

State caves in to vested interests

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PLANNING has devolved into prying open reserved land such as food bowls, national parks, green wedges and extending the already stretched urban growth boundaries for housing and commercial developments. Once lost, these areas are gone forever. There is no agenda to balance natural wealth, liveability, and future impacts - just a regime to ensure profits for developers and encourage urbanisation.

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The state government, under Planning Minister Matthew Guy, is undemocratically removing restrictions to planning, and is actually undermining the whole meaning of the word, by moving towards open-slather land use ("The planning guy", *The Saturday Age*, 15/9). It is a deregulation of any previous holistic planning, and is carried out under the guise of "economic development", which really means caving in to vested, commercial interests.

What is not mentioned is Melbourne's unprecedented rate of population growth, 200 people per day, 1500 per week, 75,000 each year. There is no population upper limit, and no population plan for Australia - or Victoria - except growth. This is placing pressure on all open spaces, including our coastal playgrounds - areas that should be reserved as natural sanctuaries.

Margit Alm, Eltham

Basis of economics

MATTHEW Guy's statement that the planning portfolio "is becoming an economic one rather than an academic one" ensures there is zero consideration for communities. Thus, a dollar-shaped scythe can shred our social fabric with little recourse from those in its path. Mr Guy, economics is about the efficient management of scarce resources, which include functioning infrastructure, breathable air, places of natural beauty and public safety. The proposed changes will make those resources far more scarce than they are now.

Doug Mealy, Warrandyte

Ideology of greed

IT IS interesting to hear Mr Guy resort to the ideology word. Does he think politicians on his side of the planning fence are immune to ideology? They have one, too - one of greed, stupidity and short-sightedness. Green wedges are precious and deserve protection at a federal level to prevent short-term meddling for political and economic gain.

Sue Aldred, St Andrews

Ode to Matthew Guy

HE LOVES a sunburnt country, a land of sweeping cranes, of haggard mountain ranges, of overcrowded trains. His

love of far horizons, filled with concrete towers, he dreams of more of this, to exercise his powers. To achieve his main objective, he must always plan and try, to destroy all that's pleasing, to one's heart and soul and eye. As he gazes into the distance, at magnificent green wedges, he imagines how they could appear, without trees or even hedges. He must plan all this madness, to please developers bold, to have shoddy plans enacted, to maximise their gold. He has just announced his greatest plan, which does away with zones, just like a hapless vertebrate, deprived of all its bones. Though earth holds many wonders, wherever he may die, we know this urban wasteland, was due to Matthew Guy.

Hilary Poad, Frankston

Condemn all hateful language

PLACARDS calling for the beheading of all those who insult the prophet are as despicable as the call for a woman to be shoved in a chaff bag and towed out to sea. I trust that those who rightly condemn the protesters for their words of violence would also speak out against the misogynistic, inflammatory and vicious terminology directed against our PM. Those street protesters were not, as NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell claimed, the "unacceptable face of multiculturalism". Rather they were the unacceptable face of humanity, and can also be found in boardrooms, occupying seats in Parliament and sitting behind microphones on talkback radio. If we want a peaceful and just society, the language of hatred needs to be eliminated in all quarters, not just in those with a multicultural face.

Pauline Hopkins, Beaconsfield

Violence begets more violence

JULIA Gillard states "violent protest is never acceptable" and Tony Abbott says the violence in Sydney was "completely, utterly, absolutely unacceptable" ("Islamic protests hit home", *The Sunday Age*, 16/9). What do they call dropping bombs on Iraq and Afghanistan then? The conclusion is that it's fine for Australia to carry out violent acts in other countries, but violence within our own country is totally unacceptable. Such hypocrisy can only continue to fuel conflicts between nations.

Leigh Ackland, Deepdene

Intimidation trumps

ALTHOUGH it is tempting to call for the video *Innocence of Muslims* to be censored due to the uproar it has created, we must ask whether freedom of speech stops once a group becomes offended to the point of violence. It seems we are trading away our freedoms in the face of thuggery by calling for the censorship of this video, however offensive it may be to some.

I had hoped political leaders such as Communications Minister Stephen Conroy would have put the Australian people's ability to judge the content for themselves above the delicate sensibilities of the Islamic fundamentalists ("Conroy urges YouTube to pull video", theage.com.au, 17/9).

Will Sackfield, Glen Iris

Accept mortality

HERE'S a novel thought, Hans Paas (Letters, 15/9): let's return to basic moral values and tolerance by giving up believing in and subsequently having to defend myriad imaginary friends. The majority of deathly conflicts in the world today result from people believing in entities no more likely to exist than the tooth fairy. Give up the need to have eternal anything and enjoy your life. Allow other people to live theirs - gay or straight or in between.

I firmly believe the only reason most people cling to a belief in some god or other is their inability to accept their own mortality. The world will go on just fine without my immortal soul - at least until we destroy it with overpopulation and fighting over who has god on their side.

Ann Bull, Hawthorn

Blind to basic needs

HOW did politicians and educators become blind to the basic need to train Australians? The TAFE closures are an indictment on their ineptitude. These centres should be expanding. The reliance on recruiting staff from overseas has to stop; we must train Australians, not put them on the scrap heap.

I am old enough to have been trained while at high school as a secretary. After my children had grown I was fortunate to attend technical colleges and gain computer skills, enabling me to re-enter the workforce. Now possessing a PhD gained through TAFE/university study, I know how important the first step is.

All this has gone, swept aside in economical rationalism gone crazy. Homage is paid to university degrees, where those who graduate often aim to go overseas, depriving this country of talent subsidised by the taxpayer.

Wake up, Australia; we need leaders with Australia's best interests at heart who don't kowtow to those just wanting to cut their costs.

