

JENOLAN ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION COMMITTEE

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MEDIA RELEASE

No Privatisation of the Jenolan Caves

The Jenolan Environment Protection Committee dismisses the need to privatise the Jenolan Caves and the Caves House. In the past the NSW government has been unable to properly manage the lessees of Jenolan Caves House; it ended in legal action on the last occasion but not before Caves House was described as “Faulty Towers”.

Whilst the allocation of funds to re-roof Caves House (\$1m+), renew the kitchen (\$1m) and works inside the caves including a new self-guided cave tour (\$2m) are welcome, for the current government to include these costs in their “loss” that Caves House is supposedly making is somewhat dishonest.

The government also appears to have lumped in the \$5 to \$6 million that the RTA spent on the road to the caves in their supposed \$11 million subsidy. This is a state road for which the government has always been responsible and our Committee has been recommending since the mid 1980s that a new route to the caves be found. The current “5-mile hill” road is in danger of sliding down the hill due to the poor rock structure and steep hillsides.

Six years ago the previous government for reasons best known to themselves removed the Jenolan Caves Trust – a body which was operating well and was starting to bring proper management to the operations at Jenolan. Subsequent legislative changes have left the management of Jenolan in limbo which has impacted on the ability of Jenolan to operate satisfactorily.

A draft Plan of Management has been sitting on various NSW ministers’ desks for almost 7 years but is still no nearer to being implemented. The Jenolan Environment Protection Committee claims that the government is refusing to implement the plan of management until they can rewrite it to suit a potential tenderer for the Jenolan Caves House.

The revolving door of management at Jenolan is also the cause of a general lack of direction at Jenolan with no experienced hotel manager able to drive proper world’s best practice for Caves House. Lack of proper senior management at Jenolan has resulted in inappropriate development works being carried out. These have included the destruction of heritage gardens, the paving-over of water courses, hideous pathways in the Devils Coach House. On top of this much of the built infrastructure has been allowed to decay.

Unfortunately the government has dragged out the old bogey of “it’s being subsidised by taxpayers’ money” which is actually far from the truth. Their occupancy rate is so low, both for Caves House and the other accommodation that they have there, that it is no wonder that it is “losing money” The problem is that when it was last leased out it was even worse and not only did the government have to buy out the

lease but caves house nearly burnt down due to a chimney not being cleaned. No money was ever put back into Caves House in the time that it was leased out and then once the government took it back again they had to attempt to repair the damage to the infrastructure and to the reputation of Caves House.

Also, during the last period of private leasing of Caves House plans were drawn up by the lessor to build a 2-storey building in the middle of the road between Caves House and the Grand Arch. This was only stopped by the concerted efforts of our Committee assisted by the Environmental Defenders Office.

The developer pressure on Jenolan is extreme when Caves House is privately leased

The government refuses to approve a new Plan of Management to protect and properly manage the Jenolan Caves. They are holding off (and have for nearly 7 years) so that they can water it down to suit some developer who takes over Caves House.

Bruce Welch
Chairman,
Jenolan Environment Protection Committee (est. 1984)

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Online petition against privatisation of the Jenolan Caves:-

<http://www.change.org/petitions/robyn-parker-minister-for-the-environment-and-minister-for-heritage-no-privatisation-of-the-jenolan-caves>

Link to the above is on our web site:-

www.jepc.bookproduction.org