

Rottnest Island Authority
Re: Mt Herschel Hotel Development

Dear Sir/Madam

Improper discharge of responsibility

As the Rottnest Island Authority (RIA), a statutory authority established under the Rottnest Island legislation you have a responsibility to abide by the provisions of that legislation. In ignoring the current Rottnest Island management Plan and proceeding with a development in breach of the provisions of that Plan you have acted in an improper manner so far as proper process is concerned and you have acted against the intention of the legislation in deliberately avoiding the level of consultation which was intended to give the community a voice in the way Rottnest was managed.

Lack of information

If the proper process had been followed the Western Australian community would have been provided with a proper set of information on the nature of the development. Unfortunately, the RIA method of proceeding through an "expression of interest" almost precludes enough information before the decision is made. The expression of interest has to be vague as to details and then everything is commercially confidential until a decision is made and it is then all too late. Even at a public meeting there was insufficient information on the physical nature of what was proposed, the services that would be needed, who would provide those services, the tenure arrangements and all the impacts on the physical, biological, social and economic environment of Rottnest that is implicit as a result of these factors.

Neglect of community interest

For almost 100 years Rottnest Island has been dedicated as a location for the holiday recreation of Western Australian families. In that role it has been spectacularly successful. A small, topographically undistinguished, calcareous island has developed a special mystique as a very special holiday location. The reason for this has time and time again been identified by widely travelled international visitors. They all say that it is because it has been kept simple, has virtually no traffic, relies on holiday-makers enjoying the natural environment for their own activities and has not suffered the resort development that mars most similar locations.

Why have members of the current RIA decided to turn away from such a successful and treasured reputation and turn to the more common (the word is intended to carry both meanings) model? As pointed out above they do not have the right to do this. It appears the only reason they are doing this is because they are listening to the tourism business lobby that expects to generate income from booking people into the proposed resort hotel.

The RIA apparently feels that they have the right to turn away from 100 years of success and turn to a new direction. Make no doubt this does mark a change of direction for the Island. It will not all happen immediately but this kind of change (avoided in 1984) will continue once started. The change in the nature of the visitors and their demands for entertainment is one factor that will cause it.

The footprint of the hotel development itself

The Norman Disney and Young report suggests that the proportional impact on peak visitor numbers is likely to be 15-20%. If this is correct it would have a noticeable impact, particularly on Longreach Bay. The increase in wastewater flow itself could have an adverse environmental effect. It would be interesting to know how familiar the RIA Board members are with the monitoring results for soluble nitrogen content of the treated waste water. How well does the aerobic/anaerobic treatment system remove nitrogen? Certainly this kind of information is not available to the public. What about other impacts such as traffic and luggage flows?

The visual impact looks as though it will be very high. No information is easily available on earth moving or dune reshaping. The images available make it look as though the hotel will dominate the natural skyline, something that would be the antithesis of the Rottneest ambience of the past.

Conclusion

I will not waste your time (whoever you are) and mine by continuing. It has been made plain that the development will go ahead whatever the community thinks. There is not enough detail available to try to suggest detailed amendments that might reduce the impact. I cannot help saying something of what I think about this, mainly in the hope that if enough people do raise their concerns it may slow down the rate at which the next new developments arrive to continue the degradation of Rottneest.

Yours, not faithfully, but very, very sincerely

Norman Halse A.M.