
Request to be heard?: Yes

Precinct: General

Full Name: Lyn Allison

Organisation: Friends of Westgate Park Inc.

Affected property: Westgate Park, Todd Road, Port Melbourne

Attachment 1: WESTGATE_Fisher

Attachment 2: ABS_data.pdf

Attachment 3:

Comments: Submission has been uploaded

Submission in response to the Draft Fishermans Bend Framework

Friends of Westgate Park (FoWP) support the vision contained in this framework for Westgate Park to perform an important role in providing what is, at 40ha, the most extensive area of parkland in the subject area.

As a Landcare group, we particularly support the objectives of:

- sustainability and resilience
- good public transport services, walking and cycling paths and more public open spaces
- improved links and connectivity between Port Phillip Bay, the Yarra River and the CBD
- improving biodiversity by creating habitat opportunities for indigenous flora, fauna (and fungi), green links and landscape design
- using stormwater and recycled water as a substitute for potable water

Our purpose in making this submission is to build on the work of the Fishermans Bend Taskforce with suggestions and comments as the Framework relates to Westgate Park and other public open space proposals.


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1. Objective 3.6 – reconsider existing public open spaces within Fishermans Bend in the context of a changing urban environment

Strategy 3.6.1 - **Redesign and/or expand Westgate Park**, JL Murphy Reserve and North Port Oval to incorporate more active uses, multi-functional spaces and improved interface design

As is mentioned elsewhere in the Framework, Parks Victoria, in conjunction with the Friends of Westgate Park, is currently finalising the Westgate Park Master Plan after a comprehensive process of consultation. Our understanding is that the draft document was expected to be put to the Parks Victoria Board and to the Minister for the Environment for endorsement in November 2017. As we understand it, the Taskforce has been kept abreast of this process and the proposals it includes. This being the case, we would like to know what is intended by ‘redesign of Westgate Park... to incorporate more active uses etc.’.

We understand from the consultation meetings that ‘more active uses’ does not mean organised sport for Westgate Park but we note from the Framework release announcement that an additional 4 AFL size ovals, 6 soccer pitches and 8 outdoor courts are to be provided. By our calculations these new football venues would require around 16 hectares for the grounds alone. We strongly support the objective for public open space to be multi-functional but sporting grounds rarely are. A public swimming pool would be a far more equitable use of space in terms of both numbers and diversity of gender and ages and can be used day and night, 7 days a week.

Organised sport is insatiable in its desire for more venues and resources and large tracts of parkland have been given over to this use with little consideration for the needs of others or indeed for biodiversity. The upkeep and the watering of lawn at JL Murphy Reserve is arguably out of all proportion to the relatively small number of users and the short time they spend there over a year.



We urge the Taskforce to recognise that sporting groups are able to lobby in a way that individuals who recreate in other less formal ways do not.

The last ABS data on participation in sport and physical recreation in Australia 2013-14 indicates that people are more than twice as likely to participate in informal activities such as walking, cycling and jogging, than park-based sport and that women are three times as likely to do so. See table attached. It is also worth noting that a higher proportion of women in Victoria (21.6%) engage in sport and physical activity than men (18.2%).

Currently the JL Murphy Reserve has 3 soccer grounds, a baseball pitch, two football/cricket grounds, floodlights, change rooms, public toilets, clubrooms and a stand and its use is almost exclusively for organised sport played by men of a fairly narrow age bracket, as is the North Port Oval. The latter is fenced off for exclusive use, as are two soccer grounds at JL Murphy Reserve. Neither reserve has walking or cycling paths and JL Murphy has just one small and outdated children's playground.

As the Framework points out, Westgate Park provides high quality walking and cycling links and this form of recreation distinguishes the Park from others in the area. It is also a park that is now recognised as environmentally significant yet is entirely constructed by people. This makes the Park and its rich biodiversity unique and astounding, given its proximity to the CBD and industrial surrounds. In other words, it is much more than 'an extensive area of parkland' with a 'variety of walking and cycling links'.

Westgate Park has been revegetated with hundreds of thousands indigenous plants, many tonnes of mulch and an enormous effort by thousands of volunteers in propagating and planting. This 'activity' is equal to around 9 full time jobs over many years and can be expected to continue for some years to come.

