



CONVERSATIONS IN THE COVE

'Touching the Water'

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Dechaineux Theatre
Tasmanian School of Art
Hunter Street, Hobart, Tasmania

Guest Speaker:

* **Perry Lethlean**
Director
Taylor Cullity Lethlean

Joined by:

- * **Professor Peter Elliott**
Head
Sullivans Cove
Waterfront Authority
Design Panel
- * **Jeff Gilmore**
Chief Executive
Sullivans Cove
Waterfront Authority

Moderated by Tim Cox, ABC
Radio

Conversations in the Cove is presented by the
Sullivans Cove Waterfront Authority.



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MEET THE SPEAKERS



▶ Perry Lethlean

Perry Lethlean, one of Australia's leading contemporary urban and landscape designers, is a Director of the Melbourne office of Taylor Cullity Lethlean. He has received national acclaim for his work at Geelong and parts of Docklands.

Mr Lethlean is a sought-after design lecturer and critic at universities as well as a juror for professional practice awards. His commitment to contemporary design and its expression in the landscape both in Australia and overseas can be seen as

continuing the evolution of an Australian design ethic. Mr Lethlean's work is widely published, particularly his successful entries for major national design competitions.

Taylor Cullity Lethlean is a leading landscape architecture and urban design firm, with work nationally recognised for design quality, demonstrated by the 2000 and 2002 Australian Award of Excellence in Landscape Architecture.



▶ Professor Peter Elliott

Professor Peter Elliott is one of Australia's most acclaimed architects and urban designers. He is renowned for mixing old and new forms with clarity and precision.

Professor Elliott's work has been widely published and exhibited and has won numerous Awards and Honours for outstanding architecture. This includes an Order of Australia in 1987 for services to architecture (public housing) and the Victorian Architecture Medal 1991 for the Carlton Baths and Community Centre.

Professor Elliott's work in Tasmania includes the Riawunna Aboriginal Education Centre and Faculty of Arts Precinct at the University of Tasmania, Launceston. Professor Elliott is Head of the Sullivans Cove Waterfront Authority Design Panel.



▶ Jeff Gilmore

Jeff Gilmore is the inaugural Chief Executive of the Sullivans Cove Waterfront Authority. Mr Gilmore has extensive experience in leading complex strategic policy development in planning gathered during five years in the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, including two years as Deputy Secretary, Strategic Policy and Planning. From 2003 to 2005 he was head of the Hobart Waterfront Project.

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS:

This is an edited transcript of 'Conversations in the Cove' compiled from audio recordings. While every effort has been made to ensure it is a fair and accurate representation of the event, some sections have been edited for reasons of inaudibility, relevance, grammar or length. If you believe any portion has been erroneously transcribed, please contact the Sullivans Cove Waterfront Authority. While this material may be used by individuals who are involved in researching or studying the history and development of Sullivans Cove and Hobart, the material on these pages should not be used for any commercial purposes. Any reproduction of the contents of this document is strictly prohibited without the written and specific permission of the Sullivans Cove Waterfront Authority and the persons quoted in this transcript.

Moderator: Tonight we're looking at the idea of 'Touching the Water' to explore ideas about the way we use what was once a working port but which now serves many other purposes. It's still a working port, a place for partying at particular times of year and for a wooden boat festival as well. Plenty goes on about our waterfront but how much of it is about the people, and how will people access it in the future? Please welcome international award-winning landscape architect and urban designer Perry Lethlean.

Perry Lethlean: Historically, waterfronts are formed by geography and some very basic elements: a deep harbour, habitable land and fresh water. Cities grow around these places and this confluence – the bringing together of certain qualities of geography, of maritime uses and diversity of urban life – is critical to the success of waterfronts. It's why people get drawn to them. It's a mixing together of diversity as distinct from other urban places in a city.

I've been reflecting upon what I like about waterfronts and, surprisingly, it's not necessarily manufactured ones – the ones designed by contemporary landscape architects or where architecture just lands on a site. It's places that have grown and evolved, that have a certain sense of history but with a contemporary layer embedded into the place.

What interests me, is building upon the essential qualities of a place and layering into it a contemporary design expression. Landscape architects and urban designers have a challenge here. One is, how do we retain a site's essential qualities in any new development? Also, how do we offer an invitation to the public to access these places? And more importantly, how do we respect in any contemporary design expression these places when we layer in new additions?

I often use some guiding thoughts in thinking about new design in such places. We all have this history of our youth where we look into the water and reflect upon all the fabulous creatures lying below the surface – a hidden world – and we've got to ensure this quality, this mystery, this other world is reflected in any design work we do.

So the question is, how do we capture and enhance this mystery of life underneath any urban design work we do? This quality was captured beautifully by artist Robert Gober, who exhibited in Melbourne about five years ago. As you entered the gallery space, a suitcase opened up and there was a world of water below the suitcase. It was an exploration of the literal zone and we've got to make sure we don't distance ourselves from the fundamental qualities of water and how a city meets these spaces.

