



LETTERS CONTINUED FROM P18

THE EREBUS MEMORIAL

I have been approached by some of my former constituents to lend support to the Parnell community's battle to prevent the degradation of their beloved Dove Myer Robinson Park by the imposition of the unfortunately incongruent concrete and steel Erebus memorial. Culture and Heritage bureaucrats along with Auckland Council continue to try to impose against the clearly stated wishes of the local people, including Ngāti Whatua.

In response I can only offer what I wrote to the prime minister's secretary on 2 October 2019. That's more than three years ago, but I think the message is as pertinent today as it was back then:

"Please find herewith email correspondence and attachment from Parnell resident Jo Malcolm, who is a neighbour of Dove Myer Robinson Park, Parnell, the proposed site of the Erebus memorial. Ms Malcolm lost her father-in-law in the Erebus tragedy. I am requesting that you please pass this correspondence to Prime Minister, Jacinda. Parnell residents are contacting me because I am still the ward councillor for Parnell, (despite pending boundary changes). Although representing this area since 2010 and having lived there until relatively recently I have never had the courtesy of been briefed or consulted about this proposal."

I am flagging this as an issue that is likely to have negative political consequences unless the PM intervenes. We should all be mindful that there seems there is a curse about Erebus, not only the awful 1979 tragedy in which Air New Zealand lost its perfect passenger safety record - and its innocence, but in the prolonged and unhappy consequences. I refer to the attempted official cover-up "the orchestrated litany of lies" as Justice Peter Mahon, who headed the Royal Commission Inquiry, described it. Justice Mahon suffered for his integrity and had both his health and his career wrecked as a consequence.

I am sure this memorial is meant to bring closure and peace 40 years after, but instead, because of bureaucratic insensitivity and a lack of public consultation, it is creating disharmony, even anger among the community.

I would request that the PM, as head of the Ministry and as our national leader, intervenes to require Culture and Heritage officials to genuinely consult with the community (the legal

definition of 'consultation can be found in the High Court judgements: interestingly *Air NZ v Wellington Airport Ltd*).

My personal political advice would be that if the government is seeking closure to this national tragedy and its consequences, then it should take this long overdue opportunity to officially acknowledge that Justice Mahon and his family suffered unfairly for his rectitude and integrity and that a posthumous honour be issued to him on behalf of the nation. That would be a much more suitable memorial than the presently planned insensitive concrete and steel edifice which so offends my constituents.

Unfortunately my plea was not exactly successful, though the prime minister on behalf of the government late in November that year, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the tragedy, issued an apology to all the Erebus families and publicly vindicated Justice Mahon's findings. But sadly because public pleas over the monument have been consistently ignored there was and there is still no closure. As a way towards a genuine settlement of this unhappy affair I can only support the proposals advocated by Tony Garnier in September's *Ponsonby News*. Notably that the memorial be sited on available open space at the aviation precinct at Western Springs - an idea which I understand has local support.

Unfortunately as 'Ponsonby News' readers will know better than most, the people who govern us nowadays, especially Auckland Council and its various appendages, including the local board, appear to have forgotten their statutory obligations to consult in good faith on these sorts of decisions with the public they are meant to serve. Unfortunately too, from my own experience, most of these bureaucrats have no idea what 'consultation' really means. The Government, Auckland Council and the Waitematā Local Board really should show some humility and listen to the considered recommendations of the Erebus Memorial Park Working Group, to achieve a better outcome for everyone.

As Mr Garnier pointed out, "There has never been a valid reason stated as to why a national memorial should be in Parnell. There are plenty of reasons why it shouldn't."

Surely the Erebus tragedy and its consequences have caused more than enough misery already - for everyone involved.

Mike Lee, Waiheke