

A Vision for the Arthurs Seat Parklands

(The Roy Everard Ross Nature Sanctuary and the
Roy Everard Ross Environment Centre)

Prepared by

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Contents

Acknowledgment of Country	3
Caveat	3
Introduction	3
A Brief History	5
Arthurs Seat Parklands Concept	7
Proposal to the Ross Trust	9
Overview	
The Roy Everard Ross Nature Sanctuary	
The Roy Everard Ross Environment Centre	
Community Benefits	
Environmental Benefits	
Tourism Benefits	
Benefits for the Trust	
Implementation Options	
Funding	14
Involvement of Traditional Owners	14
Next Steps	14

Key Sources

Mornington Peninsula National Park and Arthurs Seat State Park Management Plan, May 1998 (Amended 2014 & 2016)

Mornington Peninsula Shire Thematic History, July 2013

Peninsula Preservation Group Inc. Vision Statement for the Old Pioneer Quarry

Mornington Peninsula Localised Planning Statement, July 2014

Strategic Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedges, Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute, June 2021

Acknowledgment of Country

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands that are the subject of this report, the Bunurong people, and pay my most earnest respects to their elders past, present and emerging. I also acknowledge that any new Vision for the lands owned by the Ross Trust will need to be realised through the Trust, the Traditional Owners, Parks Victoria and the local community working together.

Caveat

The content of this report is solely based on the author's assessment of the publically available material relating to this issue, and some documents provided by the Peninsula Preservation Group Inc. It reflects only the views of the author.

Introduction

It is now over 3 years since the Ross Trust, through its quarrying company Hillview Quarries, first sought state government approval to open an old quarry and use, for quarrying and associated infrastructure, up to 58 hectares of land of high environmental quality owned by the Trust and sitting between two sections of the Arthurs Seat State Park on the Mornington Peninsula.

This highly controversial proposal is the subject of an environmental effects study process. This process does not however address, on a fundamental principles basis, whether this new quarry should proceed. Instead it focusses on an assessment to ensure the range of likely adverse effects are sufficiently investigated, in terms of both their extent and significance, and how these significant effects can be avoided and minimised during the construction and operation of the project - were it given approval to proceed.

There is the key matter of the understandable obligations of the Trust to respect the wishes of Roy Everard Ross and the provisions of his will. The Trust is using these obligations, as translated into its current business model which has operated for almost 50 years, to underpin its case for the new quarry.

The current business model sees the Trust operate a quarry for the primary purpose of fulfilling its responsibilities under Mr Ross's will by generating income in perpetuity to be distributed for charitable purposes. The Trust claims that this philanthropic model was and is unique to this day. It is more the case that this is a classic model that has been used since the 1800's whereby industrialists would generate great wealth from business practices that would not be tolerated today, and then use this wealth to do 'good works'.

The Trust's reliance on this old fashioned 'virtuous circle', whereby it is seeking community licence for another 50 plus years of environmental destruction in order that it can continue to hand out funds for environmental good works elsewhere, is no longer defensible on any grounds. It also begs the question that, when the next lot of rock runs out, what does the Trust do then?

The world has moved on. It is important for the Trust to go back to the values of its benefactor and ask itself, 'what would Mr Ross want if he were alive today?' Would he be able to reconcile the Trust's Mission to 'enhance biodiversity for the sustainability of Victoria's native flora, fauna and ecosystems' with a plan to remove one of the most significant areas of remnant vegetation left in Melbourne?

There is another way forward for the Trust. It can work with the Traditional Owners, the local community, Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning to establish the Roy Everard Ross Nature Sanctuary and the Roy Everard Ross Environment Centre.

The Sanctuary and the Environment Centre would be true perpetual legacies for Mr. Ross, and an enduring tribute to his contribution to the Victorian community.

