

# **SAPIENS**

**Newsletter of Save Albert Park Inc. No. A00409971X**

**Issue 298**

**June-July 2021**



The grand prix casts a pall over the park. We are to be spared this fate until next year (or whenever)

**The grand prix uncertainties** Six months ago it was evident that because of the current pandemic, a grand prix in November was unlikely. The proposed date, November 18-21 was to follow only two weeks after the grand prix in Brazil, which has one of the highest rates coronavirus infections in the world. Cancelling the event six months ago would have been realistic and sensible, but the decision to cancel was only made on July 7. The state government has blamed Canberra for a 'slower than forecast rollout of the Commonwealth vaccination program and subsequent caps to the international traveller intake.'

**Now there is uncertainty about the 2022 grand prix.** The latest news is that the much valued season opening race in March has been lost and the next Australian grand prix will be in April. This would be create major problems for the sports clubs based in the park. We understand that the Grand Prix Corporation has not consulted with sports clubs on the matter.

**Break the race contract?** It would be realistic and sensible for the state government to take advantage of the coronavirus pandemic to negotiate the breaking of its race contract with Formula 1, currently running to 2025. It might be able to claim 'force majeure' circumstances and walk away at little or no cost, and the money saved (\$60m annually) could be used for really needed government services. Of course, having just spent over \$20 million on the Albert Park race track to increase speed and spectator thrills, the government might not want to see this money and all the associated consultation with Formula 1 go to waste.

**A permanent circuit ?** Over the past 26 years SAP has argued that if a grand prix race is to be held in Victoria it should be staged in a properly located permanent circuit. Such a circuit (ideally privately owned and operated) which offered year-round motor sport and other motoring activities, could readily cope with race date changes and even offer more races. The cost of the set-up and take down of the temporary Albert Park circuit is now around \$34m and since the first race in 1996, over \$600m of public funds has been spent on this annual disruptive and environmentally damaging activity. A permanent circuit could have been built years ago for far less than that. (A recent 'Letter to the Editor' in *The Age* made such a proposal regarding a site at Aval

For

**Another uncertainty ..... how many people go to the grand prix?**The AGPC's annual report for 2019 stated: *'The event was strongly supported by Melburnians as well as visitors from regional Victoria, interstate and overseas, the estimated attendance being 324,100 across the four days'*. This is a carefully crafted sentence, but it is totally misleading. This is what it really means:

The AGPC has estimated (not counted at the gates) attendances on each of the four days (using a closely guarded secret method) and has added the numbers together to get the total. Some patrons have bought multi-day tickets and attended on several days but repeat attendances have been assumed by the AGPC to represent separate attendees. Thus a 3-day ticket has been taken to represent three separate attendees. Also added as attendees each day were people who have a job to do, event staff, caterers, officials, competitors, media, etc, plus free ticket holders.. These people are called 'accreditations'.

In reply to a recent freedom-of-information request from SAP seeking the numbers of tickets sold for the 2019 event, the AGPC supplied the following numbers:

Corporate - 30,453, Grandstands - 85,104, General Admission – 144,543; total 260,100 tickets.

The AGPC stated that this total did not include 'accreditations', so the 64,000 difference between the tickets sold and the AGPC's 324,100 attendance estimate must represent the number of accreditations, ie, about 16,000 per day.

Further examination of the 'tickets sold' figures supplied by the AGPC indicated that the numbers were far too high to match the AGPC's audited ticket sales revenue of \$38.7m. This confirmed that the AGPC's tickets sold numbers represented attendances not tickets. Some basic arithmetic and reliable information regarding ticket usage rates indicated that the actual number of people who held tickets to attend the 2019 grand prix (the real patronage) was only around 100,000 or even less.

