

## *SUBMISSION TO THE ROTTNEST ISLAND AUTHORITY ON THE RESORT HOTEL PROPOSAL*

Being a Pom, I didn't grow up with Rottneest, but having come here 35 years ago as a young man, I soon came to recognise that it was the jewel in the crown when it came to all the great benefits of living in Perth. To have such a wonderful natural relaxing island right there off the coast, and for it to be perceived by all as "the people's island" and run as just that is an incredible piece of good fortune for us all.

I see that Brian Burke is back in the news again, still apparently doing all sorts of deals with property developers, and it was the proposals of his government for a "world class" resort on Rotto that had us all reeling way back then. Fortunately those with the power to reject this had the wisdom to do so then, but it would seem the lesson has sadly not been learnt, and here we are again with a government minister telling us we badly need this and it will be going ahead like a steam train, no need for public comment.

I visit Rotto more than most, one reason being that I hold a pilot's licence, gained many years ago in association with my work, and I am often asked by friends to take them and their friends and relatives across for day trips in a four-seat aeroplane hired from Jandakot. This works out at much the same price as the ferry, and I might typically make half a dozen such trips in a year. In many cases my passengers are my friends' overseas visitors, and all without fail express wonder at how beautifully unspoilt Rotto is. I mentioned this new hotel proposal to two Poms whom I flew over last month, and their reaction was that it would be utterly awful. And that's what genuine overseas visitors think.

Let's face it, this proposal isn't about the ordinary overseas visitor who can take joy in walking and cycling around the island and swimming in the bays, it's about the rich who want another luxury playground, with all the diversions upon which they are sure to insist, because for them unspoilt nature will never be enough. And it's about the corporate world and conferences. I once used to inhabit that world, and I have twice attended conferences at the Lodge. I can make an observation on this, which is that the vast majority of my fellow attendees at those conferences were barely aware of it being a location any different from any other hotel at which they had attended similar pow-wows and love-ins, because they spent most of their free time in the bar, but a few bemoaned the fact that the golf course wasn't a "real" one with grass greens. I'm sure that insatiable demands for "world class" golf will be just one immediate impact this new resort would have.

I spent a couple of nights at the Lodge as recently as December. I thought some parts were maybe starting to become in need of a face lift, the service was a bit slack, and the restaurant hours had failed to register daylight saving, with the kitchen closed before dark. So there's room for some improvement. But what I also noted was the apparent emptiness of the place. I'm sure occupancy must have been very low at that time, just before the school holiday period.

So is there really any need at all for more luxury accommodation? Without all the numbers and statistics to hand, I can't pronounce on the demand, but I am very sceptical. Certainly not 120 rooms, and this proposal is way too big, and way too flashy. Certainly not conference facilities, as these have **nothing whatever** to do with the quiet enjoyment of Rotto, and indeed are totally inconsistent with it. Please keep them **off** the island, as conference attendees constitute a serious hazard to the environment. Schoolies we have to put up with for one week each year, conference attendees we can keep off full time. On Rotto they are to be always regarded as an undesirable exotic species!

Does Rotto need something "world class". Come off it, is anybody out there still fooled by that vacuous term? For heavens sake, it's developer-speak for "something that will bring us lots of loot", nothing more, nothing less. That's precisely how we got lumbered with that appalling eyesore of a hayshed on the riverfront, and I recall the Court government repeating that mantra that we needed a "world class" convention centre. Maybe with a bit of luck it will be bulldozed before the decade is out, but the damage there is already done. So please keep these greedy grasping people and their "world class" resort off Rotto.

I won't be totally negative. I want to consider what Rotto needs. It is right that there should be accommodation on the island for those who are prepared to pay a little bit more and don't want to self cater. The island is for all, not just the poor! But the existing buildings of the Lodge do indeed provide that, offering a high standard of accommodation, perfectly acceptable to anyone in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some minor refurbishment may be needed in places, service may currently be less than it might be, but that's no reason to inflict a new resort upon the island. If demand is exceeding supply at the Lodge, and I'm very far from convinced it is, there may be a long-term case for another small hotel of 30-40 rooms, maybe with a good restaurant that will be open for longer hours, and maybe at Mount Herschel to give it that bit of differentiation of all rooms with ocean views. But we certainly need none of this so urgently that the public can't be consulted.

In conclusion, I return to my flying hobby, and the fact that in a parallel case we have hopefully just saved Jandakot Airport from property developers who had "world class" plans to move it to North Dandalup and make a few billion on the land sale in so doing. Hopefully that is a sign that the tide has at last turned on these rapacious people. So to repeat, the current proposal is altogether way too big and way too flashy. It benefits nobody but the developers. Above all, it doesn't belong on Rotto, any more than the 1980s one did, and must be resoundingly rejected.

Nick Suess