The Roy Everard Ross Nature Sanctuary would protect key remnant bushland, be a safe haven for endangered wildlife, a showcase for conservation best practice and, importantly, a place to celebrate the spiritual meaning and use of this land by its Traditional Owners. Its establishment and the restoration of the old Pioneer quarry site would bring together Traditional Owners, the local community, the State government and the Trust in a true coalition to realise this new vision. The new Sanctuary would be distinct but integrated ecologically with the surrounding State Park and other nearby open spaces, creating a major parklands and ecological corridor.

To achieve this we have wonderful examples to follow, such as in the Phillip Island Nature Park, where the local community and the State government came together in 1985 to realise a vision to save critical habitat and the penguin colony by the government purchase and removal of a large housing estate for new parkland at a cost of over \$40 million. Closer to home, in 1975 the State government purchased 500 hectares of habitat from the Green family and in 1986 a public appeal was launched by the Victorian Conservation Trust to buy the remaining area. Over \$1.3 million was raised and this precious habitat is now part of the Mornington Peninsula National Park.

The Trust is very supportive of the role that sanctuaries can play in species protection and reintroduction: it has recently made a substantial donation of \$200,000 to the Odonata Foundation for its Orana Sanctuary outside Bendigo. A few years earlier the Trust made a very substantial loan to assist in the establishment of a wildlife sanctuary ('Wildlife Wonders') in the Otways near Apollo Bay. Designed to be hidden from view, 1.4 km of fencing encloses an area of more than 12 hectares, creating a safe haven for the bandicoots, potoroos, koalas and other native species who live here, protected from the feral predators, cats and foxes, which would otherwise prey upon them.

The Roy Everard Ross Environment Centre would be established on the current Hillview quarry site at the cessation of extraction activities. It would be a base for a range of low-key ecotourism and nature based activities for visitors to enjoy, to understand the environmental values of the surrounding State Park, and the role of the sanctuary.

Again the Trust has been very supportive of this type of centre elsewhere. It provided \$500,000 to establish the Conservation Ecology Centre (part of 'Wildlife Wonders') in the Otways. This centre, which is now operating, is a striking parallel to what the Trust

could achieve on its own land at the 'Hillview' quarry site and by linking trails into the adjoining State Park. It provides eco-lodge accommodation, guided nature walks and a range of interpretive experiences.

A Brief History

As with the rest of Victoria, the Mornington Peninsula was subject to the major impacts of European settlement, with widespread farming, followed by intense urban development, quarrying and other activities.

Grazing licenses, pastoral leases and freehold land sales saw a dramatic reduction in indigenous tree cover and species diversity. Selectors cleared their blocks for agriculture, sometimes selling the timber, sometimes burning it.

The attractive peninsula became a favoured place for the wealthy to establish holiday homes, and the inter-war period saw a marked growth in residential estates. This continued post WW2.

By the mid 1800's, in a community reaction to this loss of environmental integrity, the push to protect the remaining areas of ecological value in Victoria began. On the Mornington Peninsula the few remaining areas were centred along the coast and along the Arthur's Seat escarpment. Land in the Arthurs Seat area was first reserved for public purposes in 1863.

The first country to encircle a remarkable, beautiful and important tract of land in a protective embrace was the United States of America, with the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872.

Australia followed suit with the Royal National Park near Sydney in 1879. Victoria, always progressively minded, reserved a small area at Fern Tree Gully in 1882, and then Wilsons Promontory and Mt Buffalo, our first 'real' national parks, in 1898.

The declaration of other areas followed, but prior to WW2 they enjoyed little protection.

Given the growing concern with the impacts of further residential development and quarrying, the State government moved in 1978 to establish the Nepean State Park, which included the northern section of Greens Bush and most of what is now Arthurs Seat State Park (established in 1998). Between 1978 and 1987 several additions were made to the State Park.

Arthurs Seat State Park embraces the western and northern escarpments of Arthurs Seat, a prominent landmark on the Mornington Peninsula, and one of the few remaining areas of natural significance. The vegetation on the Arthurs Seat escarpment comprises one of only 2 large remaining areas of natural vegetation on the peninsula, the other being Greens Bush.

