

## **ROTTNEST SOCIETY QUESTIONS FOR RIA ABOUT THE DRAFT RIMP 2009-2014**

Some of the Rottnest Society's concerns about the draft RIMP 2009-2014 are raised here. Apart from concerns about the overall direction that the RIA is proposing to take over the next five years the major concerns that we have are to do with a number of developments that are potentially very contentious in the public arena but which are combined with less contentious developments in several of the initiatives (and in fact are rather 'glossed over'). The complete draft RIMP contains fuller discussion than the summary. However we are seriously concerned that there is very little, if any, mention of further opportunities for community consultation about the more contentious issues following the gazetting of this document. This document is far too open-ended in terms of proposed developments. Some, but not all of our concerns are addressed herein.

### **Compliance with the *Rottnest Island Authority Act 1987***

We question whether the draft RIMP as it stands constitutes a 'summary of operations' as required by Section 20(1)(b). This document is a plan for the development of more plans and strategies and investigations rather than an operations plan.

There is no indication of the kind of 'on the ground' work, or the scope of such work, planned for the life of this plan or any idea of how much funding will be allocated to such works – for example, environmental works such as dune rehabilitation, swamp rehabilitation, revegetation etc. Surely a funded management plan should include such items. This of course is also true in other areas of operation on the island. In fact the funding information contained herein is not to do with operations but rather to do with development of strategies and plans and such things, as far as we can see, with the exception of Initiative 9 (Maintain quality of RIA visitor accommodation).

We understood that it was a government requirement that this plan was to be fully funded – and a Taskforce recommendation. We understood from this that the plan would show funding for work proposed to be undertaken over the life of this plan – including work of an operations nature.

1. Will the RIA explain to the public how this draft RIMP meets the requirements of the Rottnest Island Authority Act 1987 Section 20(1)(b)?
2. Will the RIA provide to the public details of its forward budget estimates for the five years of this plan for all of its proposed operations?

It is clear too that the care of the natural environment comes a very poor last in this document. Even in the funding allocations for development of strategies and plans it is clear that the natural environment rates well behind cultural and social strategy development. Much of the thrust of this new RIMP is towards the provision of activities, facilities and events which are aimed specifically towards tourism, ecotourism and business interests and increasing privatisation as well as towards somehow transforming the culture of the island. This is clearly not what the current Act calls for under Section 11(2)(a),(b), or (c), or indeed under Section 12(1)(a) (see below).

3. Will the RIA provide to the public details of proposed funding for the care of the natural environment, marine and terrestrial for the life of this plan?
4. Will the RIA explain to the public how it reconciles the thrust of this plan towards ecotourism, increasing commercialisation and private business interests with the requirements of the Act under Section 11(1)(a) or indeed under Section 12(1)(a) (see below).

#### **INITIATIVE 1**

##### REVIEW THE *ROTTNEST ISLAND AUTHORITY ACT 1987*

5. Will the RIA undertake to ensure that there is wide community consultation for any Review of the Act?

#### **Proposed GTE model**

We note also the RIA's intention to investigate moving to a different management structure such as a government trading enterprise (GTE) is part of this initiative. (We note too that the Rottnest Island Taskforce's very first recommendation was that the current governance structure be retained).

Presumably this would have to be done via an amendment to the Act, or via the proposed review of the Act. Obviously such a move would be one of extreme interest to the public as it is tantamount to privatising the island.

6. Why is the RIA proposing to move away from the Taskforce's recommendation?
7. Will the RIA undertake to canvas widely such a proposal with the public via a public consultation process, whether or not it is associated with the proposed Review of the Act?
8. What does the proposed review of the Act mean for the future of the *Rottnest Island Authority Act Amendment Bill* currently before the Parliament?

#### **INITIATIVE 6**

##### DEVELOPMENT PLANNING CONTROLS

9. What constitutes an 'independent development assessment system'?

#### **INITIATIVE 10**

##### PROVIDE A RANGE OF VISITOR ACCOMMODATION

#### **Camping ground and/or eco style accommodation**

The draft RIMP appears to leave open the possibility that there will NOT be a camping ground. It also says that funding for a camping ground will have to come from external sources – presumably a private operator. Surely since the camping ground had to be moved because it infringed on Aboriginal burial ground space funding to replace it should come from within the RIA's budget.

10. Will the RIA guarantee the public that there will be a public camping ground on the island?
11. Will a concept model be put out for public comment?
12. What locations are being considered for a camping ground?
13. Will the RIA undertake to fund the provision of a camping ground from its budget?

#### **Eco-style accommodation**

14. What location is being considered for this development?
15. What scale of development is being considered?
16. Will the RIA undertake to put the concept plan for this development out for public comment?

#### **Expansion of guest accommodation adjacent to the Hotel Rottnest**

17. What kind of accommodation is being considered for this site?
18. Is it possible that it could this land could be taken up by the Hotel Rottnest?
19. Will concept plans for any proposal be put out for public consultation?

