

# The Rottnest Society

## BACKGROUND: MT HERSCHEL DEVELOPMENT

Rottnest is an 'A' Class Reserve and the Rottnest Island Authority Act 1987 requires, amongst other things, that:

- The Rottnest Island Authority manage Rottnest in accordance with the current Rottnest Island Management Plan (RIMP) [Part IV(17)(1)]. The current 5 year plan is valid until 2008;
- The management plan, or any amendment to the plan, be subjected to a comprehensive public consultation process of not less than 2 months [Part IV(22)].
- Notification of a public consultation process be advertised in the *Government Gazette* and in 2 copies of a state-wide newspaper [Part IV(21)(2)].
- Any direction given to the Rottnest Island Authority (RIA) by the Minister shall be consistent with the Act or the management plan [Part III(1)].
- In the provision and operation of recreational and holiday facilities on the Island, the Authority — (a) shall have particular regard to the needs of persons usually resident in the State who wish to visit or stay on the Island as a family group [Part III(12)(a)];

In 2004 the state government accepted 101 recommendations from the Rottnest Island Taskforce (set up by then Tourism Minister Bob Kucera to investigate the problems previously identified by the Office of the Attorney-General).

These Taskforce recommendations have never been incorporated into the RIMP and have never been subjected to a comprehensive public consultation process.

A specific instance of extreme concern is that of the proposed new hotel at Mt Herschel on Rottnest Island.

The Taskforce recommended that 'the Authority seek expressions of interest for a new low-impact ecotourism development in the South Thomson area' (Recommendation 94).

Possible future accommodation at Mt Herschel was NOT a specific recommendation of the Taskforce but was mentioned in the following paragraph of the Report headed 'Further Development':

'As is discussed in the section Water Supply, the Taskforce recommends in the longer-term removing the bitumen catchment areas around Mount Herschel. This would enable them to be used for an additional accommodation project. The Taskforce believes that priority should be given to the eco-tourism development in South Thomson as discussed above. However, in the future it should undertake further research to establish what type of development might be appropriate in the Mount Herschel area.' (p.86 *Rottnest Island Taskforce Report*).

Currently the Rottnest Island Authority's website tells the public 'that The Rottnest Island Authority, at the request of the Taskforce, undertook extensive market research to provide information about what Western Australians would like to see made available'. Whilst there appeared to be considerable support for limited additional accommodation the current

Minister for Tourism, Sheila McHale says, in a letter to the Rottnest Society on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2006

The location of the Mt Herschel site was referred to in the Rottnest Island Taskforce Report and was subsequently covered in several print media articles dating back to 2004. A visitor survey conducted for the Rottnest Island Taskforce, by market research company TNS in late 2003, captured community sentiment that a boutique hotel would be an appropriate development for the Island. These documents give the WA Government confidence that the Mt Herschel Landbank development will be welcomed and patronised by the majority of visitors to the Island.

However, the TNS research referred to gave respondents four different types of accommodation and asked them to comment particularly on two aspects of these types. Those aspects were 'appropriateness' for that type of accommodation on Rottnest and perceived 'negative impact' on Rottnest (Appendix 2).

It is not possible to understand how the Minister(s) or the RIA could translate conclusions reached by TNS into high public support for this kind of development. An 80-bed 'boutique hotel' with luxury accommodation (current Mt Herschel plan has 360 beds) was considered to be significantly less appropriate, and believed to have a significantly higher negative impact on the island than any other options. (See Appendix 1)

Further, the information available on the RIA website also states that 'An impact study conducted by Norman Disney and Young concluded 'that with the exception of a slight increase in power generation (5%), existing water and sewage treatment capability is sufficient to cater for the new development'. The Conclusions (Appendix 3) reached on p.14 of this report are more substantial than this and we are concerned about the cost to the RIA and/or the taxpayer of the possible solutions.

