



CITY OF MELBOURNE DOCKLANDS SUMMIT

SUMMIT SMALL FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Summary Report

August 2022

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INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

Docklands is 200 hectares of land and water on the Victoria Harbour and the waterfront to Melbourne. As a precinct, it provides for the residents, businesses and workers, offering a mix of inner city living, shopping, business, parks, entertainment, dining, sporting events, community events, arts and culture.

Docklands has been the hardest hit precinct from COVID-19 which is largely attributed by the absence of office workers, international students and visitors. Over time, Docklands has also had challenges with a complex governance structure, a lack of identity and no shared vision to bring it all together. The Summit provides an opportunity to bring together all of the stakeholders to help shape the future directions of Docklands.

The City of Melbourne is inviting partners, stakeholders, businesses and residents to join them at the Docklands Summit on Friday 2 September to identify opportunities to ultimately enhance the vibrancy to Docklands.

In the lead up to the Summit and to help set the agenda, the City of Melbourne hosted a series of Summit Small Focus Group Discussions with small businesses, representative groups, residents, government departments and agencies, developers and large businesses based in Docklands.

This summary report captures the findings from the special interest conversations and is considered one of the key inputs to explore at the Docklands Summit.

SESSION PURPOSE

The purpose of the special interest conversations was to provide a platform for community and stakeholders to voice their aspirations for Docklands and discuss the barriers for achieving success.

The conversations also helped City of Melbourne to understand where interests align, as well as feed directly into the design of the Summit.



FAST FACTS



WORKSHOP AGENDA

NO.	DETAILS
1	Welcome (City of Melbourne)
2	Opportunity to share a little about you and your interest in Docklands
3	Identify interest and aspirations by exploring the identity of Docklands, what is currently working well and the vision for Docklands future
4	Issues and concerns in delivering a positive vision for Docklands
5	Next steps and close



SUMMARY RESULTS

Overall the feedback received from these group discussions was positive, with participants actively involved in the conversations and eager to share their experiences.

The key takeaways we heard was that the locals love Docklands - the location, what is on offer and the services they frequently use. The key issue is that this does not align with the public perception of the Docklands and what might appear in the media.

The following aims to breakdown these issues so that actions and solutions can be discussed at the Summit

SECTION 1 INTERESTS AND ASPIRATIONS

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE IDENTITY OF DOCKLANDS CURRENTLY?

THE LOOK AND FEEL OF DOCKLANDS

There was a strong response to what people see and feel about Docklands and how this might influence peoples experience of Docklands.. The climatic conditions plays an important part in the Docklands identity with participants recalling cold, windy and cloudy as a descriptors. There were comments to how the Docklands is perceived as the deadlands and a ghost town. This was particularly at night, which highlighted a lack of night activity and offerings.. This was often followed up with the feeling that it is unfinished, unloved and forgotten. This was also tied to conversations around the precinct is still evolving and there is opportunity to improve the public realm and provide useful and welcoming spaces for the community.

There were also responses that talked to the oasis that the Docklands provides from the city centre and the peacefulness of being close to the water. Participants mentioned the opportunity to focus on the water aspect of Docklands as a crucial component of the precinct and unique to Melbourne.



"Perceived as deadlands from outside"
"A place, not a community"

"Activation is all about waterways, play the differentiator"

THE PEOPLE OF DOCKLANDS

The people of Docklands are diverse, multicultural, vibrant and transient. Participants described Docklands as a mix of different precincts that attract different people who live, work or relax in them. There are more young families moving into the area with a local school now located at Docklands. There is hope that with the school and more children in the area, community spaces will be activated, providing more reasons for families to stay long term.

Locals like living in Docklands for its high rise living and to watch a community develop over time. One thing that has risen over the last few years is dog ownership, with a notable influx of furry friends during years of managing COVID.



"School = connecting community to stay"
"Community space. Young population. Developing. High Rise living"

"Multicultural, vibrant, transient population"

DOCKLANDS: A DESTINATION

Docklands is the water gateway to Melbourne and it is felt that this identify is underutilised and not seen as an asset. There is great opportunity to market the precinct as a city destination.