Another artist, Jennifer Turpin, a fabulous Australian-based sculptor, works specifically on water-based work. She uses waves and tides to create a choreography of ladders that are constantly moving and animating the setting. It's very beautiful work based on enhancing and capturing the qualities of a site.

Sometimes work just needs to be very simple – an ability to touch the water, access it cleanly, provide safe access and allow kids to frolic and play. Waterfronts shouldn't just be for adults. Any waterfront development should look at a diversity of ways in which the public can access it, and it shouldn't be a uniform experience. It's about diversity, it's about surprise and it's about accessing the water.

An example of something we probably shouldn't be doing is Darling Harbour where there is a promenade of ubiquitous brick paving uniformly along the waterfront edge. It's bringing a city or a suburban vocabulary of materials down to the water, and it's actually blurring the essential qualities of this site. Also, there is a repetition of flags and bollards which actually create a barrier between the water and the people when the intention should be for people to access it.

We should be careful not to provide sanitised experiences. We should be careful not to remove the smells, the noise and the activity that makes these places unique. I walked around the Hobart waterfront today and realised it has a lot of these qualities that I'm talking about, and we should take care that they are integrated. One is to keep the sense of maritime use, which is quite critical. An example is Marseilles, with cafés which provide one of the world's best waterfront experiences. You feel invited into the experience of the local community. There is a sense of clutter and history. It's not about mess, it's an evolution of a site that is quite a fascinating experience.

Another great place is Helsinki, which has constant markets on the waterfront to access fruit, vegetables and fish. In Hobart, too, these are essential qualities in creating a dynamic quality so the waterfront is not a static experience.

Similarly, if we're talking about waterfronts and ports, we must make sure we don't sanitise them so much that the fishing industry needs to be relocated at the expense of putting public access ways in.

This is absolutely critical. The ability to walk past fishing boats, look into them, see the activity and be part of that, either as a visitor or a resident, is fantastic.

"We should be careful not to provide sanitised experiences. We should be careful not to remove the smells, the noise and the activity that makes these places unique."

These sorts of qualities – the authentic qualities – are critical and we should be careful that we don't just keep waterfronts as static, historic experiences. They need to grow and evolve, just like cities do, and there are important lessons in the quality of the waterfront experience that we can take in any new design.

One of these is reinforcing the maritime character within the materials we use and that can be simply through the use of timber,

boardwalks, edge details; very simple, tactile qualities that are distinct from a civic or an urban palette. It can be simply about accentuating the drama of a setting by providing really simple, beautiful, elegant qualities that accentuate the scale and the materiality of the space.

Sometimes it can be about accentuating the scale and vertical drama. In Homebush (Sydney), light poles are an element that tie together very well a broad and sometimes not very populated space. Architecture and architectural expression, and the vocabulary of form, can be used to reinforce the qualities of a maritime setting. An example can be found in Rotterdam, where the Netherlands Architecture Institute designed by Jo Coenen is housed in a very simple object. The reflective qualities of the water and the adjacent historic buildings are quite fantastic.

The other important quality to reflect upon is how to ensure a public destination in any waterfront work. This is not just about layering in a whole lot of new elements, it's sometimes about editing and revealing a site. It's about allowing flexible uses to occur over time and not to programme and define exact spaces or exact uses. Incidental qualities are memorable for residents and visitors.

Waterfronts, however, need some unifying elements. It can be trees, it can be furniture, it can be a promenade experience. Continuous treatments help to unify a pedestrian realm for the public by creating a legible network of circulation. In Lisbon, they use lighting. We often forget the magical qualities of water and reflective light in waterfront development yet this is something that can be captured in any waterfront design.

In any public realm work, we should always consider that it's for all ages. We all enjoy watching kids frolic in urban spaces; we can sit back while they expend all their energy. And to allow for that sort of use – that informal use, and not a dedicated playground per se – is what animates these settings. There is one in Paris, in Palais Royale, which is always occupied by kids playing on little poles. It's such a simple element designed by Daniel Buren. I don't know the secret of it but I wish I had designed it myself.

Walkways in waterfronts can be extremely celebratory of their place. There's no reason to be scared of contemporary additions if they are appropriate. There is a new bridge in Melbourne's Docklands which is probably the best thing down there at the moment. Based on an Aboriginal eel trap and designed by Robert Owen in association with Melbourne-based architects Denton Corker Marshall, it's a pedestrian bike path that crosses over the Yarra River.

A contemporary layer over a waterfront condition can often be used to tie together a lot of diverse and ad hoc qualities. Instead of removing all ad hoc qualities, a single unifying gesture might pull and knit them together, and this was particularly important and necessary in Southbank in Brisbane, where an harbour weaves its way through a cacophony of different landscape conditions and building uses left over from Expo 88.

Now, I'd like to talk about the Geelong Waterfront example, where we [Taylor Cullity Lethlean] were brought in five years ago with a really simple brief: to connect the waterfront back into the city. The project was to provide a continuous pedestrian promenade along the water's edge and a high-quality public realm which might be able to attract investment.