A further complication is that the current proposal is an initiative of the WA Tourism agency Landbank – an agency established specifically 'to ensure an adequate supply of tourism development sites to meet the future needs of the tourism industry in Western Australia' (WA Tourism website) and to:

- Identify potential tourism development sites across the state;
- Accelerate the release of investor-ready land in strategic locations;
- Remove up-front uncertainty and reduce the time it takes for developers to commence construction on tourism zoned sites; and
- Safeguard the environment by ensuring any developments are in keeping with the location's environmental values and ensure relevant environmental approvals are gained.

Rottnest was the first of the sites so identified. Whilst these may be perfectly legitimate objectives for tourism-centred agencies they conflict with the recreational and holiday focus of Rottnest as expressly stated in the Act and the RIMP (and supported time and again by members of the public).

This took place against a background in which the RIA had, in 2003, held a public comment process for a proposed redevelopment of the existing Rottnest Hotel (affectionately known as the Quokka Arms). This redevelopment involving 100 rooms and swimming pool attracted approximately 200 submissions (many of which were highly critical of size and swimming pool) as a result of which the RIA went back to the drawing board. This proposal was abandoned and superseded by the establishment of the aforementioned Taskforce.

In June 2002 the Rottneest Island Authority released a draft RIMP for a widely publicised comprehensive three month public consultation process and there were more than 700 submissions received. The results were analysed and the final RIMP was released in 2003 and remains current until 2008. The RIMP details every possible aspect of the management of the island. In relation to the provision of accommodation it clearly states that the RIA should 'Except where otherwise specified, limit construction of accommodation on Rottneest Island to the replacement of existing accommodation, as necessary' (6.5.3.3).

### **Mt Herschel development**

On 5th November 2005 then Tourism Minister Mark McGowan announced the project and said that the concept plans for such a development would go out for public comment. In a number of subsequent meetings with Paolo Amaranti, CEO of the Rottneest Island Authority (RIA), through 2006 Rottneest Society committee members were given to understand that the concept plans would go out for public comment. The Society understood (wrongly) this to mean a public comment process as per the requirement of the Act.

The Society acted in good faith, advising members via the Newsletter on a number of occasions that the public would all have a chance to comment when the concept plans went out for public.

Late in 2006 it became apparent that this might not be so and we commenced corresponding with the Tourism Minister Sheila McHale in an attempt to ensure a public consultation process.

On 10th January 2007 Minister McHale released details of the preferred proponent and the initial concept plans for the proposed new hotel development at Mt Herschel on Rottneest Island - without a public comment process.

The Rottneest Society immediately launched a campaign for a public comment process and on 24<sup>th</sup> January a number of stakeholders were advised by the RIA by email that there would be a public comment period of one month from that date. The RIA placed a ¼ page ad in the 'The West Australian' on that day on page 46, but the call for comment on the hotel was buried in other text (Appendix 2). No journalists and very few members of the public knew about this six days later.

The panel which will review any comments received is the same one that has overseen the tender process and is heavily weighted towards the promotion of tourism. There is no clear understanding that the results of this review will be made available to the public.

Although there is now a public comment period of sorts the focus of that is not about the suitability or otherwise of such a development; it is merely an invitation (well-hidden) to comment on what has been released so far about the proposed development. One hundred and thirty members of the public attended a public meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> February at the Swan Yacht Club and it is clear that there is deep anger about this process.

The Rottneest Society has been heavily involved in the development of submissions to the RIA on the above matters and expect to be so again within the next year when the RIA, as required under the Act, reviews the current RIMP.

Further a number of documents of a similar nature from the last two decades are remarkably consistent in terms of the views of the public and of the recommendations, concerns and desires for this 'A' Class reserve that are recorded in these documents.

The Taskforce recommendations have never been incorporated into the guiding document – the RIMP – and the Society does not believe that the Minister(s) or the RIA are abiding by the clear intent of the Act and the RIMP in relation to the Taskforce recommendations and specifically in regard to the proposed Mt Herschel development.

It is difficult to understand how, given the apparently clear intent of the Act, a set of recommendations such as those of the Taskforce can be implemented without being subjected to the same requirements of the Act as the RIMP is. In the event that the Act is no barrier to such behaviour then it is clear that the Act and the RIMP are not worth very much to the people of Western Australia.

