

NATIONAL PARKS AMENDMENT (POINT NEPEAN) BILL 2009

SECOND READING SPEECH

I move that this bill be now read a second time.

The National Parks Amendment (Point Nepean) Bill 2009 will incorporate the historic Quarantine Station into Point Nepean National Park, thereby implementing one of the government's key 2006 election commitments.

Also in fulfilment of its election commitments, the government will invest \$10 million towards the upgrading of infrastructure at the Quarantine Station, and \$4 million over four years for the management and operation of the expanded park.

Realising a vision

The historic transfer of the 90-hectare Quarantine Station from the Commonwealth to Victoria in June 2009 follows the transfer of the 205-hectare former weapons range area in 2006 and the transfer of the original 265 hectares in September 1988 that formed the first part of the national park.

Incorporating the Quarantine Station into Point Nepean National Park is therefore the final instalment in realising the long held aspiration of the Victorian community and the Victorian and Commonwealth governments of returning this historic site to Victoria, and permanently protecting this outstanding heritage site in a national park.

Many individuals and organisations have long campaigned for the protection of the Quarantine Station's heritage values, as well as public access to the site. These have included: members of the local community and local associations such as the Nepean Historical Society and the Nepean Conservation Group; the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council; and peak bodies such as the Victorian National Parks Association and the National Trust.

I would like to acknowledge their considerable efforts and also to thank the Point Nepean Advisory Committee, comprising community and government representatives, for its work in providing advice about Point Nepean issues on behalf of the Victorian community.

Protecting an outstanding heritage

The existing Point Nepean National Park includes historic defence installations at Fort Nepean, the panoramic coastal views of the Rip, Port Phillip Bay and Bass Coast, and significant nature conservation and Indigenous cultural heritage values.

The inclusion of the former Quarantine Station in the national park adds impressive cultural and natural heritage values to the park. The Quarantine Station is listed as both a heritage place and an archaeological place on the Victorian Heritage Register maintained under the **Heritage Act 1995**. The heritage values of the site are separately listed on the National Heritage List established under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

Many of the site's numerous heritage buildings relate to its use for quarantine purposes from the 1850s to the early 1950s. More recently, it was used by the Department of Defence. Of course, prior to the comparatively recent European settlers, the Port Phillip District was occupied for at least forty thousand years by the Boonwurrung / Bunurong people, their ancestors and other Indigenous people. Thus the environs of the Quarantine Station, as well as the rest of Point Nepean, are richly steeped in both Indigenous and recent cultural heritage.

The Quarantine Station was abruptly established in November 1852 when the passenger ship *Ticonderoga* (sensationalised in the press as the 'plague ship') anchored alongside, in what was later named Ticonderoga Bay in memory of the more than 100 passengers who lost their lives to typhoid and scarlet fever, some of whom were buried nearby in the hastily established cemetery. Another cemetery was established in 1854 for the burial, until 1926, of early settlers, victims of shipwrecks, quarantine staff, military personnel and the local community.

Many of the Quarantine Station's buildings date from the 1860s. They include gracious hospitals, accommodation buildings and kitchens for the various classes of arrivals, who were first processed in the Disinfecting Building and the Bath and Wash House. Many of the earliest buildings, such as Shepherd's Hut from 1845, were constructed from limestone quarried at the site.

From the 1950s to the early 1980s the site was occupied by the Department of Defence, first as the Army Officer's Cadet School, and from 1978 as the School of Army Health. In 1999 approximately 400 refugees from Kosovo were accommodated at the site. These more recent uses have added additional layers of heritage value to the site.

Investing in the future

Together with the Victorian Government's \$10 million investment in 2009-10 towards the upgrading of infrastructure at the Quarantine Station and \$4 million over four years for management and operation of the expanded park, the Commonwealth Government is immediately contributing approximately \$15 million towards the remediation and rehabilitation of the site. The shared priority objective of both governments is to achieve safe public access to the Quarantine Station, as part of an integrated national park at Point Nepean.

The site presents several novel challenges arising from its past use. These include the need to remediate the consequences of past military uses, including removing unexploded ordnance. In addition, the site's long isolation requires the upgrade of basic infrastructure including electricity, gas, water and sewerage, as well as the establishment of visitor services so that all Victorians, Australians and our international visitors can access and experience this unique part of our heritage. Over time it is intended that the site will become the primary visitor activity centre for the national park.

Recognising the work of the Point Nepean Community Trust

Before turning to consider the principal features of the bill, I wish to acknowledge the important role undertaken by the Point Nepean Community Trust which, from June 2004 until June 2009, has been the Commonwealth Government's interim manager of the Quarantine Station.

The work of the Trust included its extensive investigation and remediation of environmental contaminants at the site (including the removal of asbestos from buildings), its refurbishment of key buildings, its preparation of the Cultural Heritage Management Plan under the **Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006**, as well as the development with Parks Victoria of the *Point Nepean National Park and Point Nepean Quarantine Station Management Plan*. This plan is the key guide for future decision-making about integrating the natural, Indigenous and historic heritage and other values of the site with opportunities for recreation, education and tourism.

I wish to affirm that securing the safety of the Quarantine Station for public access is the paramount objective of both the Victorian and Commonwealth governments, the achievement of which will build upon the foundational work of the Trust.

Details of the bill

I now turn to the Bill. The bill will add the Quarantine Station and the abutting intertidal zone to Point Nepean National Park. In addition:

- the bill will enable the Minister responsible for the **National Parks Act 1975**, after consultation with the National Parks Advisory Council, to grant a lease at the Quarantine Station for a period of up to 21 years, and up to 50 years in specified circumstances, for purposes which are not detrimental to the protection of the national park, including its historic, Indigenous, cultural, natural and landscape features;
- the bill will also enable the Minister, in association with granting a lease, to grant a licence for up to 21 years to occupy or use part of the Quarantine Station area for the same or related purposes of the lease; and

- it will enable the Minister to grant a licence or a permit for up to seven years to occupy or use any part of the Quarantine Station area, consistent with the objects of the **National Parks Act 1975**.

The provision for longer lease terms at the Quarantine Station than what is currently provided for in the **National Parks Act 1975** is consistent with the government's policy that longer term leases in areas under that Act should be subject to site specific legislation.

It is the view of the government that the potential to offer longer lease terms at this site is required to attract the community and private investment needed to adaptively re-use and thereby preserve the site's heritage buildings and, as appropriate, new developments. For example, longer term leases may be appropriate for education and training facilities and accommodation and other tourism-related ventures which require the economic certainty of a longer lease term in order to be financially viable.

While the government envisages a maximum lease term of 21 years will be suitable for most tenancies at the Quarantine Station, in exceptional circumstances, and again after consultation with the National Parks Advisory Committee, the Minister may grant a lease for a period up to 50 years where the Minister is satisfied that:

- the purposes of the lease are not detrimental to the protection of the national park, including its historic, Indigenous, cultural, natural or landscape features; and
- the proposed use, development, improvements or works are of a substantial nature, of a value which justifies a longer term, and the granting of a longer term lease is in the public interest.

The bill does not include two small parcels totalling about 1.3 hectares at the far eastern end of the Quarantine Station in the national park at this time. These areas of Crown land may be used for the purpose of a respite centre to provide short-term holiday accommodation for the carers of people with a disability. The agreement between the State and the Commonwealth for the transfer of the Quarantine Station provides that, if a respite centre has not been established by 30 June 2013, or it

ceases to operate, legislation will be amended to include the area within the national park.

Conclusion

With the goal in mind of protecting Point Nepean's outstanding heritage for this and future generations of Victorians, Australians and our international visitors, I commend the bill to the House.