Previously, over the last 20 years, you wouldn't go to Geelong unless you were hungry and heading somewhere else, and you'd pass by it really quickly down to the Great Ocean Road. That was reflected in the mindset of Geelong residents; they weren't proud of their city or their waterfront so our task was to help make that change by providing a waterfront they could be proud of and that they used as part of an open space network within the city.

Over the last 20 years, the city had declined and the waterfront had become a leftover piece of land. The port industries moved on, it was extremely car dominated and you didn't actually know there was a waterfront there. We set ourselves six or seven design principles that would guide both our work and that of any other designer who might come along subsequently to us or do concurrent work.

The first principle was to provide a diversity of water experiences. How might a city come down and meet the water's edge, not just as one experience but a diversity of experiences?

Another principle was to establish a grand promenade, a continuous public walkway along the water's edge connecting a sequence of destinations. This needed to be a very legible and understandable circulation network, allowing a diversity of activities and establishing points of intensification.

We didn't want a uniform experience. We wanted places where we could reflect, places that were social places, places that terminated views, places that made you turn the corner and places that might speak of the site's essential qualities.

We also established a palette of materials – materials that we thought spoke not only of the maritime character, but also of its industrial past. We weren't scared of using rusty steel and concrete and timber, as long as they were used in an elegant and contemporary manner.

Yet another principle was the idea of the temporal. That is, the design needed to allow for parties and events, organised and informal ones, but also be quite beautiful when it was not populated. And in Geelong, it had to be tough.

When we arrived it was not an attractive place. Our first step was to establish a promenade, and we used a rhythm of concrete elements to accentuate the sense of perspective. These elements clipped over an existing sea wall, so we used the existing infrastructure and we wanted the elements to appear to come out of the sea and back on to dry land. We fringed that with a row of Washingtonia palms.

Continuing the theme, we dropped a whole lot of navigational buoys up on the promenade as if a storm had just left them there. Such informal elements can be used for a variety of uses, such as seating, but they can also be used to house lighting which shines across the pavement.

Part of the Geelong Waterfront was an existing harbour, which housed the scallop fleet, and we decided not to touch it at all. What we did do is connect it as one of the destinations along the promenade, working on the idea of being able to access it and look into it to see the activity of boats. This was a really important quality of the waterfront experience.

One of the problems was the view from the main street connecting the CBD. You couldn't see the waterfront at all so part of our work was to reveal and edit rather than add. We took a lot of material away and opened up the view, and created a site for an artwork called 'North'. While everybody thinks they're sharks' fins, the artist stipulates they're about sails, and they are an important arrival point – a fantastic beacon when you're looking down from the centre of the city to the waterfront.

We also brought water into the experience via a small harbour and a cantilevered deck, as well as a very broad cor-ten seat wall that provides quite a lovely experience sitting against the water's edge.

The important thing to consider when providing a waterfront promenade experience is that some days along the water's edge are not very lovely. It can be windy, it can be cold, so some quieter spaces are required, which is why we were fortunate to find the Customs House building hidden away, unused and back from the water's edge. We figured this would be a perfect pocket park to develop back from the water.

We thought, wouldn't it be great if we could sculpturally evoke the former connectivity between this Customs Building and the harbour, which led to a talk about the uses of this building as well as landscape architecture and artwork. That's when we introduced a rolling lawn, a wavelike pattern which has a very civic and axial design, but is also very playful. It's probably one of the best playgrounds we've ever designed. Kids loved it. Unfortunately, the councillors didn't and they've had it removed; they thought it was too hard to maintain so it's now flat.

We also developed an artwork strategy in which we came up with locations and themes, but allowed artists and sculptors to elaborate and enrich each theme. For example, an artwork by Maggie Fookes is based on cargo boxes. Each box talks about a particular ship that used to come into Geelong and within each box is a particular trade good that used to go in and out of the city. It's a very interpretive but also functional design element.

Finally, part of the waterfront development was about connecting some really well-loved experiences, such as Eastern Beach and the sea baths, which we linked via a promenade.

Part of the view of the promenade was obstructed by a car park. You couldn't walk from the city to the Eastern Beach baths without negotiating a car park. We kept the same number of car parks but pushed them back off the sand to establish a very broad, simple promenade – sand on the right, car park on the left, with a planted band separating the two where we used Geelong seagrass that grows just offshore. This seagrass also formed a pattern that we sandblasted into the concrete to provide a repetitive element along the foreshore.

All these qualities of a water experience – touching the water, the use of materials – have since been taken and used about 100 kilometres inland where we're completing a botanical garden in Cranbourne, which is a \$10 million garden based on Australian plants. This shows that these qualities of water that we all love can be not just about the waterfront, but can be transformed into new experiences. Thank you.

Moderator: You talked a bit about suburban vocabulary and how it's been brought to Darling Harbour in Sydney. What vocabulary do you see when you look around the waterfront in Hobart?

Perry Lethlean: Concrete ... a lot of concrete. (Laughter from audience.) Seriously, the Hobart waterfront experience is all about the diversity of inlets and bay that create it. It still has a very maritime, industrial quality with quite a nice feel to it. I think another layer of pedestrian quality could be looked at. In Geelong, we used concrete throughout. It's an economical, cheap and efficient material, and there are a number of beautiful ways it can be used. We were able to distinguish a road network, which was asphalt, and we distinguished a path network, which was gravel, adjacent to that road network, and we distinguished a promenade experience via concrete, with deck used to highlight special places. That idea of legibility or a hierarchy of materials to distinguish certain uses is quite nice.

