



Richard Willis
Secretary, Council Committees
Department of the Legislative Council
Parliament House
East Melbourne, 3002

Dear Sir,

**Re: Select Committee on Public Land Development and;
a Proposal to develop a theme park on public land currently operated as a
public zoo**

The Board and members of Friends of the Zoos (FOTZ) are extremely concerned about a proposal to re-develop the site of the Werribee Open Range Zoo as a commercially operated theme park.

The proposal involves a large-scale transformation of a significant and valuable cultural asset on public land, including what is in effect "gifting" it to a non-public entity for purely commercial purposes. The proposal includes removing Werribee Open Range Zoo from the management of Zoos Victoria and giving full commercial control of the facility to the commercial developer. This will have the effect of the alienation of public land for commercial development and is therefore of interest to the Committee by virtue of Terms of Reference (a).

FOTZ is a significant stakeholder in Werribee Open Range Zoo. We have over 67,000 members and support each of Victoria's three zoos, Healesville Sanctuary, Werribee Open Range Zoo and Melbourne Zoo. We provide a 750 person strong workforce of trained volunteers and make significant financial contributions. In 2007 we made direct financial contributions of \$1.7 million and contributed volunteer hours worth over \$1.2 million to Zoos Victoria.

We highlight the following points for your consideration:

- Werribee Open Range Zoo is an important cultural asset that belongs to the people of Victoria and should be protected for future generations. In particular, we believe the Zoo's current conservation, educational and zoological contributions are threatened by the potential conversion of the Zoo into a theme park managed by a commercial operator.
- By definition, the objectives of a public company are commercial and the primary obligation is to generate returns for its shareholders. These objectives and obligations are inconsistent with many of Werribee Open Range Zoo's core objectives and values. A public company, by its very nature, would be unable to adhere to, or give priority to the Zoo's fundamental objectives and values and

would therefore undermine its conservation, educational and zoological contributions.

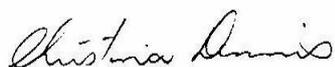
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- The proposal is not in the best interests of the animals at Werribee Open Range Zoo and will negatively impact on important and internationally recognised conservation and research programs involving both endangered native Australian and international species.
- The proposal would severely threaten the viability of Melbourne Zoo and Healesville Sanctuary as it would replace Werribee Open Range Zoo with a direct competitor and hence undermine the financial viability of Zoos Victoria and inhibit the ability of the remaining publicly owned facilities to meet their conservation, educational and zoological objectives and fulfil their roles within the community.
- In addition to a 99 year peppercorn lease of the site of Werribee Open Range Zoo and the gifting of all its plant and animals, the proposal involves a further \$100 million contribution from Victorian taxpayers.

We believe Werribee Open Range Zoo should remain under the direct management of Zoos Victoria in order to ensure that its land, assets, conservation and educational contributions are safe guarded for the Victorian community.

Additionally, we are particularly concerned by the lack of transparency surrounding the Government's consideration of the proposal and are deeply disappointed that such a proposal has been considered without full consultation with stakeholders and the Victorian community.

I am aware that the date for written submissions has passed however I would welcome the opportunity to give a more detailed verbal submission.



Christina Dennis

President

Friends of the Zoos