#### **Mt Herschel Hotel**

20. We understand that changes were made to the original Broadwater design – will the RIA tell the public what kind of changes were made and what criteria will govern any new design?
21. Will the RIA make the concept plans for any new hotel on this site available for public comment?

#### **INITIATIVE 12**

##### **REVIEW VISITOR ACCOMMODATION MANAGEMENT OPTIONS**

The RIA would appear to be moving in a direction contrary to Section 12(2) of the Act if it moved towards accommodation management options along the lines of any model which isolated part of the Authority operated accommodation from the normal booking system for purposes of forward selling (with or without a public/private partnership) with the possible exception of a number of units in the low season. To pursue such a course of action in the peak or shoulder periods is likely to contravene Section 12(2) as it would give preference to those in a position to fund a number of years' purchase in advance – in other words it is likely to favour the rich.

22. Will the RIA guarantee the public that it will not undertake any plans which would give preference to certain citizens over others in relation to any of the RIA operated accommodation – in accordance with the Act?

#### **INITIATIVE 15**

## MARINE FACILITIES – BOATING MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The RIMP calls for the investigation of a marina in Thomson’s Bay and this appears to be associated with the redevelopment of the Army Jetty but this is lumped in with other items which are probably not contentious.

Such a development has the potential to be significantly different to what has been talked about by the RIA for several years – and that is the handling of barges and vessels of a similar ilk at the Army Jetty, and the provision of a pump-out facility. The draft RIMP also mentions ferries as potential users of the Army Jetty.

And of course Taskforce recommendation 101 calls for a feasibility study ‘to investigate the viability of a floating dock system to be located in South Thomson Bay’ and a rumour has now come to our ears that consideration may be being given to relocating all vessels currently moored in bays other than Thomsons Bay to a marina in Thomsons Bay. In the event that there is truth to this rumour it would surely mean a very large marina development (at least double the size of, for example, Fremantle Sailing Club) with a considerable expanse of sea wall.

### **Large marina model**

23. Is this a model being seriously considered within the Authority within the life of this plan?
24. If so how many pens and what other facilities are being considered?
25. In the event that this is being given serious consideration within the organisation will the RIA assure the public now that it would be with wide community consultation?

### **Smaller marina**

26. How many pens is a marina attached to/associated with the Army Jetty redevelopment likely to cater for and for what size vessels?
27. Is such a marina likely to require a sea wall to protect the pens?
28. Which side of the Army Jetty or what location is being considered for such a marina?
29. Does the RIA intend that ferries use the Army Jetty? If so, which ferries and why?
30. Would any proposal for any marina development be available for public comment?
31. How does the RIA propose to handle the extra heavy vehicle traffic between the Army Jetty and the settlement villages?

## **INITIATIVE 17**

### TERRESTRIAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The natural environment is the most important asset under the management of the RIA. However, we note the extraordinary disparity of the funding budgeted for the Terrestrial Management Strategy with that for ‘Cultural Heritage Conservation and Tourism’ as being \$1,140,000 over the five years, that for ‘Education and Interpretation Products’ as being \$740,000 (on top of ‘Education and Interpretation for Environmental Management as \$320,000). To our minds this is not in keeping with Section 11(2)(b) & 11(2)(c).

32. Will the RIA explain this disparity to the public?
33. Will the Terrestrial Management Strategy be developed in consultation with the public in a manner similar to the process which led to the development of the Marine Management Strategy?
34. Will the Terrestrial Management Strategy provide base line assessments against which specific KPI’s can be measured at regular points over the life of the RIMP? If so, what are they likely to consist of?
35. Why is there no costing for the development and implementation of the Terrestrial Management Strategy?
36. Will the RIA provide to the public details of proposed funding for the care of the natural environment, marine and terrestrial, for the life of this plan?

### **INITIATIVE 23**

#### **BUILD ‘TEAM ROTTNEST’ TO PROVIDE A GREAT VISITOR EXPERIENCE.**

The Rottnest Society is concerned at the level of prominence given to the Rottnest Island Business Community in this document, to say nothing of the increasing level of privatisation that is planned. Of serious concern is the possibility that the RIBC, with some members having very long leases (which in itself contravenes the Act), will have disproportionate influence on management over the coming years.

37. Will the RIA tell the public how it proposes to balance this influence?

### **INITIATIVE 25**

#### **SUPPORT VOLUNTEERS**

‘Improve practices for support and management of volunteers including establishing dedicated volunteer accommodation to provide centralised, shared facilities for all volunteer groups on the island’.

We think it is reasonable to say that optimism, hope and excitement were some of the terms that might have been used to describe the feelings of members of volunteer organisations three to four or five years ago as management reached out in ways previously not known to these organisations. However things appear to have changed.