Moderator: Many of your European examples have a sense of daring about them and we see that in Geelong. But I don't see much of a sense of daring in other Australian venues. Can Hobart do that in this location?

Perry Lethlean: It's not necessarily about being daring. Hobart already has a fantastic quality so it's about editing, revealing, providing strategies of circulation and strategies of connecting to water. I'd be mindful of layering some big object or trying to do something that Hobart doesn't need. What interests me far more is building upon the essential qualities of a place and layering into it a contemporary design expression.

Moderator: A question for Peter Elliott – Where do you see cars fitting in? It was interesting that Geelong took cars away to give that space extra value. How do you see that fitting here?

Peter Elliott: It is a different situation in as much as the Geelong waterfront is a promenade. As Perry said, there were a series of things that were already there that were a bit unloved and passing away, so tying them together was good. Now, instead of being able to drive your car right on to the beach, you pull back five metres or so, that's all it is, and give prominence to the public beach. That's been skilfully done. But it's also critical, particularly in low-density cities like we have in Australia, that we don't lose the little bits of intensity that we have, so I'm of the mind that we can have a shared situation. If you strip all of the energy away from a place and leave it as an open space, you risk bleeding the energy out. It's a perceptual thing but at the moment in Hobart there's an imbalance between the number of cars and the lack of clarity and legibility of pedestrian zones.

But you don't have to radically change anything to get that part right again. Hopefully that's something the Design Panel will be working towards over the next few months.

Moderator: Does anyone else want to pick that up because there's no doubting that some of the cars in Hobart have the best view in Australia.

Member of audience: What's wrong with that? It works for those who are immobile, to be able to sit there and have some fish and chips on a winter's day in the car, and it's great for people who want to enjoy the view from the comfort of their car. I'm not saying the whole place has got to be a car park, but there's a place for that type of experience for those people who wish to experience it in that way.

Moderator: Is that what you were talking about, Peter?

Peter Elliott: Yes. Having that sort of flexibility, or at least a determination for that sort of use for part of it.

Perry Lethlean: Exactly. The waterfront is designed as a working dock so it already has an opportunity for mixture, and this simply means being able to give over spaces for that sort of thing, while in other

situations you can remove the cars altogether, for a big event perhaps. It's about maintaining flexibility and life and connections without suddenly going, 'We don't want cars'. I think that would be an unfortunate counter-idea.

Member of audience: Do you have any examples from Europe where 'slow city' movement principles have been applied to port areas?

Perry Lethlean: Marseilles is the complete opposite.

Peter Elliott: Yes, Marseilles is a chaotic example, but you also have Scandinavian and Dutch cities with a very sophisticated shared arrangement. In fact, I've heard recently about traffic-calming measures where they've taken intersections that were full of traffic lights and stop signs and road dividers, and took all that out to leave an intersection without any traffic devices whatsoever. And guess what? Traffic accidents stopped overnight and the reason is, the more clarity you give to drivers, the more they think they own the road and the less concern they show for other road users, including pedestrians and cyclists. As soon as you take all that stuff away people look out for each other much more, there's more awareness and it's basically calming.

It's a bit like that at Franklin Wharf at the moment, where there's a negotiated zone where everybody sorts it out. It's a counter-intuitive idea and maybe Europe's up to that; maybe we're not. But it's definitely interesting to see the way European cities have dealt with this issue of getting a higher pedestrian and civic amenity. There's always been a great thing about promenades in European cities, so there's a lot to learn about that. Unfortunately for us, we don't have the numbers of people that create those intensive experiences, although we do on certain occasions, like Saturday morning here in Hobart.

Member of audience: Given the right circumstance or perhaps the right environmental conditions in Hobart, would that change or is it always going to be confined to Saturday morning?

Peter Elliott: Hobart is a beautiful, small city and it's got a very calming, quite beautiful sense about it. I can think of little cities like Helsinki and Oslo with similar qualities. They're not big cities but they're just appropriate to where they are and what they are.

Moderator: That Saturday morning thing has now extended into Friday night and to some extent Sunday, I think.

Perry Lethlean: Oh, good. And these things bring their own success. If you have a successful public place, it draws people to it, and if you've got a reason to be there, then all of a sudden you'll find that the activity level goes up. A high-quality public place usually means people are drawn to it.

Moderator: Jeff Gilmore, what's your thinking on that?

Jeff Gilmore: I have to agree with Perry and Peter. The two words that I've heard often from them over the last few weeks are 'editing' and 'housekeeping'. It's not about revolutionary change, it's about evolutionary change and adjustment and, as Perry said, revealing. Relatively small changes that can make quite a big difference to an overall experience.