The Land Conservation Council review in 1994 recommended a number of further additions to Arthurs Seat State Park. Most of these areas (including the Arthurs Seat Public Park and the Parkdale block) were proclaimed as part of the Park in June 1997. The McKellar Flora Reserve area also became part of the park. This left the two big

gaps in the parklands chain, being the major properties owned by the Ross Trust.

In May 1998 the Mornington Peninsula National Park and Arthurs Seat State Park Management Plan was approved to guide the protection and management of these parks.

This plan highlighted the need to:

- Recognize the contribution of the Traditional Owners.
- Maintain and enhance the ecological corridors that connect the Parks and to the parks.
- Re-establish indigenous vegetation communities in disturbed areas by addressing natural regeneration processes, and by active planting.
- Protect the parks' vital role in fauna conservation.
- Develop a northern escarpment walk, subject to negotiation with the Ross Trust, as part of a proposed long distance walking track network on the Mornington Peninsula.

In particular the report noted:

'There may be an opportunity to establish future walking track links between separated parcels of (Arthurs Seat State) Park in these areas through potential additions to the Park or negotiated agreement with the Ross Trust. The recent addition of the former Arthurs Seat Public Park, McKellar Flora Reserve area, Tower Hill Road link and the Parkdale Estate area have joined the major portions of public land parcels on Arthurs Seat to form a consolidated State Park.'

One of the key actions in the plan was to:

'Liaise with the Ross Trust regarding potential additions to the Park to link separate areas on the northern escarpment.'

This did not proceed, and there was no will at the time for the government to compulsorily acquire these critical land holdings to complete the park.

The Peninsula Preservation Group Inc. released its 'Vision Statement for the 'Old Pioneer Quarry' owned by the Ross Trust, covering the private land constituting one of the two key gaps in the park chain.

'We call on the MPSC (the Shire Council) and the State and Federal Governments to work together to acquire the site and incorporate it into the surrounding state park. This will protect the site from future inappropriate development and enhance the Arthurs Seat State Park. The local community has shown a willingness to act to protect this site and would assist in an improved model of both fire and conservation management on the site. The acquisition and rehabilitation of the quarry has the potential to form a spectacular centrepiece to the Arthurs Seat State Park and a tourist attraction for the whole peninsula.' (Peninsula Preservation Group Inc.).

The Mornington Peninsula Landcare Network has undertaken a large amount of work in promoting the importance of protecting and reinstating key biolinks across the Peninsula. The Arthurs Seat parklands chain is a key biolink in itself and links to a number of other vital biolinks. The Ross Trust properties are pivotal in maintaining this biolink in perpetuity.

At a statewide and national scale there has been a growing recognition over the last 20 years of the importance of prioritizing the protection and retention of existing remnant bushland areas, particularly those within a broader biolink, against the investment in damaged habitat restoration which has mixed success and is incredibly costly. The opportunity is here with the Ross Trust properties to do just that.

Arthurs Seat Parklands Concept

The vision starts with the Arthurs Seat Parklands; a parklands chain including the State Park and all of the Ross Trust properties in one integrated bio-link offering enhanced ecological and tourism outcomes; to be managed in partnership with the Traditional Owners.

The only way that this vision can be realised and this parkland to be protected for all time will be to bring all of the Ross Trust properties into public ownership as Crown Land. This could commence with the Pioneer site and the other Trust properties, and be followed by the 'Hillview' site at the completion of rock extraction activities.

