



This evidence is provided in response to the exchange between the Chair and Brendan Coates with respect to Docklands in Melbourne, Uncorrected Transcript of the Upper House Inquiry into the Transport Oriented Development (TOD) Program, 7 June 2024, page 27.

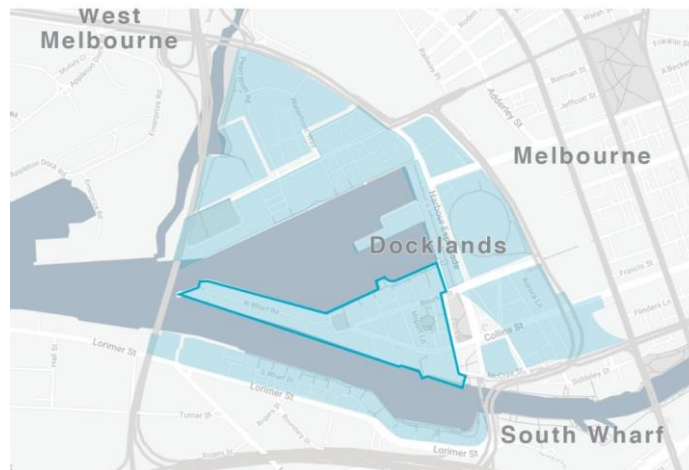
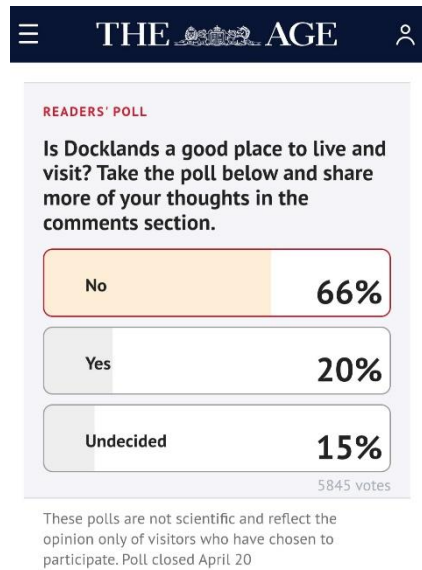
The CHAIR: *I just wanted to put something to you that was put to us during a hearing, and I am not sure if you are familiar with it—I am sure you are—but Docklands in Melbourne as a density development. I am just curious about what your views are. Done well? Done badly? How do you see that particular development? Somebody put a very convincing argument to me that has stuck with me and I am really curious about whether you have views on Docklands in Melbourne.*

BRENDAN COATES: *I think the views on Docklands are a bit outdated. Could that development have been done better? Could it have succeeded more in its first 10, 15 years, 20 years of existence? Yes, but it is now a pretty vibrant community. What you see there from friends who live there is that it's a place where you can have access to comparatively cheaper housing, frankly, that is townhouses or particularly sort of apartments where people have got the city on their doorstep and you see people who choose to live in that location for that reason.*

If the alternative location for them was to live in Broadmeadows, I think they have clearly chosen the former because it is more suitable to their preferences than the alternative. I think what we need to be weighing up here, Chair, is we shouldn't let the perfect be the enemy of the good when the risk is that you end up with just more of the status quo. I think that is the biggest risk..”

Response from the Save Greater Sydney Coalition:

Why the Melbourne Docklands urban redevelopment precinct is widely considered a planning failure



Melbourne Docklands is a precinct that sits on about 200 hectares (of which 44 hectares is water). It offers a mix of uses, including residential, commercial, retail, dining and leisure.

According to recent population statistics, an increasing number of people now call Docklands home, with the most recent census data recording a population of 15,495, up from 10,964 people four years earlier.

Docklands residents are young, culturally diverse and highly educated, with a median age of 32 compared with the Victorian median age of 38, and with 49.1 per cent holding tertiary qualifications compared with 24.5 per cent in Victoria. The census shows 22 per cent of Docklands residents are of Chinese ancestry, 15.3 per

cent of English ancestry, 13.1 per cent of Indian background and 10.1 per cent of Australian background.