Member of audience: Can I ask Perry about his Geelong experience, especially how he became involved because that seems to me to be incredibly important here where we have 5,000 experts with 5,000 views. Would you advocate that one authority should be charged with the responsibility or do you see a consortium? Do we do the Canberra/Paris thing and charge someone with that responsibility, or do we have a hybrid?

Perry Lethlean: In terms of the Geelong experience, we were brought in to do one street off the waterfront adjacent to Deakin University, which was successful. We were then asked to do a master plan of review. There had been four done previously and we finally did a project that could be implemented.

We started by establishing some really strong principles to do with the public domain: editing, making the place legible and suggesting materials that could be followed by any designer coming after us. Ongoing designs could then be tested against these core, fundamental principles. Fortunately, we got ongoing work and we believe we've reflected those principles rather well.

"It's not necessarily about being daring. Hobart already has a fantastic quality so it's about editing, revealing, providing strategies of circulation and strategies of connecting to water."

Also relevant was a directorate, with a board comprising State and Local Government, which oversaw our work. That was quite important. It took it out away from day-to-day problems of, 'Do you allow this boat to come in at 5 o'clock?' and we started to look at a bigger picture. The more diversity of decision-making authorities you have, the more conflict and the less likelihood of decisions being made.

Moderator: What does that mean for the Sullivans Cove Waterfront Authority, Jeff?

Jeff Gilmore: There are certainly some lessons from Perry's experience that the State Government has tried to learn from in setting up the Sullivans Cove Waterfront Authority. The challenge for the Authority is to ensure that its involvement with the community remains active so that those connections aren't lost in the cut and thrust of decision-making.

Perry Lethlean: I might also point out that by the time we arrived in Geelong there were no stakeholders left; they'd left the waterfront because there was no attraction to be there. While the community consultation was extensive, the responses we got were quite limited.

Member of audience: Perry, you mentioned that part of the brief was to try to attract development to the waterfront by investment. Was that successful?

Perry Lethlean: Partially. I'm not sure of the exact figures but the Geelong Council has promoted a \$250 million investment along the waterfront since the development. I think there's been a complete mindset change for residents, which has seen people become proud of their city and talking about their city, and attracting their relatives and visitors to come and visit. This wasn't happening before, so there are some intangibles there.

Part of our work was to identify key development sites. Not just because we needed to, but we believed they needed to animate the setting and activate the place, and I think that's still lacking in two sites. We looked at the harbour view and we talked about a ferry coming in, but the ferry still hasn't arrived. Financially, it probably didn't stack up. And adjacent to that there's meant to be a café restaurant precinct and that hasn't developed yet. If those two things happen I think the final jigsaw will be in place. It's about 90% there.

Member of audience: We sometimes hear that it's only restaurants and cafes that make a peoples' space. Is that a common trap that urban planners fall into?

Perry Lethlean: It probably is. What we're after, particularly on sites that are currently dead, is as much activity as we can get, and spill-out from restaurants and cafés is a great thing. We all love to sit back, look at the promenade and look at the activity on boats, and a café/restaurant scenario is important. You've just got to be careful about how many you have. I think the other thing is tourism information; central ticketing information is critical, as are civic uses. If a waterfront is seen as a civic place then it should be reinforced by a series of civic uses.

Member of audience: There is a bigger issue for us, and that's the whole situation of a growing car population. This really needs to be addressed in terms of the whole waterfront. What's being done in that area?

"It's not about revolutionary change, it's about evolutionary change and adjustment... Relatively small changes that can make quite a big difference to an overall experience."

Peter Elliott: Traffic is problematic. I think most cities face this issue and I guess petrol will run out one day. More smaller cars are already being sold and people are using public transport a bit more, and it's amazing how quickly peoples' attitudes change when the price of petrol goes up. Traffic requires a government and city-wide view; it's not something the Authority can really deal with.

We've talked about it a lot within the Design Panel and feel the one-way street system is particularly hostile to pedestrians. It might be very good if you're commuting through town, but it's not very good for the spirit of the place where you've got such wide streets with traffic in them. We will be putting our minds to ways of improving the cross-Cove connections, which means getting better pedestrian connections between the waterfront and the city proper. There are a few obvious locations where people want to naturally cross but are prevented; you've either got to run the gauntlet or go down a block or two to find a safe place to cross.

Moderator: What sort of areas are you talking about, Peter?

Peter Elliott: Opposite the museum is a good one. If you wander along and want to find your way across, you need to look either way to see which is the nearest one – and they're a long way apart. That's just simply better management of pedestrians over traffic. If you leave things to traffic engineers they tend to forget about that; it's time for us to swing it back the other way. We're not in a position to say you have to have a toll tunnel under town one day, but you never know.

Member of audience: It does come up from time to time, you know.

Peter Elliott: It'll probably happen one day. That's what happens around the world. It's the only way you can go. You can't go around under the water and you can't go over the mountain, so where are you going to go?

Member of audience: Can I add an additional dilemma, even though you'll probably get 100 different views as to how the port of Hobart should be developed over the next 50 years or so. Never forget it's the second-oldest port in Australia and if the railways cease to operate and if the public says, 'No more big trucks operating on our highways' and if they say, 'No more timber trucks coming through Hobart', it is not impossible there'll be a resurgence of port activity one day. How do you add that into the equation of an imaginative and dynamic approach? At the moment the port of Hobart appears to be dormant, but it may well rise like the Phoenix from the ashes. How do you fit that into the plan?