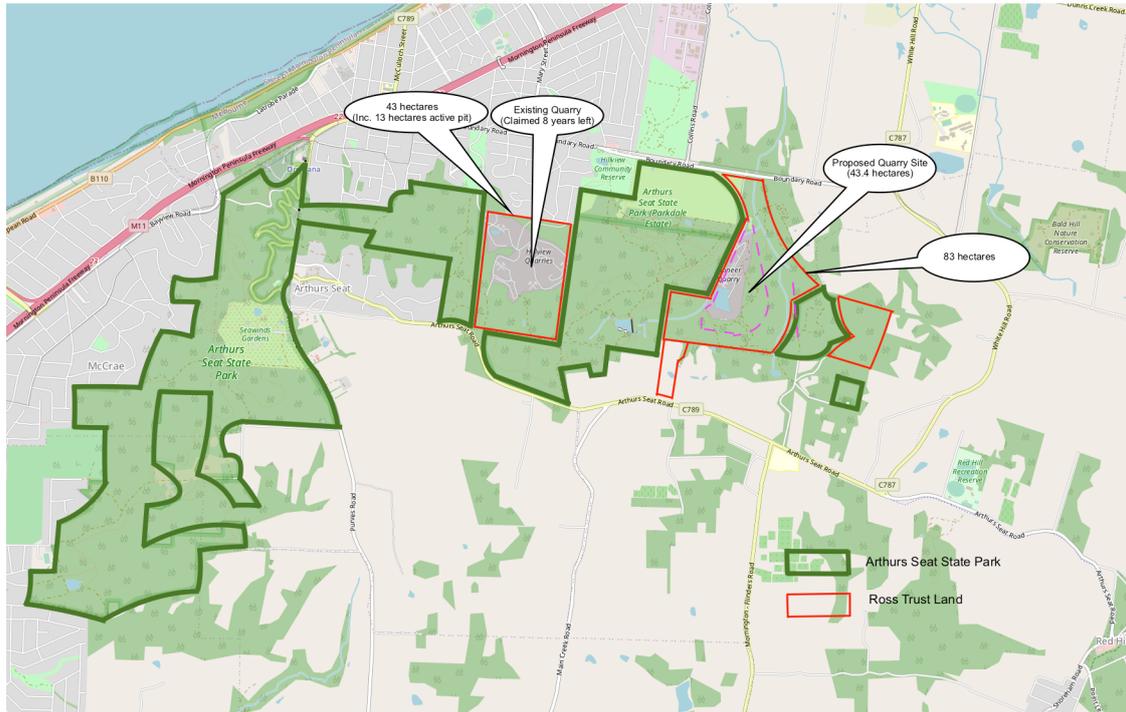
Map 1 shows the extent of the remnant vegetation across Arthur's Seat and how critical all of the Trust properties are to the integrity of the bio-link. The reopening and expansion of the Pioneer quarry (the scar to the east of the large quarry site) would significantly damage the bio-link and involve the loss of priceless existing habitat. This also demonstrates just how critical it will be to effectively rehabilitate the main Hillview quarry site at the cessation of rock extraction within the next decade.

Map 1: Extent of remnant vegetation across Arthurs Seat



Map 2 shows the two main sites (86 hectares) owned by the Ross Trust and how critical this land is to complete the parklands chain. It also shows other properties owned by the Trust, which would also play a significant role in habitat protection and restoration.

Map 2: Ross Trust properties are a critical part of the Parklands Chain



Map 3 shows the existing bio-links. There has been a major effort by local conservation groups to preserve and protect these critical links across the Mornington Peninsula.