We are keen to see many more visitors to Westgate Park and we hope that, through the master plan, other activities will be introduced such as a children's adventure playground, and boardwalks and bird hides on the edges of its many lakes and wetlands. With the Master Plan finalised, we expect grant monies to be available to fund these in due course. We suggest that for Westgate Park in particular, the emphasis should be on these kinds of activities and for understanding and appreciating biodiversity and the natural world.

A clear priority of the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity 2010-2030 is to engage all Australians in biodiversity conservation through 'mainstreaming biodiversity'. Westgate Park features in Melbourne City Council's Bioblitz and we currently partner with them on a pollinators project. Monthly bird surveys and WaterWatch, fungi forays during winter and education for school groups year round involve hundreds of people in understanding and appreciating nature.

In partnership with the St Kilda Indigenous Nursery Cooperative, we are conserving biodiversity by ensuring the survival of 322 locally indigenous plant species; 32 of which are considered locally rare, threatened or vulnerable. So far, they are a thriving feature of the Park.

The Park does urgently need better services. Families in particular are not likely to come to the Park until new, hygienic and safe toilets are finally built (the old ones have been closed for some months).

Our experience of the parks in areas of Port Melbourne where density has significantly increased is that many residents have dogs and will want safe places in which to walk them. In Westgate Park dogs must be walked on leads and, because many of the 50 or so bird species usually present in the Park nest on land or are water-dependent which makes their young very vulnerable, we propose that this remains the case.

We recommend that the Framework:

- encourages a diverse range of public open space experiences from quiet places of contemplation through to competitive sport
 - distinguishes between very different forms of recreation and activity and makes it clear that sporting activity is not proposed for Westgate Park
 - adopts an informed, inclusive approach to determining what new sporting activities are provided for.
 - supports an upgrade of JL Murphy Reserve that improves its gender and age-related inclusiveness
 - recognises the voluntary, active participation of many people in creating the important landscape that is Westgate Park
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2. Tram depot/Wharf Road Triangle

We were assured at the consultation meetings that the proposed new site for the Southbank Tram Depot is the current Boeing carpark and not the land known as the Wharf Road Triangle which was incorporated into the Park this year. **We ask that this is made clear on the plans** and point out that the footprint of the depot is likely to be a lot larger than the schematic box currently shown in the Framework documents.

It is proposed that the FoWP compound, currently sited on the northern boundary, will be closed and revegetated and a new volunteers' compound, community space and the SKINC nursery are located at the southern end of the Wharf Road Triangle. As the Taskforce will be aware, SKINC's nursery is currently at the rear of the North Port Oval which is earmarked on the plans for public open space.

3. Strategy 3.6.1 – Increase utilisation of encumbered public land for active uses and recreational links, such as under the Westgate Freeway and Bolte Bridge

Whilst this proposal has merit, particularly for movement between park areas north and south of the bridge, it must be understood that in Westgate Park this space will not provide the same high quality open space as the rest of the Park given the fact that the bridge is 10 lanes wide and would limit the sun and rainfall necessary for healthy plant growth. It may also be costly to repurpose because of its hard surfaces, bunding and, we understand, of contaminated material there.

Westgate Park has a long narrow stretch of Yarra River frontage and this could be greatly enhanced if the bank south of the park boundary was opened up for public access all the way to the River mouth. A pedestrian/cycling path could be built and the rock wall bank revegetated, as per the northern section. This would open up a great destination and view across the Bay for cyclists and walkers (as identified in the Framework as 'opportunities'). This was intended many years ago but that section was fenced off for a proposed expansion of Webb Dock capacity with a river-based berth. This did not go ahead but the fence has remained nonetheless.

4. Strategy 5.2.3 – provide **recycled water to maintain sports fields and other planting in streets and parks.**

Westgate Park has no natural tributaries to its lakes and wetlands and the rainfall for inner Melbourne is slightly lower than greater Melbourne at an average over the last decade of around 570mm. Five of these years had rainfalls below 450mm.

Stormwater is captured for the Park from Wharf Road and the rooftops of the Herald & Weekly Times printing works. Clay liners were used in constructing wetlands however water levels are low in all of them in the drier months and there has never been a discharge of water from the Park meaning salts accumulate in our lakes. We understand a water management plan will be prepared as part of the Master Plan but it is clear that the Park needs new sources of water. We ask that consideration is given to stormwater from the Holden site being piped into the Park where it can be treated naturally in our system of wetlands.