We note that there appears to be a belief amongst at least some volunteer organisations that the RIA pays lip service only to the notion of support for volunteers but that this is not necessarily forthcoming in their day-to-day activities. We are noticing some disenchantment in other volunteer organisations, apparently to do with

the lack of support they receive from the RIA – there is a sense that some of the goodwill is ‘withering on the vine’. It is our belief that this disenchantment is growing and that it is with all levels of the RIA.

Our enquiry leads us to the conclusion that management may not be aware of this (it is very difficult for these organisations to speak up or to be critical of the RIA) or, if management is aware, then perhaps it doesn’t care. Perhaps there is not the interest in really trying to establish what the problems are, and to find solutions that will help to maintain the enthusiasm. We note that there is no longer any mention of the Taskforce recommendation number 68 (‘The Authority immediately develops a strategic alliance with the Rottnest Island Foundation to enhance attraction of grant funding and tax-deductible donations to the island’). Much grant funding may be being lost because there is no support coming from within the RIA to support volunteer groups willing to participate in applying for such funds. We have had this experience, and we understand that other groups may have as well (we also understand that this may be because of sheer lack of time on the part of relevant staff members).

One possible conclusion is that, as management finds other sources of funding which allows them to hire private operators, or indeed privatises more and more operations on the island, then interest in nurturing the volunteer input dwindles. It is also possible to conclude that entrenched management can become convinced that it has all the answers and does not look outside itself (a condition identified in the then RIA by the Taskforce).

38. Is management aware of these things at the highest levels?

39. Does management care about it?

40. What kind of support is covered under the \$30,000 per year allocated for ‘volunteer support’ in this draft?

41. Will the RIA undertake to attempt to reverse this ‘withering’?

### **Advisory Committees**

It is our understanding that members of at least one of the Advisory Committees are experiencing something similar to that of the Volunteer groups.

### **Support for staff**

This is not mentioned in the draft RIMP and in general the Rottnest Society does not involve itself in staffing matters or in day to day operational matters. However we believe that it is timely and appropriate to bring up the subject in this instance as it also is allied with our comment/questions under Initiative 25 above.

We have a sense of staff not being sufficiently supported through the many changes that they have undergone over the last four or five years. This impression is not new to us. Together with what appears to have been a relatively high staff turnover in some areas combined with ever higher expectations, and presumably, higher work load being placed on them it appears to us to have made their work lives very difficult for at least a number of them.

Our understanding is that management is mostly not interested in their opinions about how things should work/could work. Neither does management appear to be interested in why certain staff may choose to move on to other organisations. This appears to be leading to disenchantment (and even burnout) amongst staff members not unlike that amongst the Volunteer organisations. It appears to us as that there is a need for management to support both the volunteers and staff from the bottom up – and for them to come to genuinely feel that they are valued contributors.

Overall it seems to us that a period of consolidation in order to bed down properly all of the changes of the last few years is required but the whole thrust of this draft RIMP is more development and change. Whilst change is not necessarily bad, neither is it necessarily good.

42. Will the RIA take note of these things and seek ways of listening to (and actually hearing) and supporting staff and volunteers through the years ahead?

### **Staff Accommodation**

This item does not appear to be incorporated into any of the initiatives however it is an important item in the overall direction to be taken by the RIA and the public has an interest in this matter. We understand that the RIA is currently evaluating a tender to build, manage and operate staff accommodation on the island but very little information about that has been made available to the public.

The Society supports the improvement in staff accommodation standards but would like to have the following questions answered:

43. What does the tender currently being evaluated cater for – is it for singles or families. What form does the accommodation take?
44. Is it short term or long term or a mix of both? Is it houses or hostel accommodation?
45. Has the RIA taken a formal decision to have more staff living on the island?
46. If the answer to Question above is ‘yes’ will this be made clear in the final RIMP?
47. If ‘yes’ to Question 3, how many RIA staff will live on the island? How many contractors and business staff?
48. What are the criteria which determines who lives on the island and who commutes?

### **Part III — Functions and powers**

#### **11. Functions of Authority**

- (1) The Authority has the control and management of the Island for the purposes set out in subsection (2).
- (2) The control and management of the Island is vested in the Authority for the purpose of enabling it —
  - (a) to provide and operate recreational and holiday facilities on the Island;
  - (b) to protect the flora and fauna of the Island; and
  - (c) to maintain and protect the natural environment and the man-made resources of the Island and, to the extent that the Authority's resources allow, repair its natural environment.

#### **12. Access to facilities**

- (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; and
  - (b) may reserve the facilities at Kingstown Barracks, or part of those facilities, for use by persons or groups visiting the Island for educational purposes.
- (2) Subject to subsection (1), the Authority shall ensure that where the demand for the use of facilities exceeds the supply of facilities no preference or advantage is given to any person or group.

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#### **20. Contents of management plan**

- (1) Any management plan for the Island prepared under this Part shall contain —
  - (a) a statement of the policies or guidelines proposed to be followed; and
  - (b) a summary of the operations proposed to be undertaken,in respect of the Island during the period of 5 years from the time when it is approved