Map 3: Key existing Bio-Links



Proposal to the Ross Trust

Overview

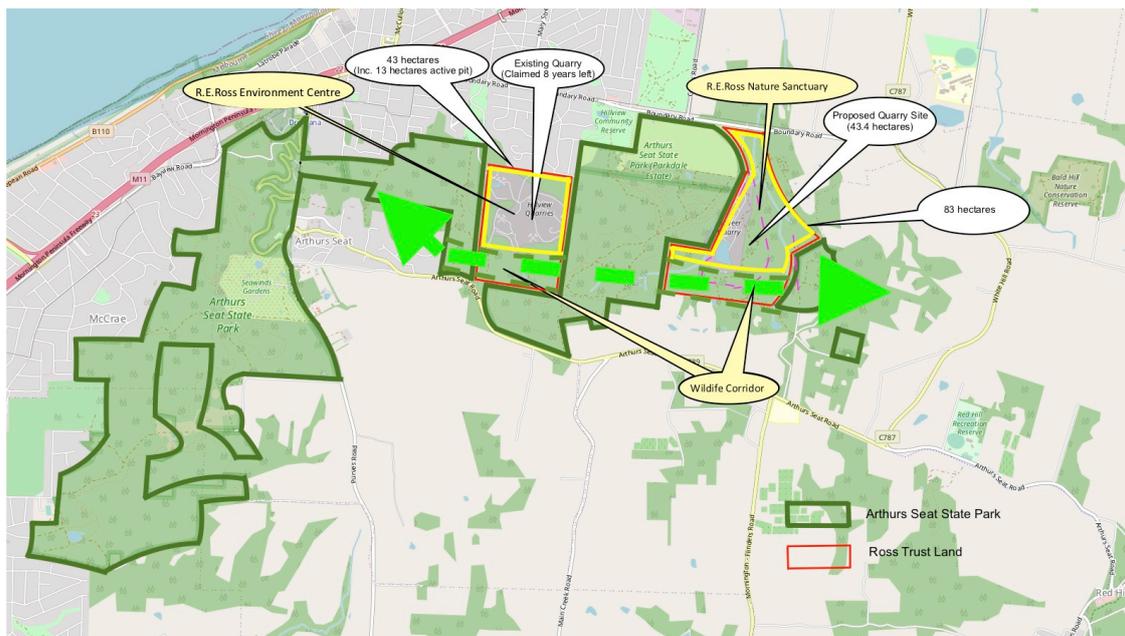
Within the overall vision for the Arthur's Seat parklands chain, it is proposed that the Trust would establish over time two key permanent legacies for Roy Everard Ross:

- A Nature Sanctuary on the old 'Pioneer' quarry site and the surrounding bushland (115, 121 Boundary Rd), within the next 3 years.
- An Environment Centre on the Hillview quarry site, within the next 10 years.

Other Trust land at 30 Lookout Hill Road and 450 Arthurs Seat Road would be incorporated in Arthurs Seat State Park as soon as possible. The option to include the proposed sanctuary in the Arthurs Seat State Park should also be considered.

Map 4 shows the proposed locations for the Nature Sanctuary and the Environment Centre.

Map 4: Locations of the R.E.Ross Environment Centre and R. E. Ross Nature Sanctuary



This will ensure that all of the remnant bushland is protected for all time and is managed to remove introduced species, and the two quarry sites are fully rehabilitated.

Work on the Pioneer site restoration and establishment of the sanctuary could start immediately. The restoration of the Hillview quarry and establishment of the environment centre would be completed in 8-10 years time at the completion of quarrying activities.

Planning for and the realisation of these two new environmental assets would be achieved through a cooperative process involving the Trust, the Traditional Owners,

Parks Victoria and key local community groups, to build a ground-swell of support and commitment. The agreed implementation and funding strategy could be finalised in time for submission to the State and Federal governments before the upcoming elections.

The Roy Everard Ross Nature Sanctuary

The Roy Everard Ross Nature Sanctuary would be a safe haven for endangered wildlife, a showcase for conservation best practice and, importantly, a place to celebrate the spiritual meaning and use of this land by the Traditional Owners (Map 5). It would offer the opportunity to reintroduce the near threatened Tiger Quoll and protect the endangered Southern Brown Bandicoot, which is nearing extinction on the Peninsula.

Map 5: R.E.Ross Environment Centre and R. E. Ross Nature Sanctuary



The sanctuary would be around 65 hectares in size. This would allow for a nature wildlife corridor to pass through the Trust land immediately to the south of the sanctuary and link to the Trust land in the east.

A predator proof fence would enclose the sanctuary, with public access limited to occasional guided walks.

The sanctuary would play a key role in habitat and species protection, while also being used for the release of key threatened species. It would form part of a network of predator free areas being established across Australia.

Before the sanctuary could be established, the Trust would need to undertake a full rehabilitation of the old quarry site, including the removal of non-indigenous tree and plant species (including those that have migrated into the state park). Careful planning would also need to be undertaken for a permanent body of water in the old quarry.