Perry Lethlean: The bit out the back [industrial port and rail yards], if we can call it that, is what most other working port cities have had to deal with. The port has shifted somewhere else and land is left over, be it the rail head or the active port, and it's tended to turn into residential or office parks. The vast majority of them end up that way, or as a canal city. So if you're able to maintain the active port component then that's got to be a good thing. There's a classic problem in Melbourne – as the port shifted towards Port Phillip Bay, rather than downriver like it used to, the 8kph speed limit for boats became a major issue. It took two hours for a boat to get where it had to go, and now Melbourne is kind of dead. You don't see boats any more. They're even talking about taking them off the Maribyrnong River. For the life of me I can't work out why, but it just kills the whole sense of what the water's there for, which is maritime activity, be it leisure or be it a real port. So where you can, you want to keep your boats and activity happening.

Moderator: I'm just curious, Jeff, how extensive in geographical terms is the brief for the Sullivans Cove Waterfront Authority? Are we talking about going as far as the Regatta Grounds and the Cenotaph?

Jeff Gilmore: The boundary of the Sullivans Cove Planning Scheme, which is where the Authority has a role to play, includes all of that. It includes the slipway beyond the Regatta Grounds and certainly part of our remit will be to look at the long-term future of those areas. I know Peter and his colleagues are already thinking about the entrance and the 'entering experience' to Hobart itself, which most people get from the Tasman Highway.

The potential future role for the working port is a very important aspect of the Authority's work and one of the reasons why we're working so closely with the Hobart Ports Corporation is to ensure flexibility for the future is maintained because predicting 30 years out what the transport modes are going to be and where they're going to be from is very difficult.

We've already talked about what-if situations for rail. A few months ago it was moving out and now it's closing down. If the rail area is to cease to be used actively as a rail yard, how do you deal with that area?

Putting a strategically planned master plan into place to ensure you don't cut off options for the future is an important part of our thinking. We're looking short, medium and long term, and maintaining flexibility for the long term is an important aspect of our work, but at the same time we have a focus on the inner port area, which means we don't have to sweat too much on some of the potential conflicts. Hobart Ports Corporation has a tremendously valuable asset in a deepwater port that's going to maintain itself for a long time to come.

Member of audience: I was pleased to hear that commercial activity is a very important element. Without it you've got very little. There's a prescriptive element among the anti-everything brigade that says a modern boat next to Parliament House is inappropriate; that if it was a sailing boat it would be fine. Another prescriptive issue is signage. For instance, there's a group in Sullivans Cove that wants to reduce everyone to grey and brown signs, but the commercial imperative is to project a vibrant, exciting business experience, so you want to put up colourful signs. Can you comment on that?

Perry Lethlean: Urban designers are often asked to develop signage codes as well as furniture and materials codes. While these may be fine for central city spaces, it's an interesting proposition to say a waterfront's character is about diversity, about colour, about movement, and about differences and a cacophony of stuff, and there probably need to be guidelines and allowances to let diversity occur. If you looked at it the other way, without some level of control or guidelines you could have 30-metre neon poles outside every boat or every shop, and you don't want that. You've got to find the right balance. If it was charged to a consultant, they would need to respond to the specifics of the place, the specifics of the character of the site and the issues that come with it.

Member of audience: Do you think this site is one that needs colour and vibrancy? Is that your take on it?

Perry Lethlean: No, I think it has plenty. The best thing about this site is the colour of the boats and the water and the diversity of experiences as you walk along. I don't know anywhere in the world like it; you've just got to be mindful that you don't lay a whole lot of other stuff on it.

Peter Elliott: I agree it is about balance because if you let commercial interests run the place, there will be a diminishment of the public interest. You need to get the balance right and make everyone aware of the priorities. If you say, 'The priorities are primarily about the public realm in the first place', that's really significant for Hobart and a very important thing that's got to be worked on and layered into daily life. You can be tolerant and not overly puritanical about it – as long as it doesn't conflict with the public interest or the public realm, then I think there's plenty of room.

Member of audience: It's clear that the Hobart Port has been a working port and hopefully might again become a working port. One of the things that concerns me with what I see going on around the waterfront is public access becoming more and more limited. I can remember when I was a young boy there would be literally hundreds of families who would be down around the waterfront. They'd be fishing, they'd be having some lunch sitting in their car, and it seems to me that type of access and enjoyment and relaxation is becoming more and more limited. That would seem to be contrary to the concept that you were trying to bring back to Geelong. Do you think there can be compatibility between the two, or does there have to be a clear delineation between the working port and leisure activities?

Perry Lethlean: The beauty of Geelong was that there were no other conflicting uses and functional requirements, which meant we could work with the promenade and create a journey and a continuous experience. Down in Melbourne, you just can't access big, working freighter terminals because of safety issues. If you are forced to recognise 'no go' areas, you should provide alternative routes. Attractive, alternative routes... not dead-ends.