Participants reflected that activation is the key to building Docklands reputation as a destination and to entice people into the area. This could be through small events held regularly and large events held over a longer time period that supplement the existing program of events.. The activation would bring in people to support the hospitality and retail areas, and provide atmosphere and community liveliness for those that live in the Docklands.



"Significant port area - poorly understood by the public. As such, an undeveloped 'asset'"

"Needs to be marketed as a city destination"

"Smaller events on a regular basis not one off large events"

"Activated to bring people & retail to docklands"

HIGH RISES IN AN AREA THAT IS FRAGMENTED AND DISJOINTED

There are hidden gems in the precinct if you know where to look. They can often be overshadowed by the enormity of space, appearance of concrete and the high rises. This can lend to a fragmented precinct where there is not one clear or celebrated thing that brings it all together. The precinct is split or segregated by large structures and in some cases, this leads to people feeling isolated. Improving the visual aspects of the public realm may support greater connection with the established infrastructure.

There are differing views from people who live and or work in the different areas of Docklands. Some like the segregation whilst others want to see connectivity in some way shape or form. This also extends to Docklands and the city centre, where getting over Spencer Street or past Marvel Stadium is seen as a barrier to the remainder of Docklands.



"Different areas with different needs e.g. Yarra's Edge versus Victoria Harbour"

"Isolated & separated from CBD"

THE WATERFRONT

The Docklands identity is built off waterfront living and its close proximity to the heart of Melbourne. The waterways hold a history that some participants felt was not told and is seen as an important historical element of Melbourne.

It is felt that more could be done to tap into the water based identity of Docklands and to celebrate the historical connections. In one of the focus groups it was raised that there should be greater acknowledgment and recognition of the Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri People, and their connection to land and water.

This would involve purposeful activation on the water and services near the water, venues that support heritage based activities and ways to encourage people to head towards the waterfront.



"Heritage listed waterway needs interpretation"

"Water is key to the identity"

WHAT IS WORKING WELL IN DOCKLANDS?

COMMUNITY SERVICES, FACILITIES AND CONNECTIONS

People who live and work in Docklands have had a front seat view of the evolution of the precinct. They see the businesses are well established, community and recreational facilities on land and water are growing, and that the community feeling is growing.

There is a lot of support for the new school, the Docklands Community Hub and Library, Ron Barassi Park and services such as the Toy Library. They are providing the facilities and services of established suburbs with a touch of difference such as dragon boat racing. These services are playing greater importance supporting flexible work and start-ups in residential towers. The Library at the Dock maker space was used as an example of a well used and supported space.



"Very social - people want to connect"

"Businesses are well established. Good community to build on"

"Excellent new school"

"Dragon boat, Go boat, rowing, schools"

ENTERTAINMENT OPPORTUNITIES

There is a dichotomy between what people are wanting to see in Docklands. Some participants want small and regular events, and others said the large-scale events that bring in large crowds, tend to be annual or 'one off', are working well. Participants mentioned Docklands venues that attract large crowds such as Marvel Stadium, The District and O'Brien Ice House, as successfully attracting people to the area. And open air venues that hold viewing points for events such as Firelight. A balance between the two types of events is required and finding ways that encourage people to linger for longer and more frequently is important to businesses in the precinct.



"Marvel Stadium attracts visitors"

"Activity hub (weekend activity, drawing tourists)"

"Great for viewing fireworks for NYE etc."

THE WATERFRONT

Participants commented on the Marina as an attraction, well managed by the Recreation and Waterways team. It is also recognised that the water access and transportation (ferries) is working well and that they make the most of the views Docklands has to offer. The promenade and walking circuit encourage people to get out and about for a walk and to explore the precinct, and dining closer to the waterfront would enhance this experience. Like the theme captured under the identity of Docklands, the maritime heritage is important and there is an opportunity to explore this further.



