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Parkland poachers mar vision for city

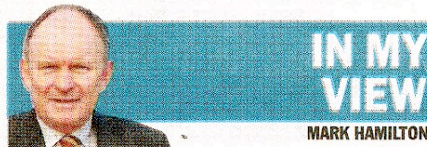
A FLEETING glance at Colonel William Light's *Plan for the Town of Adelaide 1837* would have been enough to tell Minister Gail Gago that she is plainly wrong to suggest that he intended any form of permanent development in Adelaide's parklands belt.

Colonel Light carefully specified the uses to which the parklands could be put, designating land as "government reserves" for the development of facilities such as Government House, Adelaide Gaol, Parliament House, police barracks, the Torrens Parade Ground and Botanic Gardens. He designated the balance of land as open parklands to be held in perpetuity for the benefit of the citizens of Adelaide.

In accordance with Colonel Light's wishes, the government reserves were given over to the Colonial Government and developed for their designated purposes. Title to the parklands was given to the Adelaide City Council to be held on trust in perpetuity for future generations.

Despite various government attempts at grabs for free land, city councils have been remarkably successful at keeping the state government "wolf" at bay over the past 175 years.

Only 85 hectares (209 acres) out of a total 944ha (2332 acres) – or just 9 per cent – have been alienated by state governments, and always in the face of fierce city council and community opposition. Even this is beyond the areas that



Colonel Light set aside as government reserves within the parklands area.

The most recent failed land grab, of course, was the State Government's attempt to build a large corporate entertainment facility in Victoria Park.

If colonial and state governments had been left to manage the parklands, instead of city councils, there would be very little left today.

A case in point is the 400-plus hectares (1000 acres) of parklands left to the citizens of Sydney by the Lachlan Macquarie Bequest. Successive New South Wales governments have pillaged Sydney's parklands to the point where there is only 30 per cent of the original bequest left today.

The railway yards to the northwest of Adelaide represented the single biggest parklands grab by a colonial or state government.

Ten hectares with a priceless 1.3km River Torrens frontage were alienated in two phases in 1880 and 1913 and turned over to the then Railways Commission, despite the protests of

both the city council and the community.

The recent stadium and hospital debates have presented a 100-year opportunity to reverse what was one of the worst decisions made in relation to our parklands.

The proposed hospital plan should not go ahead because, apart from a waste of \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion of taxpayers' money, it desecrates one of the most significant parts of Colonel Light's parklands vision.

Instead, the railway yards land should be returned to the public – for example, for development of a waterfront recreational area that can host bigger concerts and community events beyond the capacity of Elder Park.

The Adelaide City Council has always been able to argue for the long-term interests of the city, including the parklands, whereas state political parties make policy based largely on short-term electoral cycles.

The drum that the Adelaide City Council and community must continue to beat is that current and future state governments must learn to resist the lure of free parklands in the interests of present and future generations.

Governments should think hard about the reasons for the massive swing in inner-city seats in the recent state election.

■ Mark Hamilton, a commercial lawyer, is a former Deputy Lord Mayor of Adelaide.