

MEDIA RELEASE

Perth Waterfront

Dr Lise Summers, President of the History Council of Western Australia, is one of the City Gatekeepers and is concerned that the Perth Waterfront Development is proceeding without a full recognition of the impact on one of the State's oldest recreational sites.

Dr Summers said, "The Perth Esplanade and associated buildings are permanent entries on the State Heritage Register. The Heritage Council of Western Australia advises that 'Entry in the State Register recognises a place's value and importance to Western Australia and helps ensure that it is conserved into the future.' (<http://www.heritage.wa.gov.au/the-state-register.html>). However, there appears to have been little or no consideration of the site's heritage when the scheme was developed, nor have the risks to the site been adequately addressed in the Metropolitan Region Scheme Amendments report."

As a registered heritage site, best practice would be to include the Esplanade into the development and it is a pity that heritage considerations appear to have been included at the end of the project, rather than in the original brief for the site. Adaptive re-use and the development of additional public recreation facilities, such as a new gym or re-instatement of elements such as the tennis courts, perhaps with volleyball courts and skateboarding facilities, another cafe and an interpretation centre or City museum, would also have been appropriate. Only when all other alternatives have been considered should a heritage site be demolished. While the fate of the associated kiosk is being discussed, little attention appears to have been paid to the documenting the whole site as it is dug up.

Historical archaeologist, Gaye Nayton, has identified that the site, if properly excavated, has the potential to tell us much about the early history of commerce and transportation of the colony. A prehistory archaeology investigation is in place, but no historical archaeologist has been employed, consequently understandings of the area as an archaeological site is currently limited to its Aboriginal connection. The site of the Esplanade was situated between two of the City's major jetties, at Barrack Street and William Street. The archaeological evidence of these two jetties exists under the Esplanade, as they were probably used as retaining walls for the fill. Not only can we expect to find the jetties, but we can also expect to find items lost overboard from the barges coming up the river, or dropped from the jetties. Similarly, there will be an archaeological footprint from the Perth Bathing pavilion, built in 1885, which extended from the Esplanade into the river. There may even be remnants of the 1920s 'White City' site at the end of William Street, where charities ran 'spinning jenny' lotteries, and Aboriginal and European boxers and rodeo riders competed. However, it has not been possible to identify how much of the site will be demolished, nor if any further reclamation is required for the island, cable car and Indigenous cultural centre sites which may further affect archaeological research.

The Perth Esplanade is a major historical site. It is also reclaimed land. This does not negate its importance, but contributes to it. A lack of transparency and accountability may seriously affect our ability to document it and interpret it properly.

As a site of State heritage the Esplanade should be conserved and interpreted, providing a continuing focus and unique identity for the city and the State.

www.historycouncilwa.org.au

PO Box 1619

West Perth WA 6872

ABN 8338 3850 795

Email: office@historycouncilwa.org.au