Peter Elliott: Increasingly, security is a popular word. Areas that were once generally accessible to most people have become lock-down zones, and I think we have to accept that parts of the operating port are going to be like that. But we want to make sure we don't create dead-ends, so we have to be planning for the long term with as much public promenade as we can around a continuous water's edge and make sure that where there's a blockage, there's an alternative route that's attractive and good for everybody. If it sometimes means going out into the water or it sometimes means going around the back, then do it.

Perry Lethlean: In Darling Harbour, which is a working port, there is a desire for it to be connected to the Sydney public, but what often occurs is a chain link fence and a road emerge, not a walkway. There are a whole lot of interesting uses occurring in freighter terminals that we can't see. It might be about providing public visual access to those locations instead of chain link fences, a whole lot of crap signs and no walkways. If we accept the fact that 'no go' areas are going to be there, let's think of creative ways the public can experience them.

Member of audience: I like the idea of walking access but the path next to the cycle-way stops at the Tasman Bridge. Those two really need to be kept separate because if you're out walking the dog or walking with small children, it's not safe on the cycle-way. On another point, Perry was saying that part of his project at Geelong was to make it a nice place for commercial activities, and it seems to me that a lot of discussion around the Hobart waterfront is being driven by commercial activities. I see a risk of us losing our visual views of the water. When we were asked to comment on different propositions about 18 months ago, there were buildings plonked everywhere. If we lose the car park near the museum, we'll no longer have a view of the water from Macquarie Street. There's also a building blocking the Murray Street view of the water. I see these commercial propositions as taking away from what we currently have in the way of connections between the city and the waterfront. What are your comments on that?

Perry Lethlean: Just before Peter answers that, with what's happening with the railway we may be able to get pedestrian access to the waterfront along the rail path, possibly within about three or four weeks.

Member of audience: There's always an opportunity here for government because they've turned railway lines in the United States, Canada and Europe into walking, cycling and public access areas.

Moderator: There's a campaign to build a big cycle-way along the North-West Coast on disused rail space... these are good issues.

Peter Elliott: All of what you say is perfectly reasonable and it's typical of cities where people are beginning to realise that the shared walkway for leisure now has to be more sophisticated. Certainly, once you get bike paths and pedestrians out in the commuter belt path, where bikes can get up a bit of speed, you do probably want them separate. When you get them into the waterfront, I think there's a different situation where probably it's much harder to keep them separate and in a way it's just like anything – it's traffic calming. Be it the bike, pedestrian or car, everyone's got to learn to get on together.

In relation to building out views, I personally don't think you should be quite so concerned. I can't see the future but I do know the work that's been done in terms of the Hobart Waterfront Urban Design Framework makes it pretty clear about what are the overriding principles that need to be maintained, and a lot of it is about open vistas and qualities of spatial arrangement. They are fundamental and I don't think you'll find that there's a lot of building to take place in that zone. There have been a few things happen, like the Zero Davey building that people obviously think is regrettable because of the way it changed the arrival aspect to the harbour, but the Authority is very aware of this. All I can say is that we don't see those fundamental qualities of the cove floor changing.

Member of audience: The presentation tonight has concentrated on public access from the land only. I'm not sure if your architects are land-based or not, but are you considering public access from the water?

Peter Elliott: Sure. It's fundamental that if you want maritime activity then you should want both public and private waterfront activity. The hard thing with the private part of it, the modern marina, is that it's problematic in terms of protecting public access because of the way they operate and the fact that they've got shutdown zones. They're a bit tricky but they can be designed so they're not detrimental to the public realm. You've got marinas in Hobart and they seem to be generally OK although there are points where there are little problems. I think we can do better in terms of maintaining generous circulation for the public and the kinds of intrusions that constantly come and go from those spaces. But yes, boat arrival is critical.

Member of audience: There's no public access by boat to the waterfront at all. There are places for you to park your boat if you've got the money to pay for a space at the marina, but there's no place for public access to tie up your boat for half-an-hour or an hour to come in by dinghy.

Peter Elliott: I wasn't aware of that. Isn't Waterman's Dock available for you to tie up?

Member of audience: There's a plan to block it off. It's on your drawing [in the Hobart Waterfront Urban Design Framework]. There's a bridge across there.

Peter Elliott: I don't think that's right. There have been various suggestions that a bridge might go there but there's no definitive answer to that one just yet.

Member of audience: Waterman's Dock is available sometimes but with big boats in there a lot of the time, it may as well be closed.

Peter Elliott: It sounds like there should be more public tie-ups. Put that on the list.

Member of audience: A matter for Perry – I noticed in your Geelong presentation that you left out some elements that are very prominent there.

Perry Lethlean: Selective editing, I think.

Member of audience: I just want to know your opinion of the bollard figures [in Geelong]. There must be 150 of them and rising. They're going in prolifically.

Perry Lethlean: They're not my cup of tea, I must say.

Member of audience: How do they fit in, though, with the overall theme? There are very many of them and I suspect many people really like them because they photograph them prolifically, but do you believe they've ruined what you've done?

