

Royal Park Protection Group Inc.

The Hon. John Pandazopoulos MP
Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Parliament House
Melbourne 3002

19 September 2008

Dear Mr Pandazopoulos

Inquiry into Melbourne's Future Water Supply

Submission from the Royal Park Protection Group Inc. and Terms of Reference: I am making this submission on behalf of The Royal Park Protection Group Inc. (RPPG), an inner city based group established, primarily, "to 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...". We have also spoken up for other parks and gardens in inner Melbourne.

We would like to address two of the terms of reference: No 2 the collection of storm water and No 3 the reuse of treated waste water.

Need for Local Water Sourcing Projects: The RPPG is well qualified to speak about water sourcing initiatives for supply of parks and gardens and sporting grounds, especially Royal Park. This is extremely important as local councils are forced to purchase waste water from Werribee and the Easter Treatment Plants. Given the long distances the treated water has to be trucked it is not energy efficient and contributes to green house gas emissions. Far better that water is sourced locally.

Firstly, since 2000 our organisation RPPG has been represented on the City of Melbourne's Royal Park Master Plan Implementation Advisory Committee. This Committee played a leading role in developing then implementing plans for the wetlands in West Royal Park, which recycles storm water from Melbourne's northern suburbs for use on Royal Park's parkland, sports fields and golf course. (This project received additional assistance of \$5 million from the State Government so that it was completed and operational by the time of the 2006 Commonwealth Games. The entire design had, however, been completed by then) We are of the view that the State Government should be subsidising development of local wetlands to recycle storm water for local use. The only other recent example we know of is Boroondara Council's Glen Iris wetlands on the site of the former Bowls Club next to the Tooronga Village. (Construction of this wetland has only started this year) The City of Melbourne is now putting in underground water storage tanks for the Wetlands under the nearby Ross Straw Field.

Secondly, as a community representative I have been a member of the Royal Park State Netball and Hockey Centre (SNHC) Committee since 2001. I was instrumental in advancing the plan for water harvesting/catchment off the roof of the SNHC. This is said to be the first sports facility water recycling of its kind in the world. It was installed with a State Government Smart Water Scheme grant awarded in 2004 and was operating in 2005. It supplies 89% of grey water needs of the SNHC. Unfortunately it does not appear to have been replicated throughout Victoria. Only Bendigo has a similar project. We would advocate that the State Government subsidise the retrofitting of sports stadiums, railway stations and city office roof tops to harvest storm water for use as grey water on sports grounds and toilets. Union Solidarity has been advocating retrofitting buildings to implement water harvesting from the roof tops and storage. I can supply the booklet outlining the mechanisms of the SNHC project.

Thirdly, RPPG actively supported a City of Melbourne and City West Water initiative. It was first outlined in 2005 for a "sewer mining" project in Princes Park to supply grey water to city parks, the University of Melbourne and the Melbourne Zoo – one of the biggest users of potable water. RPPG was concerned over the failure of Government to prepare in advance for the El Nino drought

phenomenon and failure to recognise its predicted impact on Victoria. Alarm bells were ringing throughout 2007 when, in May, reservoirs hit the low water mark of 29%. Little thought had been given by the Bracks Government to the development of projects to source waste water to keep alive Melbourne's historic parks, gardens and avenues with their 100 year old trees during the Big Dry and for use on sports fields and golf courses. Royal Park had been partially drought proofed by the development of the wetlands in West Royal Park and was more resistant to the drought being a "bushland" indigenous park. Even so it has suffered in the drought. Below are details of the well developed sewer mining project advocated by RPPG. It failed only through lack of support by then Water Minister Thwaites although the then Federal Government was willing to investigate its potential. The City of Melbourne and City West Water were its proponents and were confident of its success and willing to assist with funding. RPPG is advocating to your Committee that you investigate funding this project which is virtually ready to be implemented. It has 100% community support, unlike other current water sourcing projects, and would save water significant amounts of potable water currently being squandered. Below are details of the proposal.

Reuse of Treated Waste Water and Proposals for a Sewer Mining Plant in Princes Park North Carlton

By November 2005, Melbourne Council and City West Water had teamed up and had a feasible waste water project ready to go, its object being to "mine" or source water from the main sewer located under Cemetery Drive in Carlton and Parkville. The proposal was to construct "The Princes Park Recycled Water Treatment Plant" which could supply recycled water to Melbourne's major parks and sports grounds, including Royal, Princes and Yarra Parks; the Fitzroy, Treasury and Carlton Gardens; and the Melbourne Zoo (a large user of potable water) and Melbourne University.

It was envisaged that the treatment plant would produce quality (Class A) recycled water suitable for use in parkland and would be located underground in Princes Park with underground storage tanks in other parks. Community groups in the municipality, including RPPG, were consulted and gave the project unqualified support. The treatment plant's overall annual maximum capacity was given as 700 megalitres and it was anticipated that it could free up potable water now being used to irrigate the Council's parks and gardens. (Savings were in the order of 25 -30 % of the average annual volume of water used on Council's parks.)

Princes Park was seen as a suitable location for such a treatment plant due to its proximity to a large sewer and its geographical central location in relation to the City of Melbourne's northern parklands. In addition, the terrain is flat, there are few trees, the ground is relatively easily excavated and the site is remote from residential areas. There would be little land lost from the park.

But problems arose over the question of funding this key project then estimated at \$30 million. We were very disappointed to learn that the proposal placed before the National Water Commission by the then State Water Minister did not even go close to the 50/50 Commonwealth /State rule which is the basis for all applications under the Commission. It appeared that the then Water Minister Thwaites acting for the State Government did not make a genuine proposal as nothing can be considered unless there is equal State and Commonwealth funding. As far as we could gather the State Government was only proposing a 3.1 split at the best.

The second chapter of the saga opened on 25 January 2007 when the Council of the City of Melbourne held an emergency meeting to consider water saving measures in the light of the continuing drought. (The RPPG and Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc. made a joint submission.) Councillors voted unanimously to advance the Princes Park Sewer Mining Project and resolved that the Lord Mayor should consult with Minister Thwaites on the subject. There was unfortunately no result from their meetings. The project was not mentioned in Premier Bracks' vision for Victoria and statements on water resources or in the Budget for that year.

Attached is a report dated November 2005 by the City of Melbourne outlining action taken on the project. Also a submission by Protectors of Public Lands Inc. and the Royal Park Protection Group Inc. to the City of Melbourne's Special Council Committee meeting on 25 January 2007 re drought and water saving measures.

Conclusion: Given "Stage 3A" water restrictions has been imposed on us and we may be facing even more stringent water saving measures, it is urgent that Local, State and Federal Governments cooperate on local water sourcing measures, for instance, the Princes Park Sewer Mining Project and Storm Water Harvesting and Treatment from roof tops. The State Government seems philosophically attached to major PPP projects. This morning on 3 AW Water Minister Tim Holding said that local projects were too expensive and would not be considered. The Brumby Government claims that Melbourne is one of the world's most liveable cities. Given the rate that our parks and gardens are dying through lack of water, we will soon be calling Victoria The Desert State. Additionally the condition of sports grounds is of great concern and the rate of injury caused by hard and compacted ground is increasing. Far better the Government invest in local water sourcing schemes to supply our parks, gardens and sports fields as well as big picture projects to supply potable water supplies.

I would be pleased if you can allow me a hearing where I can expand on my comments. I can be reached on 98184114 or 0408022408.

Yours sincerely

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