**The AGPC's 324,000 attendance claim was clearly intended to mislead the Victorian public and decision makers as to the popularity and acceptance of the grand prix event, despite the huge operating losses. It is SAP's job to ensure they don't get away with it. The claims of massive economic benefit and the hundreds of millions watching the race on TV are heard no more, thanks to SAP. The AGPC's 'estimated attendance' figures will go the same way.**

## **Our double standard state government**

Victoria has a government with two apparent standards; it has one for the state's 'beloved green spaces' and for climate change and zero emissions, and a totally different standard regarding the grand prix. The Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Lily D'Ambrosio put out a media release on July 3 announcing that \$14.22 m will be spent on improving Melbourne's parks and reserves. The Minister was quoted as saying *"Victoria's parks and reserves have become more important during the pandemic as a place for people to escape to..... the funding will help to ensure they are properly maintained and continue to be treasured."*

Back in May, Minister D'Ambrosio issued a media release headed 'Driving towards a zero emissions vehicle future' which announced a \$3000 subsidy for new Zero Emissions Vehicles (ZEVs). 'An unprecedented \$100m package will make ZEVs more affordable, building charging infrastructure and achieve more ZEV's in government and commercial fleets'. She was quoted as follows: *"Our transport sector is a significant contributor to our emissions. This package of reform makes cars the vehicle for change, by getting more zero emissions vehicles on our roads."*

**These policy announcements are in total contradiction to the government's commitment to the staging of a high emission car race event in a temporary circuit in Albert Park Reserve, with all that this entails (including 66,000 km of heavy truck travel) and the recent spending of \$20m to widen the park road circuit to allow increased racing speed.**

**The need for noise** Since 2014, F1 cars have used 1.6 litre V6 engines. The noise emitted by these engines has been criticised by race fans as it appears the noise is part of the enjoyment of the racing. One spectator has been quoted as saying : “*My main request for an engine are: terrifying, guttural and aggressive, with a spoonful of backfire.*” The cockpit of an F1 car is supposed to be the noisiest place on earth, reaching 140 decibels. Spectators are urged to wear earplugs to protect their hearing , but this of course will reduce their enjoyment of the sound.

In a bid to improve/increase the sound of the cars, for 2021 a higher engine speed has been allowed. This follows the introduction in 2016 of a separate exhaust wastegate tailpipe. This was intended to increase engine noise by 25%. Apparently, this did not fully satisfy the fans.

(Ref. [therace.com/formula 1/engine noise](https://www.therace.com/formula-1/engine-noise), Dec. 13, 2020)

### It's all about money

With international flight numbers being halved from July 14, there is some doubt as to whether the Formula One grand prix can go ahead in November in Melbourne. But apparently flights for grand prix personnel would be exempted from these caps ("State to rule on grand prix as bosses seek green light", *The Age*, 5/7).

This beggars belief. So racing car drivers and their cohorts are more important than Australian citizens stranded for months overseas? Just where exactly do our government's priorities lie?

Oh, I forgot. It's all about money, not compassion for people wanting to return home.

Apparently if the race does not run again this year, Melbourne could lose the event to another state.

Hurray. Sounds like a great outcome to me and many other Melburnians.

Joy Hayman, Blackburn North

### What now for our city?

What a week it has been for two Jeff Kennett-era institutions in Melbourne. Crown Resorts is taking a battering before Victoria's royal commission. The postponed grand prix has now been cancelled. It is time for a collective sigh of relief and for some social introspection into how we want our city to grow over the next three decades.

Who would want to be defined by a gambling monopoly that preys on the vulnerable and a car race that closes down inner-city suburbs for extreme carbon emissions to enrich a few oligarchs? Mr Kennett has moved on into obsessing about his football team, and I think we should move on too.

Gabriel Dabscheck, Elsternwick

### The grand prix silver lining

These ghastly COVID times do bring blessings. I and hundreds of others have been able to walk our dogs, stroll and picnic with our families and ride around and through Albert Park Reserve, unimpeded by Melbourne grand Prix construction and infrastructure. When the construction carnival begins again next January, we will have enjoyed the park as parkland for more than 18 months. Sheer joy.

And Victorians could continue to enjoy it for 12 months every year if the sensible decision were made to move the whole event to a permanent facility at, say, Avalon.

Motor enthusiasts could enjoy year-round facilities, recreational and sporting users of the park could relish this oasis year-round, and Victorians generally could look forward to an event that contributes to the state's coffers.

Instead, we have a three-day event that takes four months to set up and dismantle, taking over public parkland, closing commuter routes and schools, disrupting life in inner Melbourne and requiring millions of dollars of taxpayers' money every year.

All it takes is political will.

