

## Save Flinders Pier – 2023 AGM Address

If a week is a long time in Politics, a year is almost an eternity in community campaigns.

But we won.

The reason we won was not just the signs in the village, which of course helped. Or the petition. Or the continuous media coverage. Or even because of Sir David Attenborough.

We won because our community came together and galvanised into action. And even more importantly, we didn't just make it about Flinders – we made Flinders, and its pier, a unique endowment that belonged to all Victorians.

My sense is that as we move forward as a community organisation, we should from time to time reflect on those who don't live in Flinders – the divers, the visitors, the tourists, the fishermen – who also share a strong personal connection with what we cherish.

During the campaign, I spent time on the pier counting people to collect data; and of course, talking to them. I did this because Government loves data; and I was calculating the economic benefit to our Village. One afternoon, I was quite surprised by the high results of my head count, and asked Harry the Mussel Man if maybe my numbers were wrong. Harry, quickly responded: *“you should've been here an hour ago!”*

In other words, I'm not sure many of us really appreciate the popularity of the pier amongst people who travel to Flinders from all over Melbourne – and interestingly, they became the voice that the Government couldn't ignore. And for the first time, the FCA through our pier campaign, came to represent and unite all those people in one common goal.

It is such an interesting lesson for any future battles that we may need to fight. To not only broaden our constituency when we need to; but also, how we share our lessons with other community organisations facing similar battles of their own.

I want to pay tribute to the late Trent Williams, one of our most active volunteers on the Save Flinders Pier committee; who most of you would recall died suddenly in a diving accident - currently the subject of a coronial inquest.

Trent was at this meeting last year – sitting quietly in about the fourth row on the right. Anyone here who joined our beach-cleans on the Flinders beach during our campaign would have met him. He was a larger than life marine biologist, environmentalist, scuba diver and decent human being. His funeral, attended by Mary and John Iles, Neil Hallam and myself was one of the most poignant I have been to. I don't think the FCA has ever lost an active volunteer in the middle of something like this; and I'm hoping that in time, our community can honour Trent's memory and his effort in helping us Save Flinders Pier.

Our victory was the result of a wonderful team effort, but I am mindful that I was unable to bring everyone out the other side; and of course, it is Trent where my mind always turns when the issue of the pier comes up.

Moving forward, the next step is to ensure that Parks Victoria follows through with the repairs and restoration. I have no reason to believe they won't; but rest assured, I will be keeping an eye on things.

Finally, thank you to you – our FCA membership for your support. The petitions you signed; the money you gave; the signs you nailed to your front fence; the submissions you wrote in support of the Heritage listing; the stickers on cars; caps on weary heads; and your encouragement to our wonderful Save Flinders Pier committee. We couldn't have done it without you.

And to our SFP committee, where every individual contributed something special and unique to our campaign: Mary Iles, Neville Wale, Susan Grant, Jo Monie, Neil Hallam, Melissa Smith, Alan Farrer, Claire Thorn, Jane Bowman, Mark Holland, Myra Kelly, Trish Hurley and supporting Trish - Patricia MacDonald. And of course, the late Trent Williams. They are the true heroes of our victory; and prove the power of communities like ours, and the power of teams.

This was a committee that could move mountains. And it did.

*Charles Reis*