

Submission Hanging Rock Review (DELWP)

10 July, 2015

MRRA's position on the issue of protection of Hanging Rock ('the Rock') has remained broadly the same for the life of the organisation. It is set out, with references to previous documents and submissions, below.

First and foremost, it is the opinion of the MRRA that the protection of the Rock, in all its aspects, hinges on the protection of the surrounding natural ecosystems, and the geomorphology of which the Rock is part. Everything else, in any valid, coherent, cogent management plan proposed, should be and necessarily is subsidiary to this.

Human uses of and relationships to the Rock, from earliest times to the present, also need to be taken into account in order to prioritize and rank possible and potential usages of this landmark and icon, and to protect its other values. The least of these values, at the bottom of the scale, is as a backdrop for generic tourism or active leisure activity, things which could be held or organised anywhere. To attempt to shoehorn these into a physically and culturally sensitive landscape is not respectful of the area, and eventually deleterious of the very values and features that make the Rock so attractive to visitors and residents alike.

With the above two points as guiding principles, we would like to offer some more detailed recommendations to the Review:

- 1. Lack of Credible Management Structure** The Rock suffers from the lack of a credible guiding management structure. "The Hanging Rock *Development* Committee" obviously skews the guidance of the area's management from conservation, preservation, passive recreation and low-impact management, to looking at ways the Rock can develop an economic return, with associated greater building and construction works. It should be noted that the Rock has maintained its current infrastructure with income from visitation fees alone, and only a greater increase in the level of this would need additional guaranteed income streams. The establishment of a formal, impartial, independent Committee of Management, independent of, but advisory to Council, with representatives drawn from all interested groups, including Newham Landcare (who do so much to maintain the environmental and natural amenity values of the precinct), Friends of Hanging Rock, Hanging Rock Action Group, with executive power over decisions on the Rock's status and upkeep, is an appropriate response to such a need.
- 2. Recognise whole-of-community, public ownership** Hanging Rock, or Mt. Diogenes, from Aboriginal settlement tens of thousands of years ago, to the present day, has always been acknowledged as a place special, indeed sacred, to the whole of the community: as a meeting place, as a spiritual place, as a restful place. Hence, the whole of the community must be consulted on any significant change to the environs and management structure of the Rock. Such proper, effective, in-depth consultation must guard against short-term diminution of the values that make the Rock special. It has, in the Association's opinion, been sorely lacking to date. Private interest must be discouraged from and restricted in attempting to diminish or derogate such values, as has been repeatedly seen over decades under the current management structure.

- 3. *Formally Incorporate The East Paddock Into The Crown Reserve*** The review *must* acknowledge that the East Paddock, purchased by the Shire of Newham and Woodend, and included in the 1993 Loder & Bayley management plan for the precinct, is part of the Rock environs, and integral to it. It *must be* rezoned from the current Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ), which allows for insensitive and exploitative uses, to Public Conservation and Resource Zone (PCRZ), to stress the passive recreation and conservation-themed activities that the original purchase was intended to facilitate. As such, this means the integration of the East Paddock into the reserve proper, to protect it from diminution and fragmentation (contrary to the Shire's original intent), at the behest of local residents, and the wider community.
- 4. *Ensure Transparent, Accountable Management of Financial Matters*** The financial aspects of running the reserve, currently subsumed into general financial information within Council documents, must be made explicit and public, in an accepted and discrete format. It has been seen in the recent and not far distant past that uncertainty as to the true financial status of the Rock has been used to advance certain arguments in favour of certain types of development, without a full and frank disclosure of all relevant considerations. This can only be contrary to good governance, and open to abuse in service of certain interests.
- 5. *Re-Establish the Hanging Rock Statutory Financial Reserve*** Consequent on the above, a Statutory Financial Reserve must be established, into which income from the Rock is sequestered, and out of which expenditure can be drawn. Discretionary, i.e. Council-controlled finances, cannot be relied upon, as evidence from past years shows, to provide a stable, transparent and broadly responsible means of maintaining the environs, to the benefit of all.
- 6. *Establish State Level Policy And Legislation To Protect Hanging Rock*** The ad hoc, 'flavour-of-the-month' tendency of locally formulated policy in relation to the future and present management of the Rock precinct must be immediately reduced, and eventually eliminated. Therefore, State level controls must be put in place in order to take the place of these, preferably in the form of planning legislation. A clear statement of the status of the reserve, and intent as to its purpose, would leave no room for tendentious interpretation of the current or future controls on the use of, and care for Hanging Rock and its surrounds, in a healthy state, for many future generations.

Any further explication of these settled views (here presented in outline) of the MARRA on this subject may be obtained by contacting the Secretary of the MARRA via mrra.sec999@gmail.com or phone 5427 1481.