly supported by the broader community and well used especially within the Metropolitan area. Each park under the previous management had approved and "live" management plans. Each Park within the Metropolitan Parks System had a very clear direction linked to the Metropolitan Parks vision. Long term goals were being strategically put in place "jig saw" like. Piece by piece land purchased strategically, upgraded "developed" as per management plans - opened to the community. Excellent environmental works were being achieved.

Since the 1970's tens of millions of community dollars have been spent in probably the biggest successful Victorian Open Space, land and waterway restoration project. The lands purchased, upgraded, environmental restoration, visitor amenities and a continuing opening of community lands for public use. To a large degree much of this work especially environmental, visitor facility and ranger contact has been or is being degraded and lost due to current management practices. The mighty effort by many and what would be seen as Best Practice lands and waterways management whilst providing key recreational opportunities is progressively being wasted/degraded back to what many of the sites were like prior to the being purchased by government.

We ask who is speaking for the Metropolitan Park Systems "Real" survival. Obviously the VNPA have been very vocal and rightly so. We all treasure our National and State Parks. The VNPA's concerns are very valid. However, to date it seems very one sided toward the National Parks System.

We would like to meet with you to discuss the Metropolitan Parks System's needs, future directions and long term visions.



ER FF on to NW who prepared report to Prof Buxton.

Issues: Many of the same issues are at stake:

- Where is the funding going collected from the parks levy rate for metropolitan parks, paid for by those living within the collection area, yet available to all Victorians and visitors? A careful and critical review of this funding and how/where it has been allocated in recent years should be carried out.
 - Why are the Friends Groups and community involvement being stifled under Parks Victoria? Much is lip service and seen as a cheap labour source.
 - Why has the Metropolitan Ranger Service numbers drastically dropped to a level that only allows for the basic, if that, level of management?
 - Why is there massive re-invasion of weeds? Most of these weed species and their infestations were mostly controlled or in check and managed prior to Parks Victoria. Today massive re-invasion occurs and previous dollars spent lost.
 - Pest animals, rabbits, foxes etc are the same as above, where has the funding gone?
 - Dogs are no longer managed, there is inadequate ranger numbers to patrol or enforce regulations. Dogs are allowed to wander and be taken into areas where they were previously excluded due to important conservation values and strategies within management plans.
 - Town planning on adjoining lands and good consistent approaches to a healthy parks system for 50 - 100 years has been all but lost.
- **Environmental management:** The environmental values of metropolitan parks particularly Yarra Valley Park are significant and integral to the health and well being of the natural systems of the whole Yarra Valley, including Port Phillip Bay (Yarra Strategy 1999). The parks environmental and landscape health plays a major role in community well being and health. The Yarra Valley Metropolitan Park has significant flora, fauna and other key natural features that have suffered greatly over the past decade from of lack of professional management.
- **Fire management:** - What fire management? The majority of fire equipment has been sold off, works not contracted out. The pretext is that it is not a core business. Parks Victoria states that the CFA is responsible or MFB where applicable. Ask these agencies who should be responsible and how are they going to tackle fires, many of which they don't have correct vehicles to access critical locations. The 1991 North Warrandyte fire was a classic example of this and the Coronersreport of the day highlights this. No fuel reduction burns take place. Parks like Yarra Valley Metropolitan Park particularly - East of Fitzsimons Lane the Warrandyte, Eltham sections of the park and the majority of the Plenty Gorge Park are rated as some of the highest fire hazard areas within Victoria.

The adjoining Warrandyte State Park is fire equipped (not necessarily adequately) yet located in exactly the same critical area. Previously the two agencies equipped appropriately fought together to support each other and CFA and MFB.

Although these parks are small in size compared to some of the larger National Parks there is potential for major disasters that could result in loss of lives/homes etc to surrounding land owners and/or potentially park visitors on trails in the event of a fire.

These high fire rated areas near Melbourne due to their topography, vegetation types and the surrounding suburbs, speed of fire spread have the potential to be more devastating than major fires in East Gippsland, Grampians or North East Victoria. A tour of these areas with

the CFA and some members of our group will certainly demonstrate the need for ensuring each Metropolitan Park has an approved and active fire management plan, re - equipped with appropriate fire vehicles and equipment, trained staff.

Community assets and access: Why have previously approved and strategic plans to “develop” and open areas of public owned land to the community not proceeded - Viewbank (Purchased in early 1970s) still closed to the public?

- Bolin Billabong, highly significant to the Wurundjeri Aboriginal Community has had a development plan for 6 - 8 years (developed by Wurundjeri Aboriginal Apprentices) including important links to Bulleen Park, Banksia Park and Yarra Flats always a low priority, no funds however ten's of thousands use the trails and adjoining these parks annually.