The Roy Everard Ross Environment Centre

The Roy Everard Ross Environment Centre would be based on the current Hillview quarry site and would be established at the cessation of quarrying activities and the removal of all quarrying infrastructure from the land. To ensure funding and a successful outcome planning should start now. (Map 5).

The Centre would consist of:

- A Traditional Owner cultural history interpretive space.
- A Roy Everard Ross profile space.
- A Forest Therapy Facility
- Eco-accommodation Pods
- Walking & Nature Therapy trails into the surrounding State Park
- Environmental and cultural education programs for the community.

Before the Centre could be established the Trust would rehabilitate the site and plan for a permanent body of water in the decommissioned quarry.

There are many examples around the world of successful quarry and habitat restoration projects.

For example, Hornsby Quarry in NSW operated from 1959 to 2003. Although the quarry had reserves sufficient to last until 2020, community pressure saw the Hornsby Shire Council compulsorily acquire the Hornsby Quarry and develop a master plan for its restoration. After a long period the Council adopted the master plan, which includes the protection of 60 hectares of surrounding bushland.

While the scale of the Roy Everard Ross Environment Centre would need to be modest to protect environmental values in the surrounding State Park and recognizing access is via quiet residential streets, the opportunity is there to work with the community to create something of world significance.

Forest therapy, forest bathing and nature-connection walks are part of a booming worldwide eco-tourism trend. Forest Therapy is an evidence-based, effective and economically valuable public health practice. For Victoria and Australia it constitutes an increasingly important aspect of health tourism. This would also complement other wellness experiences on the Mornington Peninsula.

This Centre would play a key role in slowing down the trip to the Mornington Peninsula helping both Melbournians and tourists connect with the area, extending their stay and spend. The Global Wellness Institute estimates wellness tourism is a \$639 billion global market, growing twice as fast as general tourism, with Australia in the top five wellness tourism markets in the Asia Pacific.

Community Benefits

The community health benefits of a cessation of all quarrying activities will be substantial. The proposed environment centre will add another significant community health bonus through the therapeutic power of nature-based experiences.

The community will also have access to a larger State Park with an enhanced network of walking trails.

Environmental Benefits

The environmental benefits of these proposals are substantial, starting with the value of protecting all of the Arthurs Seat remnant bushland areas in one critical bio-link. The proposed sanctuary site alone will protect over 30 hectares of native vegetation, in the heart of one of only two substantial contiguous areas of intact native vegetation remaining on the Mornington Peninsula, and at least 28 endangered species, with six listed under the Federal Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, including the Swift Parrot.

The site is also an important koala habitat and breeding ground and will materially help to ensure their survival in the southern Peninsula. It also contains what is likely to be the oldest eucalyptus trees on the Peninsula, there before European settlement and providing important nesting locations for the threatened Powerful Owl. It also has many native orchids and is rich in fungi.

Tourism Benefits

These proposals will materially assist in branding the Mornington Peninsula as a destination for eco-tourism and wellness. In 2019-20, tourism was estimated to be worth \$888 million to this region's economy.

The direct and indirect ongoing tourism jobs generated will well exceed the job losses associated with the inevitable cessation of quarrying activities.

The negative impacts of quarrying on the visitor perception of the Peninsula will be gone.

Benefits for the Trust

There are very significant benefits for the Trust in these proposals.

First and foremost, the Trust will honour both the spirit and the provisions of the will and wishes of Roy Everard Ross by establishing two permanent legacies in his name for the benefit of all Australians. There can be few finer memorials than something that protects our environment for all time.

Agreement by the Trust to implement these proposals will also begin to restore its standing with donor recipients and the wider community. As the full implications of the Trust's current proposals become known more broadly there will be even more environmental and community groups who will refuse to accept funds from the Trust. Instead, this proposal will allow the Trust to get back to focussing on its good work with the community.

With the lead-time for the cessation of rock extraction the Trust has ample time to address in a respectful way the phasing out of the jobs of the current employees of Hillview Quarries.

Implementation Options

There are a number of ways in which this Vision could be realised that can be worked through with the Trust and the State government.

