

Australian rules football was played at Yarra Park in the late 1850s

Rocky future for ground

Rage over park ruin

By Lyndal Cairns

THE State Government is under pressure to build an underground car park near the MCG to offset parking at Yarra Park.

Melbourne Council is urging the government to build a car park in conjunction with its news soccer stadium next to Olympic Park.

Melbourne Council says it wants motorists banned from the historic ground by 2010, but the State Government will not budge.

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ENVIRONMENT

Lyndal Cairns

THE hallowed turf at the MCG is so precious you need a permit to walk on it.

But thousands of cars invade the historic Yarra Park surrounding the MCG each weekend, turning it into a grassless mud bowl with dying trees gouged by tyres.

Melbourne Council wants the parkers out by 2010 but its plan needs the State Government to build a car park, which it has yet to commit to. Cr Catherine Ng said the park was

being destroyed. "The park is not a car park so we need to return it to a normal park," she said.

The council stands to lose about \$1.2 million a year in parking fees.

"It's not about the parking money, that's just . . . for administration," she said.

"People are using Yarra Park as a convenience and we've extended (the parking contract) because there are no other options."

The State Government should build a car park big enough for all Olympic Park events when it builds its soccer stadium in 2009, Cr Ng said.

But the State Government is hesi-

tant to commit to a car park. In a statement to the *Melbourne Leader* spokesman Bill Kyriakopoulos said: "Car-parking options in and around the sporting precinct will continue to be monitored as patronage changes and new needs are assessed into the future."

Aardvark Professional Tree Services managing director Jason Lehman said several trees were damaged by cars parking on their roots. "Most health-related functions of tree roots occur in the hair-fine surface feeder roots that exist mostly in the top 10-20cm of the soil profile where this type of traffic damage

occurs," Mr Lehman said. "This damage is much more significant when the ground is wet and has a compounding effect over repeated incidents."

East Melbourne Group president Margaret Wood said the maximum number of cars allowed to park at Yarra Park should be cut from 5700 to 1500 a day.

"It's used by a lot of people going to work and before games," Ms Wood said.

"You see families having picnics there.

"That's what it should be about - not car parking," she said.