Which document has precedence – the RIMP or the Taskforce Report?

There are other very serious concerns about a number of aspects of the Mt Herschel development which have not been adequately answered by the RIA or the Minister. Some of these concerns relate to

- the cost to the RIA of additional works for provision of utilities as identified in a report by Norman, Disney and Young (this appears to be glossed over by the RIA and the Minister);
- the impact of extra vehicular traffic;
- the impact of such a development on the peaceful nature of Longreach settlement and bay;
- the length of the lease required for such a development;
- the validity of private investment in an 'A' Class Reserve;
- the potential for a development of this type to substantially change the nature of the highly valued Rottnest experience;
- the lack of research to support claims by the Minister and the RIA that such a development will overcome the natural barrier of prolonged high winds and rough seas in winter to bring increased winter visitor numbers;
- the question of who bears the cost if the lessee is not successful in overcoming this barrier. The RIA has had, and continues to have, considerable trouble with other long-term leases. Indeed the Rottnest Island Review 1995 recommended that the Act be amended to 'reduce the term of a lease or licence provided for in Section 13(3)(a) from twenty to ten years but with Authority discretion to vary the term' (Recommendation 4).
- the wisdom of a development with air conditioning, baths and swimming pool (Ministers and the RIA promote the notion of developing Rottnest as a 'model of sustainability') in the light of concerns about climate change, and on an island short of power and water.
- The impact on the fragile and degraded environment in the Longreach/Geordie/Fays Bay area of approximately 90,000 extra visitors per year (360 beds at 70% occupancy)

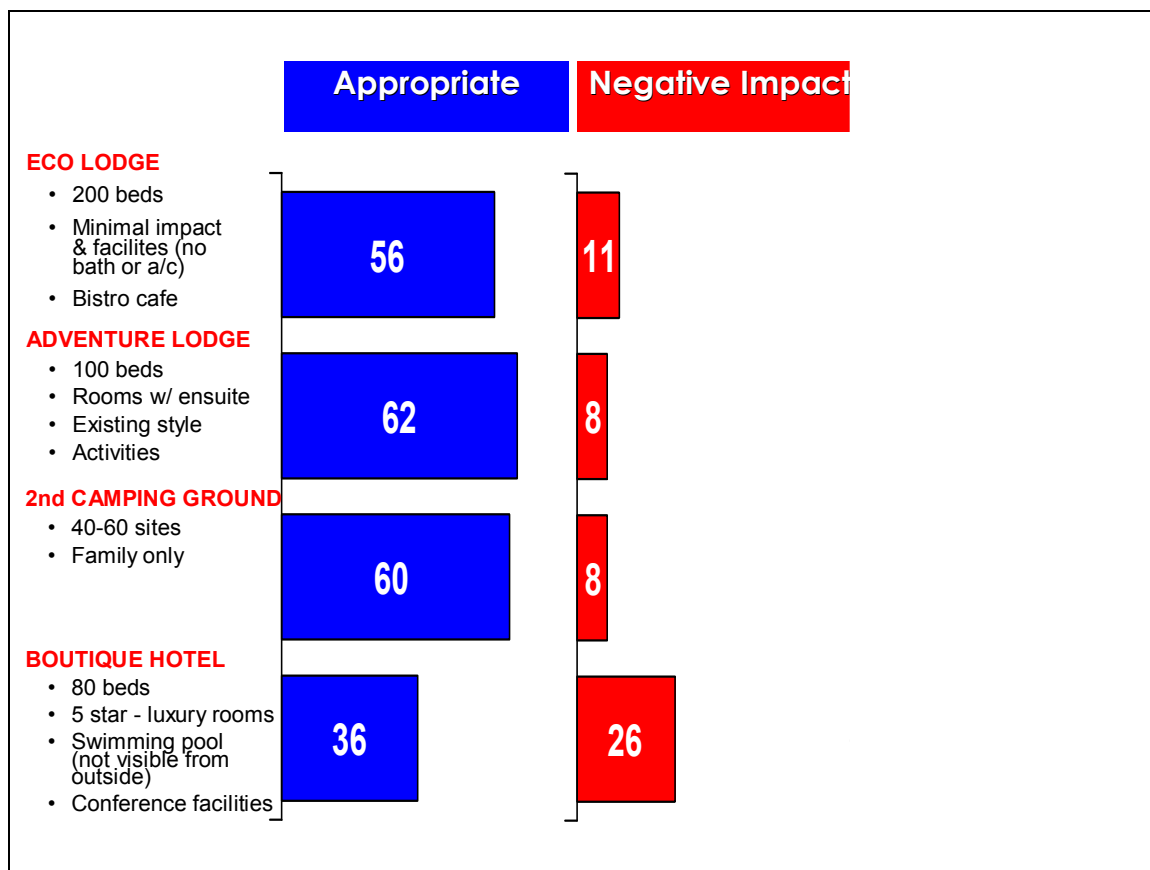
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# APPENDIX 1