Perry Lethlean: It was an art scheme that had started prior to us coming on to the waterfront so it was a legacy that we ... not put up with ... but coordinated with. The issue for me is that they're popping out at an unbelievable rate. Every time I'm down there, there's a new one. But they are artistic timber figures at real scale that denote a historic time in Geelong, so they're quite an interesting interpretive experience and they're quite popular with visitors. It's just that for me, there are too many of them and they're getting a little bit out of control.

Member of audience: What is your opinion of Mawson Place? It is an area designed by a former Lord Mayor which is a real mish-mash that's never been finished.

Perry Lethlean: I walked around today and I didn't mind it. I thought the seating and materials were fine and I didn't mind the entry walk. What it revealed to me, though, was the need to be careful of landing individual design pieces before a coherent theme is established. I don't know how those light features knitted into a greater story of Sullivans Cove. What was the reason for those specifically and are they intended to be repeated as the light features for the Cove or not? If they weren't, then I would question why they were there. It's not a comment on the design per se, but it reveals the importance of stepping back and asking how any design element fits with the greater story of this place and whether it's a sympathetic addition.

Member of audience: Speaking as an observer of transport matters and mindful of the public heritage of the Cove (eg, the former bus and tram depots), I'd like to encourage everyone to think about the serious issues of rail and ask the Authority to keep all options open.

Jeff Gilmore: Rail infrastructure is a very important part of Hobart and it can in the next 20 or 30 years be an active part of our urban transport. It's a bit difficult at the moment to say how that's going to unfold but certainly, for the unity of Hobart, to choose to throw that away would be a grave mistake. We've talked about traffic issues tonight and the complexities of road transport, rail and shipping. One of the solutions is to use that rail infrastructure for moving people instead of containers. It's all in flux and a bit hard to know which way to invest a lot of money at the moment, but over the next five years or so some of those issues will be much, much clearer, and then you can start to plan how you might reuse that infrastructure. I see it as a hugely important asset, particularly if you're going to come up with cost-effective solutions to making Macquarie Street a major arterial transport issue.

Member of audience: Perry, part of your brief was to connect the centre of the city of Geelong to the port, which brings us back to the Macquarie Street/Davey Street problem for Hobart. Did you have any major intersections or cross streets in Geelong, and if so, how did you deal with this issue?

Perry Lethlean: Geelong is a grid so it was relatively simple. The strategy we used for two-way streets with parallel parking on both sides was to establish five to six-metre broad walks against the building edge that were continuous and newly paved, with new street trees and new furniture. We also changed the traffic engineers' cycle of pedestrian lights just slightly to remove the wrong emphasis. I'm not familiar with the particular issues here so I can't comment on those but for Geelong it was doing some very simple, minor structural changes. The changes were enormous in terms of the public's ability to enjoy a walk between key places.

Moderator: Could that be done here?

Peter Elliott: Perry said it right – sometimes we think these problems are so hard they can't be solved, but simply widening a footpath and changing a pedestrian cycle against the car cycle is enough to make it a convenient and pleasant walking experience. It can be as simple as that.

Member of audience: Perry, what was your budget for Geelong?

Perry Lethlean: All up, \$10 million for two kilometres of work, and that involved a beach road that was four or five lanes wide, which we took down to two lanes, which cost \$5 million. It took five years from the master plan to sign-off on the completed construction works and it was principally State Government funded, with a 40% contribution from the Local Government.

Member of audience: Are there a lack of amenities along the waterfront?

Perry Lethlean: There's some lack of amenities that need to be looked at. Part of this is an Australian thing; instead of building toilet blocks with the best views at the end of a vista, which is where they usually are under the old way of doing things, we hope they'd be integrated into existing buildings.

This way we don't end up with toilet blocks popping up along the waterfront. That's something that needs to be looked at and has been mentioned a few times.

Moderator: I want to finish with a question for Perry on the Geelong lesson. You've already pointed out the difference in that this is still very much a working port and will obviously be for some time to come, but what else can Hobart learn from Geelong?

Perry Lethlean: Forgetting my aesthetics that I layered on to that scenario – my penchant for concrete and rusty steel – what was important in Geelong was establishing a public pedestrian circulation network that was understood by all waterfront visitors. Apart from that, the sites are completely different in terms of their legacy and attractions. Hobart's got a lot more going for it than Geelong ever did when I arrived. The pedestrian connections are the main thing that would be a fundamental and transforming experience for Hobart. That doesn't mean you need to do wholesale changes; the changes can be very subtle. But a mindset about how we might improve that condition would be a great legacy.

Moderator: Is that pedestrian part of it key to strengthening or perhaps developing from scratch the public's ownership of the space, or perhaps instilling a different sense of ownership?

Perry Lethlean: I don't think it would be as wholesale a change as in Geelong. I think it would be about revealing experiences that may be a little bit hard to experience at the moment. It would be about connecting destinations that people currently use that are a bit hard to get to. It's about providing materials that signify, 'This is a public walkway'. It's very subtle things that will make important differences.

End of Conversation.