

NEWS RELEASE



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PREMIER'S COMMITMENT TO RECONSTRUCTION OF HISTORIC ST KILDA PIER KIOSK WELCOMED

The City of Port Phillip has congratulated Premier Steve Bracks on his quick action in committing to the reconstruction the St Kilda Pier kiosk in line with its heritage significance. The kiosk, which would have turned one hundred years old next year, was devastated around 4.45am today.

Mayor Liz Johnstone, who has met with Premier Steve Bracks and Deputy Premier and local member, John Thwaites, on the pier early this afternoon said that the City of Port Phillip would work hand in hand with the State Government to expedite the kiosk's reconstruction.

"Ironically, the council has spent the last two years preparing a twenty-year plan to restore and upgrade the St Kilda foreshore, Melbourne's premier playground for the last 150 years. There is strong foundation to enable the pier to be quickly reconstructed. We've held extensive public consultations so there is no doubt that residents and visitors alike will endorse the Premier's course of action.

"The St Kilda Pier is a people's pier – and the kiosk is a people's kiosk. Since the St Kilda Pier Kiosk was built in 1904, it has welcomed millions of visitors. There aren't many Victorians whhaven't strolled along the pier to buy an ice cream or fish and chips from the kiosk. Overseas visitors from the royal family to Jerry Seinfeld have patronised it.

"During World War 11, American GIs taught Melbourne women the jitterbug on its polished metal floor. Our community is mourning its loss today. Residents are literally in tears," she said.

Cr Johnstone said she was delighted that the Premier understand the iconic status of both the St Kilda kiosk and pier and its importance to Victoria.

“We’re also pleased that Premier Bracks says he wants to meet and be fully briefed on the agreed plans for the St Kilda foreshore for the next hundred years. With the council on the cusp of implementing these improvements, this fire is a timely reminder of the importance of heritage and the St Kilda pier precinct for all Victorians,” she said.

The pier was built in the 1850s and then in (more or less) its current form in 1858. It is managed by Parks Victoria. The kiosk is designated as a significant building under the Port Phillip planning scheme, the Victorian Heritage Register and the National Estate Register. The historic features of the kiosk were restored in a \$1 million refurbishment for the Bicentennial in 1988.

Originally known as Parer’s Pavilion, it was described in 1913 as “the first continental pier pavilion in Australia”. It was also used as a meteorological bureau for recording weather and wind velocities. Flags were hoisted to indicate the forecast.

Locals still refer to the kiosk as Kerby’s. It was operated by Colin and Judy Kerby for 49 years until 1987 when it closed for the Bicentennial refurbishments. Colin Kerby, a former deep-sea salvage diver, took over the lease in the 1940s from his father and the family lived above the kiosk. The kiosk’s fortunes plummeted in the sixties after 6’oclock closing was abolished by the State Government and hotels stayed opened till 10pm. The dance floor was ripped up to make way for a garage. Mr Kerby was forced to supplement his income by working as a medical technician at the University of Melbourne. As part of his research, he kept three sheep in the garage on the pier, unbeknown to health inspectors who used to inspect the kiosk.

Over the years, Mr Kerby saved scores of people from drowning accidents and suicide. He and his wife also looked after those who had been stabbed, raped, bashed or got too drunk to make it back to the end of the pier. In one incident in 1964, he saved two children who rode off the pier on a bike – and managed to rescue the bike as well. Mr Kerby won the Tattersall’s award for enterprise and achievement for the month of July 1982, the bronze medal from the Royal Humane Society of Australiasia in 1983 and an Order of the Medal of Australia in 1984. The family weren’t able to afford to continue with the lease after the Port Melbourne Authority hiked up the rent from \$40 a week, pre-renovations, to \$1500. It wasn’t

till April 20, 1989 that the kiosk reopened under new management, following a campaign by the council to have the rent lowered.

The triathlon and the marathon in the 2006 Commonwealth Games will pass by St Kilda Pier. In the following year, the open water swimming competitions in the FINA World Swimming Championships will also be held there.

Historic photos in print quality can be emailed on request.

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