5. Objective 6 – Create an open space network that **enhances biodiversity and supports local wildlife**

The Friends of Westgate strongly support this objective and each of the strategies identified in 6.1 and 6.2. Indeed the Taskforce is to be congratulated on the emphasis and detail developed in the Plan.

For the 2050 targets to be meaningful, we would like to see baselines established as soon as possible and short and medium term targets set for the tree health and diversity of species targets. We have good data on species at Westgate Park and we hope to soon embark on a study of tree health but we doubt there is data for other open space.

The importance of indigenous species

Our unique and unusual plants, animals and fungi evolved over the 60 million years that Australia was isolated from the rest of the world, often with a high degree of specificity in their interrelationships. Ninety percent of Australian plant species benefit from or rely on fungal species for their healthy survival. The interrelationships are yet to be fully understood but we can be reasonably certain that meaningful biodiversity will be better served by diverse native plants than exotic species.

The National Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) lists 41 species of Australia's flora as extinct, 129 critically endangered, 530 endangered and 610 as vulnerable. We have focused on 31 locally indigenous plants that are endangered or rare and most are now thriving in the Park, producing seed for ongoing propagation and ensuring their survival more broadly. See [here](#) for details.

Australia signed up to the UN Aichi targets on biodiversity and expanding native habitat by planting mixed species vegetation is a key objective. [Australia's Native Vegetation Framework](#) says:

Australia's native vegetation is crucial to a healthy and biodiverse Australian landscape. It provides essential ecological goods and services and supports our economy and the productivity of many industries. Our native vegetation also underpins our cultural identity as a nation: it continues to play an important role in the relationship of Indigenous peoples with country — their traditional lands and waters — and in the lives of the many Australians who enjoy the wonder and beauty of our natural environments.

It also stresses the importance of encouraging and supporting the active involvement of the community and includes urban landscapes in its assessment of threats to biodiversity.

The Victorian State of the Environment reporting in 2016 points out that historic land clearing has resulted in the loss of approximately half of Victoria's native vegetation, causing a serious and ongoing loss of habitat for Victoria's native species. Pest plants are considered one of the major factors in the loss of biodiversity and predation by pests is a threatening process for at least 47 species of threatened fauna in Victoria.

The Westgate Park experience demonstrates that it is possible to create a very biodiverse environment by planting exclusively locally indigenous species. The Park has attracted more than 150 bird species and this is comparable to substantially larger 'natural bush' parks and sanctuaries such as Serendip Sanctuary near the You Yangs. So far 70 species of fungi have been identified in the Park. These are building soil by breaking down organic material into useful nutrients, others are in complex symbiotic relationships with plants.

The Park has a big population of Superb Fairy-wren and they are there because it has large areas of suitable habitat where dense shrubs provide cover. Though relatively common, Superb Fairy-wrens are in decline elsewhere.

We would not have 150 bird species, frogs, long-neck turtles, skinks, blue-tongue lizards, microbats etc. without the food chain that has developed. Indigenous plants provide food - leaves, pollen, nectar, seeds, etc. – that are suitable for indigenous fauna that are in turn food for others.

A biodiverse environment is also one that is in balance. Spotted Pardalotes rely on psyllid insects and their sugary lerp covers as their main source of food. Without the Pardalotes (and other native birds), the eucalypts on which the psyllids feed can be severely damaged by these insects. The Pardalotes nest in burrows on the ground making their young vulnerable to foxes and dogs off-lead so biodiversity strategies must also control the non-native threats.

Pest species

The experience at Westgate Park is that pest species can be a major problem unless kept under control. Before baiting was introduced a few years ago, rabbits overran Westgate Park. They ate seedlings and small to medium-sized plants and made regeneration all but impossible. Habitat around Port rock walls is ideal for foxes and dens have been discovered in the Park. They take the young of water-dependent birds and those that nest on the ground.

One remarkable and pleasant feature of Westgate Park is the relative absence of weeds. Mulch is helpful in this but mulch eventually breaks down and the 'lawn' areas are largely mown weed species so weed seeds are widely dispersed. This means the weed-free achievement comes from an enormous expenditure of time and effort on the part of our volunteers who hand weed and spray continuously.

Indigenous plant species are already part of our environment

There are beautiful examples of locally indigenous plants being used exclusively in City of Port Phillip parks. Lagoon Oval in Port Melbourne is a sports ground with a large oval of mown grass, heavily used by dog walkers and families and occasionally by cricket players. The oval is fringed by locally indigenous species of trees, shrubs, groundcovers, wildflowers and climbers, many of which were planted 30 years ago. Only the oval is watered but the garden beds are thriving nonetheless.