Developers are still continuing to invest heavily in Docklands, with a string of new major developments slated for the area. They include a \$750 million development with two 41-storey towers over the historic Goods Shed site, a \$187 million apartment complex on Collins Street, and a \$150 million development on Pearl River Road.

Melbourne's most maligned suburb

Nevertheless, almost since its inception in the late 1990s, Docklands has developed a reputation as the suburb Melbourne loves to hate. In 2006, Swinburne University housing researcher Professor Terry Burke went so far as to say: "They should blow it up and start again."

In April, The Age published a series of articles on the Docklands. They explored how the transformation of the area from an abandoned dock and contaminated brownfield site to a new bustling city precinct hasn't materialised in the way the former Kennett government intended.

Below is a summary of the major findings from this series and other related articles that shed light on why the Docklands can't shake off its "ghost town" reputation.

What's wrong with the Docklands today?

Docklands through the years



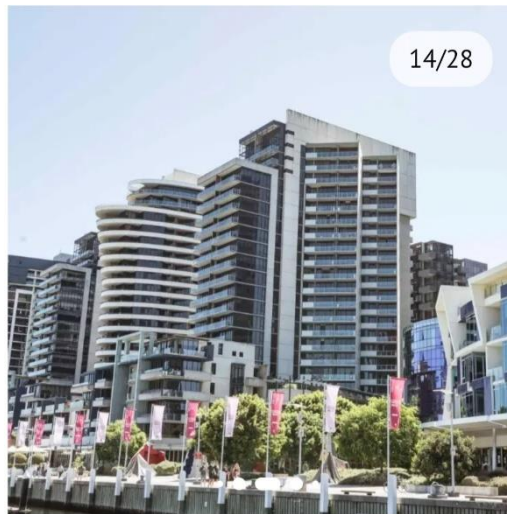
Costco is scheduled to move to Ardeer in late 2024. JOE ARMAO

- **Lack of schools.** Hundreds of children live in the Docklands but it has no high school and no land available to accommodate one. Residents want one built on the soon to close Costco site.

According to Satya Rath, who moved to Docklands in 2019 because of its proximity to his work at one of the big four banks, the suburb is losing families because it has no secondary school. There are currently two schools zoned for Docklands residents – Docklands Primary School and University High School in Parkville – but both face overcrowding as enrolments balloon.

Similarly, primary school space is inadequate. After an explosion in enrolments at the \$58 million three-storey primary school in Docklands, the state government was forced to open a temporary campus at the local shopping centre District Docklands.

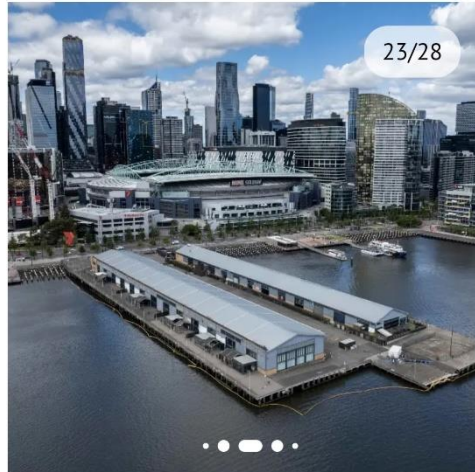
Docklands through the years



Apartments in Docklands in 2023. CHRIS HOPKINS

- **No public pool, recreation centre and limited community facilities.** The Docklands Neighbourhood House, which ran a homework club for primary school students and a playgroup for newly arrived young migrant families, closed in mid-2023 after the City of Melbourne stopped funding it. According to former Docklands Neighbourhood Centre director Ariel Valent, who is urging a return of a permanent drop-in facility for residents, community connection is important for any neighbourhood ... but I think it is [especially] important in Docklands, because it's a community where people have all come from somewhere else."

Docklands through the years



Central Pier in 2022. JASON SOUTH

- **The historic Central Pier has also been partially demolished after it was shut down in 2019 due to safety concerns about its structural integrity. Its future is under a cloud.**
- **Lack of public open space.** Lendlease is redeveloping six sites at nearby North (Collins Wharf). Community action group Melbourne Maritime Heritage Network (MMHN) argues that given the open space deficit in Docklands, Development Victoria should be acquiring one of the six Lendlease sites for a public park near the waterfront.
- **Dining and hospitality venues along the harbour front have closed down.** Recent closures of a string of Docklands hospitality venues include floating nightclub Atet, cafe Off With The Ferries, gastropub The Woolshed, artisan breadhouse Mill & Bakery and Middle Eastern eatery Mama Rumaan.