Doris LeRoy, Altona

Too afraid to act?

I READ of the persistent abuse of children in a Catholic primary school by the resident priest (Focus, 17/9). At the weekend I read Anne Summers' 2012 Human Rights and Social Justice lecture given a few weeks ago.

The hierarchy of the Catholic Church failed to act to remove the offending priest despite knowing about the offences. Similarly, members of the opposition and the press have condoned, if not encouraged, the sexist and discriminatory treatment of the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. Anne Summers cited the circulation, on more than one occasion, to members of the opposition of sexist and offensive cartoons pertaining to Ms Gillard. It appears neither the Leader of the Opposition nor his colleagues opposed this practice.

Why do we, particularly women, continue to put up with abusive behaviour by those in authority? Is it because we are afraid? Or is it because we are too despairing?

Prudence Brown, Kew

Elite not dirty word

AMANDA Vanstone (Comment, 17/9) was going along quite nicely defending free speech and advocating a thick skin until she got confused by the difference between articulation and pompous verbosity. If one uses and understands words of more than two syllables, is one therefore a "highbrow elite"?

As an alumnus of a western suburbs 1950s tech, where Wackford Squeers would have been regarded as an enlightened intellectual, I gladly left during third form, at 14½, because my widowed mother wanted me earning. I resent Ms Vanstone's inference that people of the ruling class must talk down to the populace to be understood. "G'day, mate" indeed. How patronising.

Michael Grellis, Violet Town

Overtime is normal

RAY Armstrong says teachers should never strike but work to hours instead (Letters, 15/9). There is a misconception that all teachers do at lunchtime or after school are "extras", such as choir practice, dramatic productions or sports supervision.

The reality is that much of the preparation for lessons and the correction of work takes place during lunch hours and outside school hours with no overtime payment. Only when people recognise this will there be proper

remuneration for teachers' work.

Jo Whitham, Forest Hill

Rank ignorance

TIME and again education ministers, state and federal, demonstrate their ignorance of the tertiary entrance rank. They seem to think the universities set the entrance rank for teaching courses. They don't; the students who choose the course set the rank. Simply demanding that the rank for entry into a teaching course be raised will only result in a lot fewer students doing teaching courses. If you want to raise the entry rank you must raise the appeal of teaching. So, ministers, stop attacking teachers and the profession in general and the entrance rank problem will sort itself out.

Ross Hudson, Camberwell

Sympathy nullified

ON FRIDAY, I received an email from Anna Burke, the MP for Chisholm, who was responding to people who had written to her regarding the issue of marriage equality. She condemned the homophobic and hateful views expressed in some of the correspondence. She said she felt moved by the stories of individuals who had suffered discrimination; she added that marriage equality would inevitably occur at some time.

But then she declared that members of her electorate upheld the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman, so if circumstance necessitated her vote, she would vote for no change.

What a predictable and cowardly political move. By pandering to members of her electorate who oppose equality, Ms Burke has voided all of her statements expressing sympathy for individuals who experience discrimination. Sympathy is meaningless if it does not motivate us to action. Please, Ms Burke, reconsider your decision.

Laura Bell, Forest Hill

No will to act

THE money involved in bribery and corruption (Comment, 14/9) is trivial when compared with the trillions of dollars of black money in secret Swiss bank accounts and tax havens. A recent report indicates that up to \$30 trillion is held in such accounts by millionaires and Third World dictators. A US presidential candidate reportedly has millions stored in offshore bank accounts. Most of this is untaxed money. Billions of dollars in aid to poor countries disappears into European secret bank accounts overnight. OECD countries could close tax havens without any difficulty if they really wanted to.

Bill Mathew, Parkville

...AND ANOTHER THING

Protests

WE RIGHTLY condemn slogans at rallies that call for people to be beheaded. Why, then, was there not the same condemnation when Alan Jones suggested Julia Gillard be "put in a chaff bag" and "taken out to sea"?

David Zemdegs, Armadale

I DON'T remember radical Christians protesting violently in the streets when Monty Python released *The Life of Brian*.

Michael Higgins, Erica

PERHAPS the placard should have read "Drone bomb those who insult the prophet". That no doubt would have been in line with good Australian values.

John Passant, Kambah, ACT

IT WOULD appear that some Muslims who fled violence and fear are now bringing those things with them. I thought they wanted asylum in a peaceful country.

Robyn Williams, Sale

The state

I HOPE Premier Baillieu has the same desk calendar as mine. Perhaps it would be too much to ask for him to read yesterday's quote for the day and reflect on it. "If you think education is expensive - try ignorance: Derek Bok."

Frank Pederick, Castlemaine

PEOPLE of Melbourne, you have until September 21 to let Ted Baillieu know what you think of his Planning Minister's "reforms". Mr Guy's ambitious; watch your back, Ted.

Colleen Hackett, Hurstbridge

BOLT made in China. Nut made in China. Nut put on bolt in Port Melbourne. Result: made in Australia and Victoria manufacturing is "booming".

Brian Powell, Middle Park

EITHER Tony Abbott was wrong to oppose the federal government's legislation allowing the minister to ban the super trawler or Ted Baillieu is wrong to ban the boat outright. Both can't be right.

Jim Kennedy, South Yarra

Elsewhere

IT DOESN'T seem likely that many politicians will line up to be the subject of David Marr's next Quarterly Essay.

Lawrie Bradly, Surrey Hills

ASIC warns bookies off betting on share market movements without a "financial services licence". Why, one might wonder. It has not improved the punting of banks, fund manager, planners or brokers.

Doug Perry, Mt Martha

BEING a Labor voter I do not want Tony Abbott to step down in favour of Malcolm Turnbull.

Rick Giddings, Pontville, Tasmania

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