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Metropolitan Melbourne

Crown Land Submission

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Yarra Park

This is not so much a submission as a cry of distress. Yarra Park is, I consider, a park almost at the point of no return and if remedial action on a large scale is not undertaken very soon, it will be irretrievably damaged.

Yarra Park was designated Crown Land in the latter part of the nineteenth century by far-sighted politicians who said that Melbourne's parks and gardens would be "the lungs of the city". If this was thought important prior to the internal combustion engine, how the necessity for these open, treed, areas has increased exponentially with today's pollution. We should be improving and increasing open space not destroying it.

Yarra Park is now being used as a Car park for over 5000 cars on more than 200 days a year. Traditionalists argue that it has always been used as a car park. True, but this "tradition" began when there was only one footy match per weekend and long before there was even one-day cricket let alone 20/20 matches – and few people owned cars. Now the Park has to contend with car parking two or three times per weekend during the footy season, innumerable cricket matches, two solid weeks during the Tennis Open, rugby at Olympic Park, concerts, religious conventions etc in Rod Laver Arena and, soon, matches in the new Rectangular Stadium, for which NO parking has been provided.

The result of all this activity is a totally degraded area, most of the grass has long since gone and the soil is compacted to a rock-like surface, so that if it does ever rain, the water cannot penetrate but simply runs off, eroding the surface into gullies. The trees, most of which are beautiful mature trees, are beginning to show signs of stress. As the Park is now so often used as a car-park, for over half the year it cannot be used for what was its intended purpose, children playing, people exercising or walking dogs, ball-games, picnics and many other recreational activities. Surely public parks should be available to the public all year round for these pursuits and not used as a commercial venture for much of the year.

Melbourne City Council works hard and spends vast amounts of money to try and care for the Park, but not sooner have they succeeded in planting some new trees and re-grassing a small area than it is wrecked by cars being parked there, often so close to trees that root damage inevitably occurs.

The only answer is to completely ban all car-parking so that the Park can be restored to its former glory. During the 2006 Commonwealth Games it was closed to all cars and free public transport was included with the ticket. No-one complained. In fact many people commented on how lovely it was to see the MCG surrounded by parkland instead of parked cars. Overseas visitors commented on how lucky we were to have a park around our stadium and what excellent public transport serviced the stadium. [There are three tram routes, a number of rail routes coming into two different stations, and a bus route, all within a very short walk of all the venues, and numerous city car-parks for those who feel they must drive]. There is no necessity whatsoever to park cars in Yarra Park.

The State Government should immediately close the park to all cars and fund a programme of regeneration.