

## **West Gate Memorial Park opened on 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Australia's worst workplace catastrophe**

**22 October 2004**

Last Friday, 15 October, over 300 people gathered under the West Gate Bridge in Spotswood to mark the 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its collapse during construction, and to witness the opening of a memorial park dedicated to the 35 workers who lost their lives in that incident, and to all workers killed in the workplace.



Chairman of the West Gate Bridge Memorial Committee, Danny Gardiner (pictured left), conducted the memorial gathering. He called for a minute's silence at 11.50 am, the time on 15 October 1970 that the steel box girder 112 metre-long span 10-11 collapsed, sending dozens of men plunging 45 metres into the muddy edge of the Yarra River, claiming the lives of 35 construction workers and inflicting life-long physical and emotional injuries on many others.

The CFMEU Construction & General Division's Victorian President, John Cummins (pictured right), delivered this year's keynote address on behalf of the West Gate Bridge Memorial Committee. He spoke of the lessons the union learnt that day. "Only an organised workplace can be a safe workplace - you can't leave safety to others," he said. He restated the unions' position that safety on construction sites is simply a non-negotiable.



WorkSafe's Construction & Utilities Director, Geoff Thomas (pictured left), told the gathering that the lessons of West Gate are as valid today as they were 34 years ago, continuing as the rallying call for the construction industry to strive for greater efforts to improve health and safety for all workers. He noted that the Royal Commission into the collapse had found that "the tragedy of the 35 deaths was utterly unnecessary (and) inexcusable. There was no sudden onslaught of natural forces, no unexpected failure of new or untested material".



Former West Gate Bridge construction worker, Andy Anderson (pictured left), recited one of the many poems about the collapse that have since become a part of Australian folklore.

Following the memorial speeches, Geoff Thomas introduced the Minister for Major Projects, Peter Batchelor, and asked him to officially open the \$1 million West Gate Bridge Memorial Park.

“The West Gate Bridge Memorial Park is a commemoration not only of this terrible accident; it is a tribute to other Victorians who have lost their lives in industrial accidents,” Mr Batchelor said. “It will provide a space for quiet reflection and contemplation, as well as a venue for the annual memorial service, and will serve as a stark reminder to us all of the need to work together to prevent unnecessary death and injury in the workplace.”



Mr Batchelor, who was representing the Premier and local MP, Steve Bracks, said the Memorial Park featured:

- a new memorial area, screened from Hyde Street, around the existing plaque;
- a boardwalk and long balustrade, intended to designate a ‘sacred zone’ where the bridge span fell;
- an upgrade of the bike path running through the site;
- landscaping in the intertidal zone of the Stony Creek Backwash with indigenous plants;
- 35 sculptural pillars running parallel to the ‘sacred zone’; and
- a redeveloped car park to improve pedestrian access to the site.

WorkSafe Victoria, Parks Victoria, VicRoads and the Bracks Government’s Community Support Fund each contributed \$250,000 towards the cost of the project.



*WorkSafe’s Geoff Thomas and Minister for Major Projects, Peter Batchelor, laying wreaths at the foot of the memorial plaque that was paid for by West Gate construction workers.*





*The memorial park features 35 pillars, one for each worker killed when the bridge collapsed.*

The gathering of former West Gate construction workers, the widows and families of those who lost their lives, and construction safety stalwarts were able to view for the first time a new exhibition made possible by the West Gate Bridge Memorial Committee, and supported by WorkSafe in honour of all those who have lost their lives in the workplace.



*The new West Gate display attracted great interest from those attending the 34<sup>th</sup> annual commemoration.*

The display will be at Federation Square until Sunday 24 October, then at Rialto Towers until Friday 29 October, and then the foyer of the Telstra Building in Exhibition Street until Friday 5 November. After these dates, it is anticipated the display will go to Melbourne's western suburbs, appearing in local council offices and public centres. It will then be donated to the West Gate Bridge Memorial Committee.



The display includes the names of the 35 workers who perished. It also includes key information about the collapse, and much more.



## Honour Roll

Royvin Barbuto	Boilermaker
Ross Bigmore	Carpenter
Amadeo Boscolo	Carpenter
Bernard Butters	Boilermaker
Cyril Carmichael	Ironworker
Peter Crossley	Engineer
Peter Dawson	Rigger
Abraham Eden	Rigger
Anthony Falzon	Carpenter
Esequiel Fernandez	Ironworker
Bernard Fitzsimmonds	Ironworker
Victor Gerada	Ironworker
John Grist	Boilermaker
William Harburn	Boilermaker
Jack Hindshaw	Engineer
Trevor Hunsdale	Fitter
John Little	Rigger
Charles Lund	Rigger
Peter Maguire	Rigger
Ian Miller	Engineer
Jeremiah Murphy	Rigger
Dennis O'Brien	Rigger
Joseph Ozelis	First Aid
Frank Piermarini	Rigger
George Pram	Rigger
Lesley Scarlett	Ironworker
Christopher Stewart	Boilermaker
Alfonso Suarez	Boilermaker
William Tracy	Engineer
George Tsihilidis	Boilermaker
Edgar Upsdell	Ironworker
Robert West	Boilermaker
Robert Whelan	Boilermaker
Patrick Woods	Rigger
Barry Wright	Boilermaker



Remembering those who lost their lives when a span of the West Gate Bridge collapsed at 11.50 am on 15 October 1970.

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