"Marina as an attraction"

"Maritime heritage. Community boat hub"

"Dining needs to be closer to waterfront"

GREEN SPACES AND PUBLIC REALM

Participants noted the City of Melbourne focus on parks and the public realm, noting that parks have improved over time. Green spaces are popping up and their beauty is appreciated against the backdrop of the high rises. Ron Barassi Park, Docklands Park and the Sports Hub were shared as things that are working well in Docklands. More playgrounds, and the opportunity for further urban forest and biodiversity in parks, were mentioned as focus areas going forward.



*"Ron Barassi Park
& Sports hub"*

*"Biodiversity in Docklands,
park & greenspaces"*

"Beautiful green spaces"

LIVEABILITY OF DOCKLANDS

Living in Docklands has its appeal with some participants as it seems the area has clean streets, no anti-social behaviour and is a safe location. There are also amenities in the area to support the residential community such as supermarkets, library and medical facilities. It was raised in the sessions that some people are aware of crime in the area and a lack of personal safety due to some anti social behaviour. This was largely attributed by the lack of night-time activities and people hooning down empty streets.



*"Clean streets – anti social
activity not visible"*

*"Accessible amenities
e.g. supermarkets,
library, medical"*

TRANSPORT

Overall transportation into the precinct and around the precinct was seen as a positive thing. There are trains to Southern Cross Station, trams and ferries, and a transport hub to support the precinct. It was also mentioned that Docklands is in walking distance from the central city area for those that want to be more active.



*"Transport - free tram
walking distance to CBD"*

"Free Tram!"

"Great transport hub"

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR DOCKLANDS? WHERE DO YOU SEE DOCKLANDS IN 20 YEARS?

A DESTINATION

Participants saw Docklands as a destination drawing on the features of the existing location and infrastructure. In 20 years' time, the destination is likened to The Rocks and Darling Harbour in Sydney and Monte Carlo in Monaco. Participants suggested the destination draw cards of redeveloping Central Pier, creation of a Docklands Beach and swimming area, an activated retail and entertainment district, and Docklands as the sustainability capital of Melbourne.

To support the Docklands vision as a premier destination, greater work on connectivity and ledgibility is suggested. Suggestions in how this might be done were shared, including easy walking between Marvel Stadium and the rest of Docklands, and the linking of Birrarung Marr through to Moonee Ponds Creek.



"Central Pier needs to provide destination - help continual events"

*"A place to go.
A destination"*

*"Marvel stadium connection to Docklands -
Walk bridge or viewing deck"*

"Trail from Birrarung Marr to MP Creek & beyond"

DOCKLANDS: A PLACE TO LIVE

A vision for Docklands is to be the leader in affordable, apartment living and to provide a safe and activated suburb for families and children. Community facilities would service the residents and educational opportunities would be realised, with support for a multi-campus approach to the existing primary school so that it can cater to high school students. There was also mention of the importance of family-centric facilities and housing options to cater for growing families who are likely to stay in the precinct for longer, not just young families.

Participants also commented on the strength of public art and green spaces being integrated and suggested a future with more community facilities and spaces to support connection including for the dog community. Participants want Docklands to be celebrated and not feel like they need to apologise or defend why they choose to live where they do.



*"A leader in apartment living and management"
"Affordable housing"*

"High school and more universities, footy team of Docklands"

"Victoria Harbour fenced off dog park" "Public art & green spaces integrated"

"I don't want to feel embarrassed and apologise for living here"

ACTIVATING THE PUBLIC REALM AND GREEN SPACES

The vision in the public realm is highly focused on green spaces of all kinds; including urban forests, small gardens in residential areas, and greater connection to Moonee Ponds Creek as a major open space for Docklands. Participants want to see green space activated close to the waterways, to create features that connect to Docklands as the waterfront destination.

Participants suggested a mix of permanent and temporary activations that included better utilisation of vacant shop fronts, public art, festivals and events, and pop up cafes and flexible spaces.



*"More green space
(near waterways)"*

"Urban forest"

*"Moonee Ponds Creek major
open space as part
of Docklands"*

*"More active at different
times, days"*

"Pop up cafe, flexible spaces"

GATEWAYS AND CONNECTIVITY

Participants would like to see Docklands as the gateway to Melbourne from the waterways and from the North and West parts of Melbourne. In 20 years' time, Docklands is integrated with Melbourne and the surrounding suburbs and feels connected through transport options and bridges and walk ways that support ease of access.



