

## **Comment on the Mt Herschel Development from Sue Folks**

When I saw the concept plans for this development I was so distressed that I wept. The more I have studied the plans and the likely impacts the more distressed and angry I have become. I can only think that you - the, to me, mostly faceless panel - cannot understand what you are doing.

We can reasonably assume that it will be Tourism Minister McHale, RIA Chair O'Meara and RIA CEO Amaranti whose names will be publicly identified with this 'achievement' - no matter that there are faceless individuals from Landbank, WA Tourism and other government agencies who have overseen the EOI and tender process. Perhaps that is good for careers and image about town.

These three will be known by most Rottnest lovers as the Rottnest Island Authority team that achieved what Brian Burke could not do. Perhaps it is his magic hand at work here. No, it is not in the same class as 1984, but bad enough - I have now firmly joined the camp of those who wonder what next after this.

I feel even worse because as Convenor of the Rottnest Society I was often the one urging my colleagues to wait and see - I was wrong. We should have been making a lot of noise in public about our concerns many months ago. I am not against some appropriate additional accommodation - with some reservations and after proper public consultation. This is way outside anything that I personally see as acceptable.

The target market of singles, couples and conferences is exclusive by market and price - it leaves out families. This is contrary to the Act. Why is it that we are not having extra accommodation which is accessible to a much wider range of the people who cannot stay overnight in summer because of shortage of accommodation - provided that the environmental impacts of such extra visitors is first researched.

Rottnest's buildings are unique and charming. They, with few exceptions, tuck into banks of trees and dunes - they don't stick out on top of the landscape. Not like this high energy use monstrosity - ugly, modern urban! Rottnest is real - this development is all about image and gloss. The noise from functions is likely to be disruptive to visitors in the quiet settlements of Longreach/Geordie - one can reasonably assume that music will float out across the bay on most nights. The highly valued amenity of other visitors should not be sacrificed for visitors to this development.

This development will dominate the landscape in several directions - with re-contoured dunes to give extra height (sustainability guidelines?) it will indeed be like nothing else on Rottnest. It ought to be possible in 2007 to design a much more sympathetic development. It is not possible to imagine anyone in the future campaigning to save such buildings as they would for many of the others on Rottnest. It is not possible to imagine anyone wanting to heritage-list them.

We are soothed with talk of sustainability guidelines, with minimisation of the potential dramatic change in the Rottnest 'ethos' - not immediately perhaps but certainly down the track; soothing talk of winter visitor numbers and increased viability - mostly nonsense in this wet, rough winter environment. Soothing talk of

low impact on the natural and social environment of 90, 000 extra visitors annually; soothing talk of sustainability - just a buzz word - misleading downplaying of traffic increases. Information has been distorted and glossed over, made difficult to read - or just plain lacking. It is hard to believe that there has not been a deliberate programme of distortion of facts and minimisation of impacts in order to gain public acceptance. What we can see does not stand up to scrutiny - what about what we can't see?

Whilst this distortion is clear it is not clear who is responsible for this. Whilst the Act clearly states that the island is to be managed by the RIA according to the management plan current at the time, the fact that the Taskforce recommendations were adopted by government without amending the RIMP, and the fact that Landbank and WA Tourism came into the picture, mean that the path of accountability is not as clear as it should be. This needs to be addressed to ensure that this does not happen again. Accountability and transparency are vital. .

. There is plenty of evidence to show that when people are in emotional and mental crisis simple experiences in nature, whether it be beach or forest often are profoundly nurturing and healing. They help to restore balance and harmony. We find new perspective.

We have an increasing number of people in our community on medication for emotional and mental disorders. Many of them are overwhelmed with the constant battering of demands and images in their daily lives, and have used up their inner resources. Many of them do not feel comfortable unless they are on that treadmill – they do not know how to stop. Therefore they want to take the familiar trappings (mobile phone, I-pod, gym and so on) with them.

Hundreds of thousands of Western Australians love to leave all that behind when they go to Rottnest (well, maybe not the mobile phone). They know, intuitively if not intellectually, that Rottnest is an extraordinary gift - sitting on our doorstep, offering over and over again to accept our cares as they slip from our shoulders as we take our first steps onto its sandy shores. This is a preventive health measure extraordinaire! This is what we do not want to lose - and frankly this development is a considerable step in that direction. Even just knowing it is there is comforting.

We would like to be able to trust our agencies to take care of publicly owned assets but too often, as in this case, they are busy giving away our interests to the moneyed and creating exclusive enclaves.

Rottnest is our common wealth.

Sue Folks  
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