

TEXT OF ARTICLE IN NORTH MELBOURNE NEWS JUNE 2000 EDITION

BRACKS FAILS TO SEE LIGHT ON ROYAL PARK STADIUMS (Title given by editor)

In early February this year, with next to no publicity, the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) made history by imposing green bans on the construction of 34 metre high light towers on the Royal Park hockey stadium. Shortly after, the Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union (AMWU) joined the ETU in banning work on the hockey stadium light towers. The bans are to stay until such time as the Bracks Government sees fit to undertake an independent environmental impact assessment.

Melbourne has not seen the like of green bans since the late Norm Gallagher of the Builders' Labourers Federation (BLF) blocked demolitions in the early seventies and saved the Queen Victoria Market, the Regent Theatre and the Melbourne City Baths to name a few historic buildings.

How did it come to pass that under a Labor government the unions have had to intervene to prevent a major environmental disaster overtaking Melbourne?

The Kennett Government fast-tracked the Royal Park stadiums in the race to win the 2006 Commonwealth Games bid. In amending the Melbourne Planning Scheme, the then Planning Minister, Rob Maclellan, declared the stadiums a project of State significance, thus obviating the necessity for an environmental impact assessment. Many Victorians expected the new Bracks Government to right some of the wrongs perpetrated on our urban parkland but, it seems, they are doomed to disappointment.

Bracks Government ministers appear impervious to the community unrest over their failure to commission an environmental effects assessment of the Royal Park hockey stadium light towers. Situated on the highest point of Royal Park, the eight 34 metre light towers, if constructed, threaten to light up Melbourne not only the Zoo, the Children's Hospital and the Park.

Calls by the Melbourne City Council, the Royal Park Protection Group (RPPG), the Astronomical Society of Victoria plus animal welfare and environmental groups have apparently fallen on deaf ears. Also ignored, it seems, are the requests by the ETU and the AMWU for a proper environmental impact study.

Instead, Minister Thwaites commissioned a review of light tower design, originally to be completed in the record time of six working days, by a commercial lighting company. This appears to be a means of bypassing genuine and serious environmental objections.

The advice of Dr Barry Clark, a leading Australian light pollution expert, honorary member of the Astronomical Society of Victoria and a spokesperson for RPPG, has to date been ignored. He is predicting an environmental disaster for Melbourne if construction of the light towers on the hockey stadium goes ahead. This is spelt out in a study on "the environmental effects of the hockey pitch lighting proposed for the State Hockey and Netball Centre".

Dr Clark maintains that: "The new hockey stadium light towers will subject the Zoo to intolerably great levels of illumination and have an undesirable effect on the animals. It will force consideration if the Zoo should be moved or if some of the animals should be relocated. The light towers will also increase illumination levels in residences in the surrounding neighbourhoods and affect the nearby Royal Children's Hospital. The stadiums are located on one of the highest points of Royal Park and the light towers will produce a source of light visible from as far afield as Mount Macedon and Mount Martha. They will also cause undesirable levels of light pollution in the whole of the Melbourne Metropolitan area."

It was discovered in late April that a set of six light 'masts' (towers) had been erected on the open netball courts. These masts are at least 17 metres high and are positioned directly opposite the Australian Bush Display Area of the Zoo which houses nocturnal animals. Similarly the carpark, with extensive lighting fixtures, is also located directly opposite the Australian Bush Display Area. Both will produce sources of light pollution and light trespass which will compound the adverse effects of the proposed hockey centre light towers. The developer did not have a planning permit for construction of these netball court light masts.

RPPG remains steadfast in calls to Planning Minister Thwaites for separate planning applications to be made for the hockey stadium light towers and for the outdoor netball court light masts, and for these to be advertised in accordance with proper planning processes. RPPG is also requesting Minister Thwaites to invoke the Environmental Effects Act 1978, thus requiring an environmental effects assessment to be prepared of all lighting structures in the Royal Park hockey and netball stadiums, given the undoubted significant environmental effects of the lights.

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Secretary

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STOP PRESS

Planning Minister Thwaites has amended the Melbourne Planning Scheme to expedite construction of the controversial light towers on the Royal Park hockey and netball stadiums. The minister notified RPPG during the second week of May and only after press reports. Calls by RPPG, the Melbourne City Council, the Astronomical Society of Victoria, trade unions and a range of animal welfare and conservation groups for an environmental impact assessment have been consistently ignored by the Bracks Government. The green bans imposed by the ETU and the AMWU on work on all lighting structures in the stadium complex are still holding. (Update = ETU and AMWU have lifted bans as at 29/7/2000)