*"The gateway to Melbourne -
ferry service, transport"*

*"More integrated with
Melbourne and
surrounding suburbs"*

WATERWAYS

Focus on the waterways was captured by participants, emphasising building a hub of activity around the waterfront including public transport and recreational activities and valuing the maritime heritage of the precinct. Supporting the activation of the waterfront experience connects with the public realm and Docklands as a destination themes.



*"Hub for Maritime heritage
& experience"*

*"Multilayered. Marine-oriented
- food, boating, historic"*

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENTS AND CREATIVE SPACES

Participants discussed the vision for Docklands as finding the right balance to support both the residential and business development needs of the precinct. They offered a mix of ideas including supporting a start-up model or business in the precinct, and encouraging more multinational business to be based in Docklands. There was also interest in Docklands as a creative hub, building off Docklands Studios already on location. It is seen that a focus on bigger businesses will help smaller businesses with things like lunch time trade which in turn support greater usage and activation of Docklands.



*"Creative hub
- Docklands studios"*

"A start up hub"

*"More Multinational
Businesses"*

*"More employment
opportunities"*

*"The right balance between
residents and businesses.
Keep both happy"*

SECTION 2 OUR COLLECTIVE ISSUES AND CONCERNS

GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES – NO VISION AND TOO MANY DECISION MAKERS

There was a strong sense of confusion and frustration about the range of stakeholders (or decision makers) that oversee Docklands. There is not one voice that supports the vision and plans for future development and there is a perceived lack of planning and prioritisation to realise Docklands potential. This has created feelings of uncertainty about key services and features of the precinct such as Central Pier, local schools and sites that build Docklands as a destination.

The multiple decision makers have also led to frustration in approval processes for any projects that want to improve the area. Participants mentioned the multiple sign offs required and unclear pathways to approval. It has also led to consultation fatigue where communities and stakeholders feel that there are too many consultations and not enough follow up and action occurring afterwards.



*“Red tape = approvals.
Getting things done”*

*“There is no plan
- too many fingers”*

“Single voice representing”

*“Too many plans, discussions,
forums but not
action historically”*

*“Poor communication
between all stakeholders”*

PUBLIC REALM, ACTIVATION AND AMENITY

The public realm and amenity in the area was discussed a lot when people talked to the identity and vision for Docklands. The concerns being that smaller activated public spaces are needed to break up the large expanse of space and the grey surfaces (buildings and ground surfaces). People are looking for the incidental spaces, places where small communities can gather close to their home or workplace, places that bring a feeling of warmth and connection to the area.

Activation of the precinct is still an issue for participants. They commented on the impact of the empty offices and retail spaces, and the temporary nature of some of the large scale features that were to draw people into the area. There is a push to engage the locals and to get them enthusiastic about the services, facilities and lifestyle choices available to them.



*“Communal gathering
spaces - better quality”*

*“Need small pocket parks
not big spaces*

*“Lack of permanent visitation
sites along water”*

*“Get the locals enthusiasm
about the services, markets,
libraries & activities”*

*“Improve waterfront - focus
on initiatives that
activate water”*

MARKETING AND LEGIBILITY

The participants talked to the negative perception of Docklands as an unattractive place to visit and the need to market the precinct, sharing what it has to offer residents, workers and visitors. The other source of concern is legibility in the area; participants noted that it is not clear where things are located and it can be confusing. This may not be directly related to signage, it may also include visual sightlines, natural queues, landscaping and built form. Combined they make spaces easier to navigate and orientate.



*“General reputation
of Docklands is not positive”*

*“Wayfinding! Signage - can't
find what is here”*

*“Guide to explain to people
what docklands is and
what is on offer”*

ONE PRECINCT OR MULTIPLE PRECINCTS

There is a diversity in opinion about Docklands being one precinct or many precincts, each with their own individual look and feel. This is not just related to the precinct names provided by developers, but how people associate with an area, how they describe it, and what is in a place. This issue leads to a lack of identity for the area and the disconnection between the key sites and the central city area. Some people reflected that the Harbour Esplanade is a connector of each side of Victoria Harbour and there is opportunity to improve connectivity with the redevelopment of this site. Using this to also maximise use of the waterways.