Option 1

The Trust sells all of its land to the Crown, on condition that it is included in the Arthurs Seat State Park managed by Parks Victoria, and that the State government commits to the establishment of the Roy Everard Ross Nature Sanctuary and the Roy Everard Ross Environment Centre.

Pros

- Parkland secured for all time.
- Ross Trust reputation significantly enhanced.
- Costs of management are with the state government (Parks Victoria).
- One integrated management model for the State Park.
- Parks Victoria is a leader in park joint management with Traditional Owners

Cons

- No ongoing involvement by the Trust.
- Possible lack of funding for the two proposals.
- Possibly less recognition of Roy Ross's contribution.
- Possible significant limitations on eco-tourism development in a State Park.

Option 2

The Trust progressively transfers all of its land to the Crown to be incorporated as Crown Land, on the condition that Trust is appointed as the Committee of Management over the sites for the Roy Everard Ross Nature Sanctuary and the Roy Everard Ross Environment Centre.

Pros

- Parkland secured for all time
- Ross Trust reputation significantly enhanced
- High profile memorial sanctuary and environment centre for Roy Ross established
- More flexibility to develop eco- tourism opportunities and new jobs.
- Key ongoing environmental management role for the Trust

Cons

- No financial compensation for the Ross Trust (noting the possibility of negotiating a financial contribution from the State government).
- Park management not 'core business' for the Trust.
- Less community engagement and buy-in to the new vision

Option 3

The Trust transfers all of its land to the Crown to be incorporated as Crown Land, on the condition that the government appoints a Committee of Management over the two

main sites with Trust, Traditional Owner, local community representation, and an independent Chair. The Committee oversees the development of the two facilities; in partnership with the Trust.

Pros

- Parkland secured for all time
- Ross Trust reputation significantly enhanced.
- High profile memorial sanctuary and environment centre for Roy Ross established
- More community engagement and buy-in
- Government financial support for the CoM.

Cons

- No financial compensation for the Ross Trust (noting the possibility of negotiating a financial contribution from the State government).

Funding

The Trust is or should be obligated to fund, at a minimum, the restoration of the two quarry sites, the removal of all built infrastructure, and the removal of any non-indigenous plant species introduced from the quarry sites into the adjoining State Park.

There are a range of funding options to fully realise this vision that would need to be explored with the Trust and the State government.

In principle, the public of Victoria should contribute to securing the Trust land holdings for all time in public ownership.

It would be a great outcome if the Trust was prepared to commit substantial funds to realise the proposed memorial projects for Roy Everard Ross, the Roy Everard Ross Nature Sanctuary and the Roy Everard Ross Environment Centre. With a commitment from the Trust other grant funds would become available.

Involvement of Traditional Owners

An early step would be entering into a respectful dialogue with the Traditional Owners on the process to be followed to realise this Vision.

Next Steps

It is respectfully requested that the Trust carefully consider the proposals outlined in this report and give its support-in-principle to:

- Abandoning the 'Pioneer' proposal.
- All of the Trust owned land ultimately becoming Crown land.
- A permanent environmental memorial to Roy Everard Ross being established, based around the two former quarry sites.

A process could then be agreed and entered into to develop a detailed master plan for all of the Trust land holdings. This process would involve a taskforce with the Trust, the local community, Traditional Owner and government representatives; and a high profile independent chair. Funding to support a 12 months process to deliver a master plan would be sought from the state government.

With good will and commitment the Trust can honour its benefactor in a way that will benefit the broader community, and leave an environmental legacy for all time.

This Vision can be realised and I urge the Trustees of the Ross Trust to show the way and agree to enter into a cooperative process with all parties to achieve this outcome.

I am happy to assist in any way I can.

Adjunct Professor Jeff Floyd

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Former Chair Parks Victoria
Former Chair Phillip Island Nature Parks
Former CEO Parks Victoria
Former CEO Melbourne Parks & Waterways
Former CEO Tourism Victoria
Former City Planner City of Melbourne

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