From the TNS Report [Why Rottneest Island needs additional accommodation](#)

(Note: this chart brings 2 pages of the TNS report together on one page)




## APPENDIX 2

¼ page ad in 'The West Australian' (p.46) 24<sup>th</sup> Jan 07



### Rottnest Today

## What's happening on your Island



The Government has invested \$26 million to reverse a decline of accommodation and infrastructure on Rottnest Island. 101 Taskforce Recommendations were approved and funded over a 6 year period (2004-2010). Three years down the track well over half of them have been completed.

**Accommodation upgrades**

All the units in Georgie Bay, Longreach, Fays Bay, Bathurst and the historic cottages and bungalows in Central Thomson have been refurbished.

**What's New**

**Mt Herschel Development:** The State's first Landbank initiative. Broodwater Resort and Hotels consortium is the preferred proponent to develop a new hotel on the Island. To make your comments on the concept plan visit [www.rottnestisland.com](http://www.rottnestisland.com). Alternatively call 9432 9332 or visit the Fremantle - Victoria Quay office for a hard copy. The public comment period is 24 January to 21 February 2007.


Negotiations are currently underway with the Frendiville Group in relation to a lease for the Island's landmark hotel - the Quokka Arms.

**Dome Café:** The current Dome will be demolished and replaced by a new, better designed and equipped building about 10m back from the present site. Negotiations are currently underway to ensure the development is in keeping with the Island's sustainability guidelines. These are available on the RIA website.

**Services**

The Island's desalination plant is providing fresh water well above capacity, and at a reduced cost with the 660kW wind turbine now fully commissioned.

Over the coming months developments including Mt Herschel, the Dome, Teniland, North & South Thomson and important changes that will lead to online booking procedures on 1st July 2007 will be announced.



PIE BROSCH

## Appendix 3

### Taken from the Norman Disney Young Report **Rottnest Island: New Development Impact On Utilities**

#### 7. CONCLUSIONS

The Mount Herschel development will have an impact on the island utilities and the following items will need to be considered.

- Investigation into the existing electrical network to establish if the network is capable of transmitting the increased load to Mount Herschel.
- Installation of a separate high voltage feeder from the power station to the Mount Herschel site and upgrade of the settlement feeder to create a High Voltage ring from the north section of the island.
- Relocate and redesign the power station to meet the future demands of undertake an investigation into supplying the island with mainland power.
- Redevelop the electrical high voltage network particularly within the settlement areas of the island.
- Installation of a new sewage pumping station either for the Mount Herschel development or upgrade the existing Geordie Bay and Longreach pumping station to incorporate the outflow from both the hotel and existing facilities.
- Installation of a new dedicated potable water gravity feed to the Mt Herschel development. The current water production system will meet the new developments demand by a combination of desalination production and storage.
- The sewage treatment plant can process the outflow from the new Mt Herschel development.
- The South Tompson bay will have a very low impact on the utilities.