Why do these rate payer paid for areas remain locked and “undeveloped” unavailable to the community? Is this so the local golf courses can see the land as “fair game” not required, wasting away and available for golf course development? This attitude also seems to be supported by the current Parks Victoria ceo (Melbourne Age 17/7/1999) regarding strategic and significant land within the Yarra Valley Metropolitan Park near the Yarra Valley Golf Club.

- Why is Birrarung Park even being considered to be leased/sold to a Golf Course let alone a private Golf course (Public land was sold to this club around 1985). The Middle Yarra Advisory Committee tried to stop this blatant ‘theft’ of community assets then, (sadly the same style of bureaucracy seems to be at it again today) and lack of care for community assets over ran community opinion then - lets not see it again.

The Parks Victoria ceo was quoted in the Melbourne Age 17/7/1999. “Parks Victoria chief executive Mark Stone confirmed the land required by the club was currently unused and inaccessible”. This is not the case as the golf course currently intrudes onto Metropolitan Park community paid for, owned and managed land. How would he (the ceo) know as no metro staff with any history or local knowledge remain to provide management direction and support the park. Only the Friends and Middle Yarra Advisory Committee appear to know, be concerned.

Based on Mr Stones quote the same ill informed deduction could be stated for the Alpine or Grampians National Parks. The majority of land in these parks is also unused and inaccessible. This land is integral to the long term future of the environmental, cultural significance and community health of the Yarra Valley Metropolitan Park.

Why are the Melbourne Parks and Waterways plans for Birrarung Park produced in 1995/96, in keeping with the management plan not being implemented. These plans would effectively stop any future golf course intrusion into community land and allow the section of the old seed farm along Templestowe Road (now owned by the community to be opened to the community) to be opened to the community. If implemented these plans would also ensure community links and access to the Heidelberg/Banule Billabong side of the Yarra with Birrarung Park. Once opened many other opportunities exist for the community to have excellent community and tourist facilities.

- **Main Yarra Trail:** Why is the construction of the Main Yarra Trail to Warrandyte not being actively pursued. All alignments have been planned and costed (Since John Cain was in office). This trail is of major importance to all Melbournians, and visitors, particularly tourism opportunities for the Warrandyte area. The trail being finalised and opened would make available important sites and opportunities to the community, better protect it from vandals, weed invasion, fires, the greedy eyes of developers and rezoning pressures. Importantly this trail would link both sides of the Yarra River and connect to the Warrandyte State Park with Yarra Valley State Park.
- **Aboriginal Cultural Issues:** We realise and greatly welcome your Governments position is in relation to Indigenous Peoples management. However why have the Wurundjeri Aboriginal Community been basically 'shut' out of Metropolitan Parks since 1992. Previously there were very strong links forged with park rangers and Wurundjeri people. Many events, functions and significant works were achieved in parks.

Development plans for key and strategic opportunities for Wurundjeri Aboriginal Community and the broader community were established then "binned" once Parks Victoria was formed seemingly under the pretext of not fully commercially viable. Active co - operative management of traditional lands within Metropolitan Parks was being achieved, now this has been lost and apparently no real intention from the current Parks Victoria CEO and upper management to manage other than lip service.

The few actions being currently pushed by Parks Victoria as a result of your governments good initiatives all appears to be happening within National & State Parks in country areas. The Metropolitan Parks system is essential to the Wurundjeri People. It is one of their only real opportunity to be truly involved in traditional cultural pursuits, access to and management of significant and large numbers of cultural sites on public land and "self sustaining" opportunities in co management/partnership with Metropolitan Parks.

Metropolitan Parks Funding: Why is there inconsistency in allocation of funds? There are two distinct park systems National and Metropolitan. Yet an unfair and unbalanced approach appears to be used to allocate and prioritise funding. Why are most National Parks visitors statistics counted as a whole of Park not visitor nodes? Yet Metropolitan Parks like Brimbank Metro Park, Jells Metro Park, Yarra Valley Metro Park visitor numbers are counted as individual visitor nodes inside the whole of a park. Instead of 1 - 1.2 million visitors, parks such as Yarra Valley Metropolitan Parks are counted as Birrurrung 150,000, Yarra Flats, 100,000, Westerfolds 250,000, Banksia 150,000. Why is this so? It is easy to see how funds can be allocated to areas where visitor numbers are produced to suit previous government or particular park management objectives.

Each system is different and two distinct methodologies are required so both systems receive appropriate dollars to be expended where the dollars are collected from i.e. country and metro areas pay taxes. Taxes should fund both systems on agreed 'new' methodologies. However Metropolitan people pay the parks rate fund as well as taxes. This should be only spent on metropolitan parks. We have concerns as to how and where the rate funding is spent. Funds and where they are spent needs to be clearly transparent.