David Myer, South Melbourne

### There is little public interest in Formula 1 races

Now that the 2020 and 2021 Melbourne F1 grands prix have been cancelled, I suggest that it is time for the Andrews government to pull the plug on the race in future. If accurate attendance figures were published by the government, I am sure they would show a decline over recent years, testimony to an accelerating lack of interest in the event. The novelty has long since worn off. Given that the cost to the Victorian taxpayer and the improper use of a public park for the event, it would be a no-brainer to cancel future F1 races.

John Christiansen, St Kilda

### For our health and safety, ban all large events

Well said, Joy Hayman (*Letters*, 6/7). I too was astonished that the Victorian government had even contemplated going ahead with the Formula 1 grand prix, including the possibility of flights for this being exempted from planned arrival caps. If it had gone ahead, it would have been another illustration that multimillion-dollar events, such as this and the Tokyo Olympics, with profits for the few, were a higher priority than the health and welfare of the majority.

We can do better. In Victoria we have only just come out of lockdown, with no new COVID cases. To help keep it that way and for the foreseeable future, we need to ban large events, with their inherent COVID-spreading risks.

Rita Thorpe,  
Coburg

### Focus on vehicles using renewable fuel sources

It is time that Victoria stopped supporting a dinosaur sport that glorifies the smelly, dirty, polluting fossil fuel industry anyway. The grand prix originally began to further advancements in vehicle and combustion engine technology all those years ago. How about we now initiate a similar competition for vehicles using renewable fuel sources? It could be an even bigger drawcard and money spinner.

Wayne Peterken, Berwick

### Taxpayers have so much money with GP cancellation

Great news. Melbourne to be spared the grand prix for another year. Perhaps Melburnians will be allowed their park back. And think of the taxpayers' money saved. What does it cost us? One hundred million dollars a year? What shall we spend it on?

David Cunningham, Castlemaine

### ... is someone else's gain

I have been cursing our vaccine hesitancy and inefficiency, and our fixation upon the potential of AstraZeneca to kill one person in a million while we overlook its major role in reducing the COVID-19 death rate in the United Kingdom from 500 a week to 20 a week.

But I reflected - when I heard about the further cancellation of the grand prix - that it is an ill wind that does not blow some good to someone, somewhere, somehow.

Colin Smith, Glen Waverley

### Formula One

Forget the Formula One grand prix in November; think of the money we'll save.

Geoff Schmidt, Richmond

'Letters to the Editor', *The Age*, July 6-12, 2021, in response to the cancellation of the November grand prix.

**‘Noughts and crosses’** While SAP was pleased to see the crop of letters in *The Age* reproduced in the previous page, we also noted the misinformation published by the paper on July 10 in the article *‘Noughts and crosses: can Melbourne survive postponing its major events?’*, by Richard Baker. The article was accompanied by a box headed ‘Victoria’s major Events Calendar’ which included the following statements concerning the grand prix:

- \* Poached from South Australia in 1996 by the then Victorian premier, Jeff Kennett
- \* Victoria pays \$20 million licence fee to host
- \* \$40 million economic value in 2011
- \* 324,000 attendees in 2019
- \* Melbourne hotel occupancy rate of 94%

It was appropriate to remind us that it was Jeff Kennett who inflicted the grand prix on Victoria (together with the casino, now the subject of intense scrutiny) but SAP had to write to tell *The Age* that the race licence fee was at least \$40 million, that ‘economic value was a meaningless term and that the loss on the 2011 grand prix was nearly \$52 million, that the 324,000 attendees in 2019 included up to 16,000 per day of event staff, competitors, free ticket holders etc, and that hotel occupancy rates for the March quarter showed little or no boost from the grand prix. Our letter was not published.



This recent photo shows the area close to the entrance to the park at St Kilda junction, directly opposite the ‘Albert Park Native Bushland Restoration’ area. It is the site of a project undertaken by the SAP’s park volunteer group to create a welcoming garden setting alongside the much used path leading to Lakeside Drive. The SAP group was provided with a grant of \$3500 as part of Port Phillip’s ‘Love My Place’ grant program to carry out the project. A watering system has been established and hundreds of small trees, shrubs and wildflowers have been planted and are progressing well. A high quality bench seat (to the right of the tree) was provided as part of the project.

SAP has operated a park volunteer group since the closure of the Vigil in 2006, and usually works every Wednesday morning throughout the year.

Save Albert Park Inc. No. A0040971X Save Albert Park is a self-funded, non-party political.

For

For