A number of participants reflected on the poor design of Docklands and how it is not optimised for people to use the space comfortably. This may be due to the physical look i.e. the size of the buildings and psychological feel i.e. the expanse of space. This is also over emphasised by large parcels of land laying vacant and the concern about the area being over developed.



"Emphasis differences of each precinct BUT needs to be connected"

"Connectivity = Precinct is too big"

"Central Pier pivotal to connect each side of Vic Harbour"

"Human scale architecture"

"Poor human scale"

"Developers over developing"

DOCKLANDS: A PLACE TO LIVE

Participants reflected that the community focus of Docklands is often not put first, and priority is instead placed on developers and overseas property ownership. This is an issue in working with Owner Corporations when a number of owners are not the occupiers. One example provided related to the challenge in achieving 50% votes for decisions with body corporates when buildings are predominantly owned by overseas investors. This inhibits residents being able to take action in their own buildings. The transient nature of residents is also seen as a barrier to forming strong community links.

It was reflected from the residents participating in the sessions that safety is seen to be an issue and concern at night with minimal night time activity through hospitality and retail opportunities.. Waste management in high rise living was also raised as a concern.



"Transient population - turnover of renters"

"Priority for developers over community"

BUSINESS, RETAIL AND HOSPITALITY

The Docklands, like other precincts is noticing a marked difference in the activity levels of business, retail and hospitality following the pandemic and Melbourne lockdowns. The participants reflected that people are still working from home and haven't returned to the pre pandemic norm. This has had a flow on affect to the hospitality and retail areas who in some cases have reduced their operating hours to compensate for the reduced foot traffic. It was also mentioned that hospitality businesses should cater for residents and entertainment rather than just aiming to service workers in business hours.

One theme that has come up through the conversations is the opportunity to explore start-ups and how they may interact with Docklands through vacant spaces and / or ideas and solutions to the challenges Docklands faces.

SECTION 3

BIG BUSINESS, DEVELOPERS AND GOVERNMENT

Due to attendee availability and concerns regarding information in confidence, the City of Melbourne hosted one on one meetings for developers, big business and State government departments and agencies.

The key summary points below were captured from notes taken from a City of Melbourne staff member.

The participating organisations included ANZ, AFL House, Lendlease, MAB, Mirvac, Parks Victoria, Heritage Victoria and VicTrack.

Please note that MosaicLab was not present at any of the one on one conversations.



INTERESTS AND ASPIRATIONS (IDENTITY AND VISION FOR DOCKLANDS)

- ◆ Docklands can be characterised by eras; from the when the Wurundjeri People used the area, with the convergence of the water systems, as a meeting place and for food the first generation city dwellers and a starting point for young families to live close to the city, through to expanding families and a business and retail precinct.
- ◆ With the eras also comes a changing demographic that needs different infrastructure requirements and services and facilities to support the growing community.
- ◆ There is opportunity to celebrate the rich history of Docklands and achievements from major engineering feats, maritime history and the people that call Docklands their home, work place or playground.
- ◆ Aboriginal history and connections should be on display. Docklands is the junction of a number of original water courses which would have meant a rich hub for food and gatherings.
- ◆ Docklands has shown to have great mix of uses. We need to promote the differences to the Central City such as the open spaces, fresh air and waterways.
- ◆ The big space of Docklands can suit big business with easy access transport options, the sense of being near the waterways and public spaces.
- ◆ There is a concerted effort from some businesses to entice staff back into the workplace with programs being offered such as entertainment, free coffee, pet days, school holiday programs and customer marketplaces. These initiatives are showing potential but its hard work! The office plays an important role with culture, customer interaction, and we are looking to strengthen this messaging. We want to create the right place for when people are ready to come back into the office.
- ◆ Residents are loyal – many stay within the area long term and “tower hop” between rentals.
- ◆ Perception that Docklands is a “ghost town” is wrong – there high demand for affordable apartments and low residential vacancies.