What is the Future for Metropolitan Parks: Over the past few years (since Parks Victoria) Metropolitan Parks have significantly degraded. The last two CEOs have been career, dollar,

contract and commercially driven not necessarily parks/community and opportunity focussed. The current Parks Victoria management's drive and processes appears the same as with the previous governments.

Your governments election promise to set up a separate National Parks and Wildlife Agency and Metropolitan Parks, Waterways Bays Agency is all being facilitated inside Parks Victoria and within Government. Parks Victoria's management at executive and senior level appear to have personal interests in what happens.

We have concerns on the proposed splitting up of Parks Victoria and how this would be achieved. Our preference would probably be to retain Parks Victoria with some key and major alterations. However we would not support retention if it is not with clear direction and ongoing support for the Metropolitan Parks as their own entity, secured under legislation with a clear supported vision with secured appropriate levels of funding.

Your Party promised community involvement and consultation. Where are our (community) opportunities for discussion and input in relation to ensuring a secure and equal future for Metropolitan Parks. At present we would be concerned if the same management directions, attitudes, career driven and often lip service is retained.

We request that you seek public opinion, involve the community, Metropolitan Friends Groups, Wurundjeri Community and us. We would like you to hold your decision on what will be the next park authority until you receive appropriate input from the community. Meet with a selection of both original Metropolitan Park Rangers/Staff and National Park staff/rangers. Seek our Friends Groups opinions as has been done with the VNPA and some of the staff from National Park in country Regions.

We would like you to visit some key sites in the Metropolitan Parks system with members of our group to see how Metropolitan Parks are currently managed as opposed to prior to 1992 and since 1996.

Since 1992 but particularly since Parks Victoria many Metropolitan Park staff (excellent rangers, planners, managers, area rangers) have been weeded out, moved to country areas, packaged out, placed into positions where they cannot influence the much needed drive and setting direction for Metropolitan Parks. The links with the community have been broken. Everything appears to be based around National Parks.

Options: The VNPA have been active and have done excellent work in putting their case to you and your government. You have listened and are actively ensuring good management and community needs are delivered. We would like to see a Metropolitan Parks Association as we are not represented by the VNPA.

Management of Parks Victoria over the last few years have effectively stifled community groups particularly the Middle Yarra Advisory Committee. Once a well thought of group who positioned and ensured direction, support and delivery of the Yarra Valley Metro Park Vision for the community.

If Parks Victoria is to be split we wish to be able to listen to your reasoning. We would like to present our case and see if we can resurrect the Metropolitan Park System and it's original Vision. It appears the VNPA have had a number of opportunities and regularly audiences with Parks Victoria's CEO and executive. We would like the same opportunities. Without a clear understanding of your government's policy and its intentions for Parks Victoria we

remain very concerned for the productive future of Metropolitan Parks, particularly the loss of vision, goals and a clear and accountable Director for Metropolitan Parks.

If Parks Victoria remains as one then we believe that separate and autonomous departments should be housed under the Parks Victoria banner:

The success of any model for Metropolitan Parks will be Vision, autonomy a parks driven CEO not personal/career driven. Separate secure funding sources. Opportunities for staff dedicated to Metropolitan Parks - Bays - National Parks in each system with opportunities to apply/second to/for positions in either but with clear roles.

Many have quoted large costs associated with changes, \$2m. \$3m \$4m. We applaud your government's position and direction for minimising costs. However, your decision needs to be made for the long term future of our parks 50 - 100 years on, not necessarily for today. There fore the dollars maybe not as important in a longer picture, with community support?

Metropolitan Parks are significant on many accounts. Based on the Metropolitan Parks strategic location to the population alone they are permanently used by and needed by far more people than use National Parks. Over the last 4 - 5 years the Metropolitan Parks have been "poorly" managed and driven backwards. In fact the current trend would put them in line with the ways current National Parks management places many of its Reserves little or no funds, no plans, few staff and little management.

As stated we are most uncomfortable about this and wish to work with your and support your Government to re elevate the Metropolitan Parks System to it's correct status and re - establish the Vision and direction.

Future of park up in air after golf bid

THE future of Birrarrung Park in Lower Templestowe is still uncertain.

The park was at the centre of a controversial land swap deal between Parks Victoria and neighboring Yarra Valley Country Club.

The country club made a preliminary proposal to Parks Victoria in April to extend its nine

hole golf course to 18 holes using land in Birrarrung Park.

In return it would give Parks access to riverfront land.

A Parks Victoria spokeswoman said that land could be developed into a trail running between Birrarrung and Banksia parks.

But residents have expressed their opposition to the plan.

Former Bulleen MP David Per-

rin said public land should not be given up for a private golf course.

But Environment and Conservation Minister Sherryl Garbutt did not expect to make a decision until after Christmas.

A spokeswoman said the minister was briefed on November 26.

"She's having a look but hasn't made a decision as yet," the spokeswoman said.