

The Quarantine Station

A Public Treasure

In an astonishing and controversial move the Victorian Government is proposing to grant a long lease for commercial purposes over much of the iconic national heritage area of the Quarantine Station and its buffer zone of hitherto protected native bushland.

The Quarantine Station is a very important and large area of public land which has great and recognised historical significance, and is much loved by Melburnians and other visitors in its present form. After the Defence Department decided to vacate Point Nepean completely there was a period of extensive community consultation, the Commonwealth gifted the land to Victoria, with the purpose of creating the Point Nepean National Park with an overriding respect for the natural and built heritage of the site. The Prime Minister and the Treasurer made clear the Commonwealth's intention that there would be no private development, and gave funds for remediation and infrastructure works. The last tranche of the land, the 90 hectares of the Quarantine Station, was transferred to Victoria in 2009, and was duly embedded into the National Park. The Park has been attracting over 50,000 visitors a year since being re-opened to the public after 150 years of serving the quarantine and military needs of the Commonwealth.

The present leasing proposal is to enable the development of a luxury resort, driven by the high-yield profit requirements of a private company which would hold a lease for up to 99 years.

The Nepean Historical Society has many concerns about the present proposal, especially the likely impact on continuing preservation of heritage at the site. Despite the expressions of intent by Government Ministers and other spokesmen that an appropriate balance will be found for education, research, museum services and interpretation - as against the tourist resort requirements driving the plans of the preferred developer - there is no satisfactory detail on these matters. It is an extraordinary proposition that these matters will be attended to **AFTER** the lease is finalised, and signed, and after a Special Use Zone is declared over the area in order to bypass both proper planning controls and opportunities for public consultation as the scheme unfolds.

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