Docklands through the years



The Melbourne Star Observation Wheel has been for sale for years. JOE ARMAO

- **The massive Melbourne Star Observation Wheel has stood still for the last three years.** It's widely seen as a symbol of the area's wider failures.
- **Lack of diversity in home ownership.** According to Patrick Fensham, Victorian head of the Planning Institute of Australia, two-thirds of Docklands residents are renters, which poses challenges. "Because it's a relatively high proportion of renters, the community is a bit transient," he says.
- **Many of the office buildings are half-empty and big employers have moved elsewhere.** Docklands is dominated by skyscrapers that house apartments and offices. Major employers include ANZ, KPMG and Medibank Private. But since the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the office buildings have been half-empty as more people have opted to work from home.

National Australia Bank has shifted its headquarters to the CBD. Now, most of the floors of the bank's former building in Harbour Esplanade are deserted. Vacant bank office space originally leased by NAB and ANZ accounts for a combined 57,000 square metres, blowing out the amount of Australia's sublease space. Other campus-style offices in the suburb have also been empty for some time.

What went wrong?

- **Relying on developers to plan and finance the Docklands precinct meant that land was released to the market all at once and before any strategic planning had been done.** A decision by the Kennett government in 1997 that Docklands' development should be market-driven with no government subsidy led to the area being parcelled into seven large precincts to make the project commercially viable.

The land was released to the market all at once in what was described as an “instant city” approach, which meant only developers with big wallets could afford to tackle Docklands, and only large-scale apartment towers and corporate offices could deliver the level of return to justify the risk.

- **This developer-led approach didn’t make accommodation for schools and other essential amenities like parks and libraries.** As a consequence, public space and amenity had to be shoehorned in later and at state government expense. A primary school that opened in 2021 is bursting at the seams and turning to a nearby car park rooftop for playground space.

According to Greens MP for Melbourne Ellen Sandell, lack of government planning has plagued Docklands from its inception. “The government never thought that families would live in Docklands, but surprise, surprise, families do want to live in the inner city, and so there was this explosion of families, naturally,” said Sandell, who campaigned for Docklands Primary to be built.

- **Wind was not factored in when Docklands was developed.** According to Melbourne wind expert, Dr John Holmes, Docklands is the CBD’s first line of defence when south-westerly winds come in. Dr Seifu Bekele, the director of Global Wind Technology Services, says this meant not enough consideration was given to the implications of wind in the area, resulting in the construction of apartments and giant buildings towering over open space, causing a wind-tunnel effect as pedestrians passed through. “You feel the wind immediately in the Docklands... There was never a clear plan for the area on how to manage and mitigate wind. No in-depth wind testing has ever been conducted in the suburb to guide future planning.”
- **The location is a “bit awkward”.** “It’s so quiet here,” said Ahmed, who also lives in the suburb. “As a business we have grown but last year we had a lot of ups and down. The biggest problem here is that it’s really isolated compared to other suburbs.” Robert Adams, director of Adams Urban, and former Melbourne City Council’s design director, agrees. While he thinks Docklands is a good suburb that cops more flak than it should because it’s still new in comparison to the rest of central Melbourne, its “teething problems” stem from a lack of direct connections to the CBD, he said. “The problem that Docklands has is that it’s a bit of a gated area of the city ... it’s also a bit of a cul-de-sac. You can only directly access it from the CBD from two major streets, Collins Street and La Trobe Street and a lot of people feel they’ve got to make a special trip down rather than just walk down and have lunch by the harbour.”
- **The pandemic lockdowns and complaints about noise and safety concerns around Central Pier led to the closure of many of the restaurants and hospitality venues.** The suburb relies heavily on city workers to survive and was hit hardest in Australia by coronavirus lockdowns.

- **Docklands is dominated by skyscrapers that house apartments and offices.** Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the office buildings have been half-empty as more people have opted to work from home. The lack of diversity in offerings, coupled with low home ownership and a high number of Airbnb rentals, has made the area vulnerable to economic and social shocks.