Nearby Gasworks Park is similarly planted with natives and much-loved by the many people who use this park for informal recreation.

Turner Reserve is a long narrow strip straddling the light rail from Station Pier to Boundary Street and incorporating an important commuting track for cyclists which has extensive areas of native vegetation.

The Port of Melbourne in its recent redevelopment, adopted indigenous plants for the substantial strip of landscaping along Todd Road that now provides an impressive nature link from Westgate Park to the foreshore. We assisted the Port in developing the plant list for this, the foreshore and the guide for the lessees within the Port boundaries.

The 'heat island effect' is likely to be a factor in inner Melbourne's declining rainfall and predictions are for a decline of up to 11 per cent in average stream flow into Melbourne's water supply catchments by 2020 so increasing tree cover and choosing plants that can withstand dry conditions is already crucial.

This being the case, we are unable to envisage a setting for which locally indigenous plants would not be more appropriate than exotic species.

We note and welcome the intention to 'create habitat opportunities for indigenous flora and fauna' and we would be pleased to assist the Taskforce with advice on the suitability and sustainability of plant species. A list of our EVCs or plant communities and lists of plants in them is [here](#) on our website.

We recommend that:

- **the growing biodiversity of Westgate Park is considered a major feature of the urban revitalisation for Fishermans Bend, attracting research, citizen science and use as a case study in successful revegetation projects**
- **strategy 6.2.1 '...to create [designated] areas of complex vegetation that incorporate a wide variety of plant species and scales, including layers of ground covers, shrubs and trees' is adopted throughout Fishermans Bend with the use of indigenous plants.**
- **Strategy 6.2.3 to read 'Engage the community in biodiversity conservation and mapping...' as it relates to the tree health and species diversity targets.**
- **a new strategy is included for controlling pest species**

6. GoKart track east of Todd Road

We were surprised to see that the Go Kart track was not recognised as public open space nor potential for parkland in the Framework. It is an integral part of Westgate Park, administered by Parks Victoria but was leased out to the Go Kart Club of Victoria in 1995. As we understand it the track is not ideal for this purpose and the club would be prepared to move if another site further out of town can be found. The Westgate Park Master Plan shows the site as returning to parkland.

The Melbourne International Shooting Club's gun and rifle range alongside the GoKart track at 120 Todd Road is privately owned but it too is probably inappropriate in this location into the future.

7. Historical context

The history of the area was indeed colourful and the swamps and sand hills a 'paradise of wildlife' but only the saltwater lake at Westgate Park was formed from sand pits. Three freshwater lakes were excavated and the spoil used to create islands and mounds. The original concept was a landscape to complement the curving, sculptural form of the bridge. Soil and rubble was brought in from around Melbourne to create mounds, indeed the vast majority of the landscape is undulating. Significant wetlands have been constructed on land subsequently added to the Park by the efforts of FoWP. Thanks to its wetlands and the 300+ indigenous plant species, more than 150 bird species, 70 species of fungi, lizards, snakes, turtles, frogs, possums, microbats and flying foxes and over 100 species of invertebrates have been recorded there so far.

December 1, 2017

Table 2 PERSONS PARTICIPATING IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL RECREATION, Top 55 activities, By sex

[Data from ABS study of Participation in Sport and Physical Recreation, Australia 2013-14](#)

