



MEDIA MONITORS

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JAW

NEIL MITCHELL (1030) 26.6.98

SUBJECT:

INTERVIEW WITH HAMISH
MACDONALD, BECTON CORPORATION,
RE PLANS FOR REDEVELOPMENT ON
THE ST KILDA ESPLANADE BEHIND THE
ESPLANADE HOTEL

Mayor
Leo
COO
Colin
Kristina
D Spokes
Graham
G. Dutton
S. Dunn
J. Holdsworth

GUEST COMPERE (Ross Warneke): A little bit earlier in the program, I was talking to Kate Shaw from the Esplanade Alliance, the people who, well, they've been sticking up for the old Esplanade Hotel, trying to protect it from various developers' plans over the years.

The Becton Corporation have it now and while the Becton Corporation is going to redevelop, or rejuvenate the Esplanade Hotel and the members of the Esplanade Alliance think that's a great idea, they're really going to do it up, there is the downside to the whole deal and that is that Becton want to build in the vicinity of the Esplanade Hotel, just behind it, a 35-storey building, which is going to be about seven times higher than current building limits permit.

Joining me on the line, a director of Becton Corporation, Hamish Macdonald.

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Good morning.

HAMISH MACDONALD: Good morning. How are you?

COMPERE: I'm very well. The locals don't like the tower. They like the rest of it, but they don't like the 35-storey tower. Is it really just an ambient claim?

MACDONALD: No, it's not an ambient claim. I mean, what we've done is submit a planning scheme amendment application, which more than anything is a catalyst for discussion and review, to go through what should be on this site, that we and many others including the state government recognise as a strategic landmark location.

So there's a lot of work to be done and we've submitted a quite detailed urban context study to promote what we're talking about.

COMPERE: So - -

MACDONALD: But to go back to something you said in the introduction, we're not planning to renovate the Espy Hotel. Part of the scheme we're proposing is to keep the Espy exactly as it is today, which is - -

COMPERE: Well, cleaning it up though.

MACDONALD: Nope.

COMPERE: No?

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MACDONALD:

No.

COMPERE:

Well, hang on, what are the locals talking about? They reckon you're going to move the kitchen upstairs to the second floor, put 3PBS-FM, one of the local radio stations, in there.

MACDONALD:

To understand it in context, the Esplanade Hotel at the moment, the pub, occupies the bottom floor of a three-storey building. The upper floors are not used and not allowed to be used due to non-compliance with fire regulations.

COMPERE:

Right.

MACDONALD:

We're actually planning to use - - yes, we're looking at removing the Espy kitchen from where it is to the first floor and using the disused rooms potentially for accommodation of artists, artist studios. We've currently got some artists occupying part of the property anyway, in anticipation of moving in. And, yeah, maybe putting a community access radio station in there as well. But it's in disused parts of the building.

COMPERE:

Well, yeah. I think what you are saying is that the building we know as the Esplanade Hotel is going to have this work done on it, whether it's the old hotel part of the building or the building as a whole, it's a bit academic.

Now this tower, I suppose, you know, you would argue that you need it that big to justify the cost in the first place. But isn't it a

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bit too big? It's going to tower over everything.

MACDONALD:

The proposition we're making and it's in the (indistinct) submission we're making, is that this is one of the most strategic and important landmark locations in Melbourne. It protrudes out into the Bay. It's elevated. It's on the axis of two beach roads. It's on the access of St Kilda Pier. It is a unique site and worthy of looking at a bold solution on it, rather than, you know, nothing.

COMPERE:

Yeah. But would you be prepared - - I mean, would you be prepared to compromise? When you talk about a plan being put in, a lot of plans get watered down before they're approved.

MACDONALD:

That's because they may have been ill-considered before they were submitted. I think Kate and others are fully aware that we - - It took us about nine months to decide to buy this property and we've worked on it for another 10 or 12 months before making a submission. So there's been an enormous amount of detailed work done on sorting out what should be applied for, which is the basis of that application.

COMPERE:

All right. Well, you've made this application, but the existing height limit is far less than what you want to build.

MACDONALD:

Yes, it is.

COMPERE:

So you really need a change in the rules?

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MACDONALD: Yes. That's what we're applying for. That's the application. We haven't submitted a building design. We haven't said we want approval for a building. We're submitting an application that says the rules should be changed for the following reasons. And that's the process that will be gone through.

COMPERE: All right. Well, who's going to decide that?

MACDONALD: It's been submitted to the City of Port Phillip.

COMPERE: Well, yeah. Presumably they will say no. Where's it going to go after that?

MACDONALD: I mean, you might - - I've got a somewhat naive view, I suppose, that the council at the end of the day forms the voice of the community. We've done an enormous amount of work with the community in the last 12 months and we see that there's actually quite an amount of support for quality architecture and development to happen on this site.

COMPERE: Well, yes, all right. If the City of Port Phillip says, 'no', where does it go? Mr Maclellan, presumably, the Planning Minister.

MACDONALD: I don't know. We'll see - - I don't know.

COMPERE: Are you confident of getting it through at least by and large? Maybe not 35 stories, maybe 30 stories?

MACDONALD: Yes, we certainly are. I mean, that's why we've taken the project on. As I said, we

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took nine months to decide to buy this and we bought it with our eyes wide open.

COMPERE: All right. What's the project going to be worth in the end?

MACDONALD: It's a bit of a circular argument. It depends what height gets approved. But, I mean, a building of that size costs around \$50 million to build.

COMPERE: Oooh! That's a lot of money. You'd need to get a lot of flats in there to pay for it.

MACDONALD: You actually get less flats than if you build a sort of squat little bumpy building and squash them in around the site.

COMPERE: Why?

MACDONALD: Because it's actually - - despite it being rather tall, it's a rather thin structure - -

COMPERE: Oh, I see.

MACDONALD: - -so it doesn't actually yield an enormous amount of accommodation.

COMPERE: All right, Mr Macdonald, we're running short of time, but thanks for joining us this morning.

Hamish Macdonald, the Director of the Becton Corporation. He's pretty definite. I think the locals might have a fight on their hands over this, even though it is going to - - the proposed building six or seven times higher than current building permits - -

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building limits allow. They seem pretty determined. There will be a hell of a fight down there.

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