



# MEDIA MONITORS

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NEIL MITCHELL (0900) 26.6.98

SUBJECT:

THE ESPLANADE HOTEL AND  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE ST KILDA  
FORESHORE

INTERVIEW:

KATE SHAW, ESPLANADE ALLIANCE

*Mayor*

*Crs*

*CEO*

*Colin*

*V Koastins*

*D Spokes*

*D Graham*

*G Oulton*

*S Dunn*

*J Holdsworth*

COMPERE (Ross Warneke): Now, reports this morning that the old Espy Hotel, the old Esplanade Hotel on the Upper Esplanade in St Kilda is to be, well, developed. Well, they're going to develop around it. A 35-storey apartment tower is planned for the block.

Now, the Esplanade is a bit of a Melbourne landmark. It's had its good years, it's been a run-down at times. Other times it seemed quite flash. But, you know, at the moment the grungy old place certainly needs to be cleaned up a bit. But I don't know that we really need to go the way of the Gold Coast on St Kilda Beach.

Joining me on the line from the Esplanade Alliance, Kate Shaw. Good morning.

KATE SHAW:

Good morning, Ross.

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COMPERE: This is a massive project, 35 storeys. What do the supporters of the Espy think of it?

SHAW: Well, we actually all thing it's a bit hysterical, I have to say. Thirty-five storeys is by far the tallest building along the Melbourne foreshore, around the whole of Port Phillip Bay. So we're kind of thinking, well, why stop there? Why not go into competition for the tallest building in the world with Grollo?

COMPERE: I suppose the good news is that the hotel itself is going to stay and be developed. It is going to be, you know, done up a bit.

SHAW: Look, the treatment of the Espy, the way Becton are talking about it, is really excellent. I've actually never seen a developer treat a site with such sensitivity.

COMPERE: Really?

SHAW: What they're proposing to do there is absolutely fabulous. They're talking about -- well, they're talking about relocating the kitchen out the back upstairs, which would be a lovely spot for it, and moving the recording studio into the main part of the hotel.

They're actually talking -- negotiating at the moment, I believe, with 3PBS, the community radio station, about taking up a tenancy upstairs.

And they're talking about other(?) studios and sound-proofing and all sorts of issues.

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It's actually more a tenancy issues than it is into, you know, any kind of written guarantees that do actually guarantee some kind of retention of the current culture.

COMPERE: So you've got no complaints for the actual ideas for the old Esplanade?

SHAW: Not at all. Not at all. And, right ..[indistinct].. the thing is it is a little bit of a Faustian contract. You can have the Espy and all its sub-culture or iconic glory, but we'll take your soul. And this is what we fear with this 40 storeys. It's a pretty extraordinary trade-off, really.

COMPERE: What are the height limits along there at the moment?

SHAW: Well, at the moment there's a height control of 18 - well, 16 metres, actually, which is the height of the existing building. So, I mean, obviously that's going to be breached.

COMPERE: This is going to be 125 metres.

SHAW: Indeed.

COMPERE: That's, what, seven or eight times the height [indistinct].

SHAW: Yeah. Look, I mean, quite- -

COMPERE: Are they serious about it? Is this an ambit claim?

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SHAW:

Of course it's an ambit. It must be an ambit. And we all think it is. They -- I don't think they mean this at all. A few years ago they had a feasibility study for an 18-storey tower in the -- sorry, last year in the bottom drawer. Which funnily enough is exactly the same as what poor old Mike Brady wanted 10 years ago.

But I think ..[indistinct].. cleverer than old Mike Brady. They've put in a 35-storey application and my fear is they'll get all the activists and conservationist groups into a lather and they'll argue it down from 35 to 20 or 25, or whatever it is that Becton really want.

And they'll be persuaded that knocking 10 to 15 storeys off is quite an achievement and Becton will walk away with what they probably always wanted.

COMPERE:

Yeah, and you guys will be able to claim a victory by saying it's smaller than it was going to be.

SHAW:

Well, I think that's the plan.

COMPERE:

Size is everything.

SHAW:

Yes. Look, I mean, at the end of the day we have to say, let's talk about it and if we can -- if Becton are prepared to be reasonable in terms of talking about what they really want there -- and I think they want 18 or 20 or 25 -- and if we -- and if they can come out with that at the starting point, then I think that we can get into some kind of, you know, quite

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intelligent and thoughtful discussions about that and- -

COMPERE: Because there are some buildings along that stretch. There's one sort of on the city side that, well, it must be 10 or 12 storeys, isn't it?

SHAW: Yeah, absol -- there's what -- the Esplanade is actually surrounded by taller buildings. And there's one to the north which is 15 and one to the south which is 10.

COMPERE: So you wouldn't object to that?

SHAW: Well, in fact, those buildings are regarded as utter follies from the '70s. I mean, they're awful. (Laughing) And I don't think anybody would want to reproduce those now.

But certainly we can look at what's happening at The Esplanade and in that context. And I think the community and the council are all prepared to discuss that site and discuss what you -- what they and we want out of a building on that site.

COMPERE: The problem is, the reality is though, Kate, that you're going to have the Becton Corporation holding the dagger over your head. The dagger of, you know, if you don't agree to some sort of pretty major development so that they can recover their costs, then you won't get the Espy done up.

SHAW: That's right, that's right.

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COMPERE: You've got to face reality.

SHAW: Yes, well, in ..[indistinct].. I mean, it's a quite invidious trade-off that's being put to us. I mean, I guess what we have to say is, well, what's the bottom line really? I mean, is it really 35 or 40 storeys or whatever they're talking about [indistinct]

I'm judging high 25, because the floor heights are very big. Is that the bottom line? Or let's start talking about what really is the bottom line or, you know, some kind of reasonable point.

I mean, will the Espy have to be redeveloped and not be treated in a sensitive way if they have to come down to 30?

COMPERE: Yeah. Kate, let me play the devil's advocate? What if a lot of people listening to this this morning and reading the stories in the papers this morning say; oh look, this is a bunch of inner suburban trendies trying to stop development.

They try to stop every development there is. Why shouldn't we have this beautiful building? The baths over the road or down on the Lower Esplanade are being done up. It needs it to lift the whole area.

SHAW: (Laughs)

COMPERE: Are you a bunch of trendies?

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SHAW: Well, I actually don't even live in the area anymore, but look, I actually don't even live in the area anymore.

But look, I think there -- of course there are trendies in the inner city. There are also people who have been going to The Esplanade Hotel and performing their for years and years and years, who couldn't possibly take the label 'trendy'.

COMPERE: I used to go there. I'm not a trendy.

SHAW: I don't think I am either, really. No, look, I think -- certainly the inner city is becoming much more expensive than it used to and, look, I mean, there's a part of me that says I'm less concerned about shadows being shown over properties that -- none of which are worth less than 300,000 than I would be over properties where people didn't actually have much choice and they -- It really was their life savings and the amenity was ruined and that was it. You know, their live savings were gone.

There's -- I think the point has got to be what kind of planning and design do we actually want for our whole inner city and metropolitan area, and I don't(?) think high buildings absolutely have their place and they look great in the CBD.

My fear is that high buildings along -- well, in any suburban area [indistinct] but particularly along the foreshore, do create a Surfers Paradise.



COMPERE:

Yeah, yeah, I think you're right, Kate. I think it will really come down to that point. Do we want a Gold Coast on St Kilda Beach.

Kate Shaw of the Esplanade Alliance.

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