ABS data extracted for park-based activities	Park-based sport	Informal park-based activities	Participation of women in park-based sport	Participation of women in other park-based activities	ESTIMATE ('000)			PARTICIPATION RATE (%)		
					Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
Aerobics					10.6	88.8	99.6	0.1	0.9	0.5
Aqua aerobics					11.8	77.0	90.8	0.1	0.8	0.5
Athletics, track and field	103.4		44.5		67.7	44.5	103.4	0.7	0.5	0.6
Australian Rules football	224.0		12.7		205.8	12.7	224.0	2.3	0.1	1.2
Badminton					63.8	45.3	97.8	0.7	0.5	0.5
Basketball (indoor & outdoor)	406.1		123.5		281.9	123.5	406.1	3.1	1.3	2.2
Boxing					62.0	40.3	99.8	0.7	0.4	0.5
Bush walking		285.6		161.4	126.3	161.4	285.6	1.4	1.7	1.5
Canoeing / Kayaking / Dragon boat racing					76.9	49.4	129.7	0.8	0.5	0.7
Cross country running					29.4	38.3	70.6	0.3	0.4	0.4
Cycling / BMXing		1,151.9		378.7	777.4	378.7	1,151.9	8.5	4.0	6.2
Dancing / Ballet					30.7	202.9	237.2	0.3	2.2	1.3
Fishing		177.1		12.9	169.3	12.9	177.1	1.9	0.1	1.0
Fitness / Gym					1,442.7	1,769.7	3,214.0	15.9	18.9	17.4
Football sports (excluding, rugby, soccer, Australian Rules football)	297.7		124.4		167.9	124.4	297.7	1.8	1.3	1.6
Golf					603.5	127.4	732.0	6.6	1.4	4.0
Gymnastics					18.0	19.2	38.0	0.2	0.2	0.2
Hockey (indoor and outdoor)	121.4		58.4		64.4	58.4	121.4	0.7	0.6	0.7
Horse riding / Equestrian activities / Polo					17.2	116.2	142.0	0.2	1.2	0.8
Ice / snow sports					56.4	44.0	99.5	0.6	0.5	0.5
Indoor cricket					51.4	1.3	54.4	0.6	0.0	0.3
Indoor soccer					178.2	42.0	218.8	2.0	0.4	1.2
Jogging / Running		1,363.1		624.0	740.5	624.0	1,363.1	8.1	6.7	7.4
Lawn bowls					129.4	53.2	181.3	1.4	0.6	1.0
Lifesaving					12.5	19.0	28.1	0.1	0.2	0.2
Martial arts					105.6	110.2	220.4	1.2	1.2	1.2
Motor sports					48.4	1.1	49.1	0.5	0.0	0.3
Netball (Indoor and outdoor)	413.8		387.1		25.5	387.1	413.8	0.3	4.1	2.2
Outdoor cricket	219.7		9.7		205.3	9.7	219.7	2.3	0.1	1.2
Outdoor soccer	438.8		118.7		321.3	118.7	438.8	3.5	1.3	2.4

Pilates					10.6	184.9	197.8	0.1	2.0	1.1
Rock climbing / Abseiling / Caving					21.6	8.7	32.4	0.2	0.1	0.2
Rowing					40.3	7.4	44.8	0.4	0.1	0.2
Rugby league	88.1	2.4			81.2	2.4	88.1	0.9	0.0	0.5
Rugby union	96.3	0.0			97.6	0.0	96.3	1.1	0.0	0.5
Sailing					52.4	23.5	71.5	0.6	0.3	0.4
Scuba diving / Snorkelling					42.2	9.0	45.7	0.5	0.1	0.2
Shooting sports					47.8	2.1	56.6	0.5	0.0	0.3
Skateboarding / Inline hockey / Roller sports					30.7	21.7	54.9	0.3	0.2	0.3
Softball / Tee ball	40.7	15.7			22.1	15.7	40.7	0.2	0.2	0.2
Squash / Racquetball					83.8	19.0	104.5	0.9	0.2	0.6
Surf sports					151.4	36.4	196.0	1.7	0.4	1.1
Swimming / Diving					457.3	716.4	1,174.8	5.0	7.6	6.4
Table tennis					27.8	8.8	41.3	0.3	0.1	0.2
Tennis (indoor and outdoor)	563.1	255.5			305.0	255.5	563.1	3.4	2.7	3.0
Tenpin bowling					28.1	16.7	49.0	0.3	0.2	0.3
Trail bike riding					34.7	2.1	41.5	0.4	0.0	0.2
Triathlons					38.2	15.9	58.8	0.4	0.2	0.3
Volleyball (indoor and outdoor)					45.3	54.6	91.9	0.5	0.6	0.5
Walking for exercise		3,544.9	1,152.6	2,319.7	1,233.1	2,319.7	3,544.9	13.6	24.7	19.2
Water polo					6.9	12.3	24.9	0.1	0.1	0.1
Water volleyball / Rafting / Other water sports					14.6	9.9	27.5	0.2	0.1	0.1
Waterskiing / Powerboating					66.1	15.6	88.7	0.7	0.2	0.5
Weight lifting / Powerlifting / Body building					37.7	15.1	52.8	0.4	0.2	0.3
Yoga					38.9	282.7	317.5	0.4	3.0	1.7
	3,013.1	6,522.6	1,152.6	3,496.7						