Lessons learned

- **Developer-led overdevelopment needs to be resisted.** The Melbourne City Council recently decided to take a stance against inappropriate development in Docklands by rejecting a plan put forward by the AFL and Development Victoria (DV) to redevelop part of the Marvel Stadium precinct. The proposal was described as “one of the most embarrassing applications the City of Melbourne has seen.”

It involves two new high-rise towers and a waterfront facade for the stadium being built in a move that would make the venue virtually unseen from the water. DV owns the Harbour Esplanade site on which three high-rise towers are proposed.

 **Herald Sun**
www.heraldsun.com.au



The plans are for a trio of towers on the waterfront side of the Marvel Stadium precinct.

Concerns were raised about building height, design principles, lack of affordable housing and the creation of a “wall effect”. Deputy Lord Mayor Nicholas Reece told the Council meeting: “We will not repeat the mistakes of the past in Docklands, but that is what will occur if we were to support this proposal in its current form. The final determination will be made by Victorian planning minister Sonya Kilkenny.

- **City of Melbourne planning permits in the Docklands precinct must now be assessed against design and development overlays, which requires a wind assessment impact report by a qualified wind engineer.** Wind experts say more trees and wind-screening devices on buildings would also help to mitigate the problem.



- **Community facilities are essential for attracting surrounding activity.** Melbourne Lord Mayor Sally Capp points to the cluster of cafes and shops around the Docklands library as one of the bright spots in the precinct, which includes Saluministi, a cafe stalwart of the area for eight years. Cafe owner Peter Mastro calls Saluministi “the lighthouse” because “the lights are always on” in contrast to some other Docklands venues which only open three days a week. “We’ve put a lot of soul and spirit into where we are,” he says. “On the weekend, we are driven by the locals, we built a community through COVID, we have all the dragon boat [crews] come in, so we have built a real connection there. There are still not a lot of people coming to work, it’s still a challenge there.”
- **Hospitality is key to reinvigorating the Docklands.** Lord Mayor Sally Capp says that the vacant shop fronts need to be activated. “What needs to improve, and I think we’re really starting to see it, is that activation on a day-to-day level,” she says. “There could definitely be more cafes. If you walk along a lot of the streets in Docklands, there’s entrances into apartments or office buildings with no activity, really, happening at a ground level.”

Recently, the Marvel Stadium completed a \$225 million upgrade that features a Stadium Square and City Edge. The idea is to turn the stadium into a seven-day-a-week precinct for both residents and workers by catering to more than the footy or event crowd. The Earl Canteen, on the concourse, is open on match and event days, and until 2pm on weekdays. Friends of Fire, a pub-style venue with American food, and Amphora, a plush restaurant above it,

partly inspired by New York steakhouses, are new dinner options on various days.

- **Community groups need to be supported and listened to.** A community-based project aimed at rehabilitating the image of the suburb by focusing on its residents, The Soul of Docklands, was recently launched.
- **Better transportation is being planned.** The state government recently announced that an underground train station would be built next to Marvel Stadium in Docklands and two more in Fishermans Bend as part of long-awaited plans for mass transit to the fledging precinct of Fishermans Bend.



The state government has outlined plans for a station below Bourke Street in Docklands. WAYNE TAYLOR

- **Requiring developers to provide open space leads to better outcomes.** The Melbourne City Council recently endorsed a planning proposal for a mixed use development that will include a new park. Praising the project, Acting Lord Mayor Nicholas Reece said “The most exciting aspect of this proposal is the 700-square-metres of new green space, which is directly opposite the Docklands Primary School. For those of us who know this area, we know that there’s a desperate need for green space around the Docklands Primary School.”

Docklands resident Liz Porter, is also hopeful the suburb will flourish sooner rather than later. “This proposal is going to deliver a new park right in the spot where it is most needed and that is fantastic.”



Community park at the corner of Little Docklands Street and St Mangos Lane.

- **Innovative home ownership schemes should be trialled.** Planning experts are arguing for much more social and affordable housing to encourage ownership diversity and stronger vested community interest in the precinct. Community ownership tenures for example, could give more people a stake in the place.

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