CHALLENGES

- ♦ Climatic conditions of Docklands – being windy, desolate, and cold as well as being characterised by underutilised spaces and water.
- ♦ Yarra's Edge is removed from Docklands physically and will start to orientate towards the future Fishermans Bend community in THE Lorimer Precinct.
- ♦ There are limitations on ability to expand water taxi services. Trials have been undertaken, however were hindered by speed limits along the Yarra making them unviable and not popular mode of transport that will likely be sustainable. There are private water taxi services, however these are not well known.
- ♦ Lack of critical mass of people affects the ability to make commercial tenancies viable, with no regular passing trade.
- ♦ The promenades are criticised as too wide, lack variation and interest. There has been differing views about changing this in the future to create features and destinations, or continuing consistency.
- ♦ Docklands feels confused and unintentional, there is a need to peel back the layers and put the history of the area on display, but continue a common thread to link these layers.
- ♦ There has been a slow return to work, with many government organisations not encouraging staff back into the office is impacting vibrancy during the day.
- ♦ The closure of Central Pier and design of Harbour Esplanade exaggerate the difficulties of Dockland's connection. The precincts are more enclaved without spatial linkages across Docklands.
- ♦ We need to focus on reinvigorating the retail and business opportunities as very few businesses are showing willingness to venture into Docklands.
- ♦ There are more challenges with different work models such as the 1-3 days working from the office as opposed to the traditional 3-5 days model. Working in partnership with business and government will be important to fill the vacancies and support the retail and business industry.
- ♦ The dining experience and creating and improving existing waterfront dining opportunities needs attention and maybe we need to think differently and encourage flexible experiences rather than permanent options, particularly when outdoors and in the public realm.
- ♦ Docklands can sometimes be seen as too residential and may not provide the right incentive for people to visit the precinct. Finding the balance between a liveable precinct and a destination for visitors is needed and will help with the retail, entertainment and hospitality industry.
- ♦ The number and range of stakeholders with an interest in Docklands creates onerous approvals processes that is frustrating to navigate and difficult to communicate. If stakeholders can be brought together and agree on an approval pathway a clearer way forward will be realised.
- ♦ Marvel Stadium is currently a physical barrier in connecting the Docklands to the central city area and we need to think of ways to address this. The concourse is an expanse of space however there are limitations on how it can be used for activation (weight limits).
- ♦ Victoria Dock is characterised by the death of a thousand cuts. Developer led projects have not realised the place, heritage or water vision which has diluted the quality of the place.

PLANS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR DOCKLANDS

- ♦ Greater coordination across the levels of government is needed to show 'buy in' to the area and a strong voice for change. This will be needed going forward if we are to activate the precinct as well as furthering Docklands as a destination with redevelopments such as Central Pier.
- ♦ There is a need for a vision and strategy to deliver this vision. This will provide a transparent approach to the future of Docklands that is visible for community and stakeholders.
- ♦ Having a clear vision will help achieve better policy and outcomes.
- ♦ The water and land in Docklands are state heritage listed, giving it a site of significance for Victoria. Opportunity to share the Dockland's story and connect with the history of the area. This would include working with the Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri People and understanding their connection to the land and waterways through to the settlement of Melbourne and the maritime history.
- ♦ Activating the water, including reviewing the existing marina usage, identifying areas for facilities for back of house operations, and inclusion of super yachts and tall ships and boating events should be a priority.
- ♦ Creating the X-factor experience for some of the larger destination sites and have the precinct activated every day of the year. Working together in a coordinated way may help us to achieve this.
- ♦ There is a need for stakeholders to agree on who is taking ownership for Docklands and ensure the vision is achieved.
- ♦ There are a number of existing initiatives which major stakeholders are driving that need greater exposure, including Docklands Dollars and Park Run.



PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to transcribe participants comments accurately a small number may not have been included in this summary due to the legibility of the content. Please contact Lyndal Mackintosh at lyndal@mosaiclab.com.au for any suggested adjustments.

MosaicLab is a Victorian-based consultancy that specialises in community & stakeholder engagement, facilitation, negotiation, strategic planning and coaching.



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