

Royal Park Protection Group Inc.

Submission to Finance and Governance Committee Meeting of 13 October 2009 re Agenda Item 5.5b Re Polo in Royal Park

I am speaking for the Royal Park Protection Group Inc with the support of Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc. in voicing our trenchant opposition to locating a horse polo event run by "Paspaley Polo in the City" in Royal Park on Sunday 22 November 2009. It is proposed to be held on prime parkland south of the State Netball and Hockey Centre. We are opposed to the use plus alienation of parkland for private commercial and sporting interests at the expense of the general public including residents of the municipality of Melbourne.

Here are our objections:

Firstly we find it patently unsatisfactory that the proposal by Paspaley Polo is being press ganged through Council with virtually no notice to the community and limited chance to comment. Cr Peter Clark's resolution without notice was put to the Eco City Committee last Tuesday then because staff members were not able to produce the information it was deferred til later in the evening then passed onto the Finance Committee to be heard tonight. Council officer's report was not put on the website until Monday afternoon.

The proposed venue for the Polo is the area of parkland south of the SNHC. It is not described as parkland but as "old hockey fields" and as "little used". The area was used over 10 years ago for hockey training before the State Netball and Hockey Centre was built. Under the Royal Park Master Plan has been replanted and is part of the bushland landscape intended for the Park. (See attached photo taken from the roof of the North Melbourne Housing Commission Flats. The green area is the location proposed for the polo match) It is one of the few areas in Royal Park dedicated to passive recreation and informal sport and is used all the time by children who attend the Urban Camp in Anzac Hall which is located on Brens Drive opposite this area of parkland. It is also used by residents of West Parkville and residents of the North Melbourne and Flemington flats - many of whom are former refugees and make up the Somali, Eritrean and Ethiopian communities. It is abhorrent to us that Council can consider handing over the special sports interest group which will obviously damage the whole area and make it unfit for casual recreation use. Trees will have to be felled. Two thirds of the park is covered by sports grounds. The Council has notices up telling the public they are not allowed to use them for casual use. (See attached notice.)

The Paspaley Polo Club has a booking for an event on Sunday 5 December 2009 at Albert Park This was confirmed today by the Park Ranger for Albert Park. He said there had been no changes to arrangements. It is advertised on the Clubs website as a coming event. Why the push to use Royal Park? Is it cheaper? Why is the Paspaley Polo Club not using the purpose built venue at Werribee Park? Or the Showgrounds which is especially designed for accommodating horses?.

The expanse of Parkland in Royal Park is the most inappropriate venue and is by our reckoning unsafe for crowds and the horses. What do Council insurers have to say? These are the points:

- Brens Drive is a narrow road. Vehicles have trouble passing another. Certainly competitors at a polo event arriving with horse floats would hold up traffic and cause a traffic jam. What about the poor Anzac Hall Urban Camp opposite? They may have a function that day.
- There is no pathway or road onto the expanse of parkland. Presumably this is why the officers report says trees have to be chopped down (These will be trees that the community planted and are at the moment flourishing)
- There are at least 3 huge marquees proposed to be shipped in - the parkland will suffer with huge trucks needed to ship in tents and the caterers bringing in equipment and food.

- The State Netball and Hockey Centre has parking but as was pointed out in the officer's report they have the Hockey Champions event and will be having big crowds there. I am on the State Netball and Hockey Centre Advisory Committee and asked the SNHC Manager but she hadn't heard about the proposed polo event. Where do the polo crowds think they will park? The Melbourne Zoo has said that their carparks are full on Sundays.
- It should be pointed out that polo has 4 in a team There are 2 teams = 8 players Each has a string of horses "polo ponies" One rider can have 4 or up to 8 horses in a string. Where are they going to be tied up while play is going on? The area is not fenced. It only needs a horse to bolt and it could be down on Elliott Avenue in heavy traffic in no time. This is why the event should be in a purpose built facility where horses are properly accommodated. (Albert Park has space and proper access.) Logistically speaking it is difficult to see how this horse polo event can be staged in Royal Park without being an absolute disaster,
- It is anyway contrary to park regulations as pointed out by the officer's report.

I trust that Council will refuse the request of the Paspaley Polo Club to stage an event in Royal Park.

Signed

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