

Luxury lodge a phoenix rising from Black Summer ashes



Clockwise from above: Southern Ocean Lodge on Kangaroo Island; the spectacular view from the Great Room; what remained of the lodge after the 2020 bushfires



CHRISTINE MCCABE

Almost four years after Southern Ocean Lodge on Kangaroo Island was razed by the Black Summer bushfires, the luxury property has been reborn, rising with renewed beauty from the ashes.

The doors will swing open on Wednesday to the rebuilt lodge's Great Room, hovering above the limestone cliffs of the island's wild southwest coast.

Dubbed SOL 2.0, the \$55m property has lost none of its wow

factor, with an all-inclusive price tag to match – \$3400 a night for two.

Baillie Lodges' founders and creative directors, and SOL's parents, James and Hayley Baillie, and resort managers John Hird and Alison Heath have been overseeing the final touches as trades race to the finish line before opening day. Everyone is weary but elated.

"It's not often you get to do something twice," said Mr Baillie, "to be able to tweak and massage and work on what could have been



done better ... (this) lodge will be a significantly better product.

"But it's been a huge slog ... even though we'd done it before, it's not easy building in such a remote location with trades and the availability of materials, and we did it right through Covid."

The impressive Great Room is eerily identical to the destroyed original, right down to Khai Liew's beautiful bespoke furniture, remade again, and two fire survivors: the sleek suspended fireplace, back from France after resto-

ration and Sunshine the kangaroo sculpture and unofficial lodge mascot.

Many will remember photos of Sunshine, created by local artist Indiana James from combine harvester parts, standing alone in the burnt-out shell of the lodge. Now Sunshine is back, proud and tall.

The lodge has a similar footprint to the original but many new features. Working with original architect Max Pritchard, who grew up on the island, the 23 guest suites easing down the coast have been cleverly reoriented to provide even better ocean and coastal

views. And the elegant suites' layout has been redesigned to feel "cosier, like being aboard a ship looking out to sea", said Ms Baillie.

A new premium "owners pavilion" boasts two plunge pools high on the cliff top, plus there's an expanded day spa with gym and hot and cold plunge pools, and a larger deck in front of the Great Room with a wet-edge pool looking out to sea.

Only a dozen or so suites are open in the lead-up to Christmas as the resort beds down, but demand is running hot. "(When) the

property opened reservations in May they took more than a million dollars of bookings in one day," said Mr Baillie.

Many guests arriving this month were regular visitors to the old lodge, opened in 2008 and a game-changer not only for the island, where one in two jobs is linked to tourism, but for Australian tourism as a whole.

SOL bagged a host of international awards and attracted a new cohort of high-end travellers from the US and Europe, tapping into a market so effectively courted by

New Zealand. SOL's return has generated plenty of interest among overseas travel press, with Kangaroo Island leaping to the top of places to visit in 2024.

Return visitors will not only notice changes to the lodge but to the vast wilderness ravaged by the 2020 fires. SOL has employed cutting-edge technologies in the rebuild, increased water capture and storage, solar power generation, a remote-controlled sprinkler system and the planting of tens of thousands of fire-retardant plants around the perimeter.

Inquiry to consider sacking senior judge

MATTHEW DENHOLM

Tasmania's parliament will be recalled to create an inquiry into whether or not a judge charged with assault should be sacked.

Attorney-General Guy Barnett late on Tuesday said state parliament would be recalled on December 12 to consider legislation to establish a commission of inquiry into Justice Gregory Geason.

The Supreme Court judge has pleaded not guilty to one count of common assault and one count of emotional abuse.

Mr Barnett said maintaining "the integrity and community trust in Tasmania's justice system" was of "utmost importance".

The commission of inquiry – equivalent to a royal commission in its powers – would report to parliament "as to whether Justice Geason should, or should not, be suspended or removed from the office of judge".

"Under the Supreme Court (Judges' Independence) Act 1857, the governor may only suspend or remove a judge from office on address from both houses of parliament," Mr Barnett said.

"While parliament is able to inform itself in the manner that it thinks fit, it is important to pass

legislation to establish an independent commission of inquiry to inquire into the matter. I have also directed the Department of Justice to prepare a discussion paper on the merits of establishing a judicial review commission in Tasmania, similar to that operating in other jurisdictions."

This would include options for handling complaints and concerns about the conduct of judicial officers and would be released for public comment early in 2024.

"This will ensure that our state has an appropriate and best-practice model to deal with situations such as this, and I look forward to progressing this work as a matter of priority," Mr Barnett said.

"Members of parliament have been offered briefings on the proposed bill and we will continue to work closely together to progress this important matter."

Justice Geason, 62, has been on leave since last month but before charges were laid against him the court flagged he may work on some reserved judgments.

He appeared in the Hobart Magistrates Court in an after-hours sitting on Friday evening, with proceedings controversially closed to the public and media, prompting widespread criticism and an apology from the court.

Jewish schools offer 'safe haven' to public students

EXCLUSIVE

CAMERON STEWART

Jewish schools are offering safe haven, including potentially discounted fees, for Jewish students to leave the public school system because of the pro-Palestinian bias of public teacher unions and threats of anti-Semitism.

The move reflects growing concern that Jewish students in government schools could feel threatened by recent events including school strikes for Palestine and other pro-Palestinian activism including teachers wearing keffiyeh scarves to classes.

"We have seen a fivefold increase in anti-Semitism in the Australian community and unfortunately public schools are not immune," Leonard Hain, executive director of the Australian Council of Jewish Schools said.

"In light of the attitude of the public teachers' union, we can expect the level of anti-Semitic bullying in public schools to increase further and consequently an increase in the feeling of insecurity among Jewish students in public schools.

"We are informing our community that if the student at a government or independent school at the moment is feeling uncomfortable with the circumstances, Jewish schools will do whatever they can in order to accommodate them ... and to ensure the fee is affordable."

The decision on fee levels is up to individual schools and new students from the public system may

Labor 'must do more to stamp out anti-Semitism'

BEN PACKHAM

The opposition says the Albanese government is to blame for new travel warnings for Israelis visiting Australia, arguing it has failed to do enough to stem rising anti-Semitism around the country.

As Israel resumed its ground offensive in Gaza, the nation's national security council raised the threat level for its citizens travelling in Australia and dozens of other countries, urging them to take extra precautions.

The move follows a worldwide rise in attacks on Jews, including in Australia where incidents of anti-Semitism have risen almost sevenfold.

Opposition foreign affairs spokesman Simon Birmingham said the government needed to do more to stamp out the "shameful" behaviour seen at anti-Israel protests across

Australia. "The fact that Jewish people and Israeli citizens are now being told to take precautions when they come to Australia is a stain on our nation that Prime Minister Albanese must work to remove," he said.

"Addressing this should be on the agenda for national cabinet. Prime Minister Albanese should be seeking a consensus statement of all national leaders condemning anti-Semitism, committing to combat it, committing to education and committing to the police resources and efforts to ensure that the types of intimidation we have seen are stamped out."

Other countries slapped with the new "Level 2" travel warning include the UK, France, Italy and Germany, but Israel's threat level for the US remains unchanged at "Level 1".

Foreign Minister Penny Wong told the Senate that all parliamentarians should be concerned about the rise of anti-Semitism in Australia, and must denounce it.

Referring to a Nazi rally in Ballarat over the weekend, Senator Wong said such

behaviour must be met with "uncompromising condemnation".

"Sadly it comes at a time when we see a rise in anti-Semitism more broadly. Nazism, fascism cannot be normalised," she said. "They are ideologies that work by dehumanising, by singling out people as second class citizens."

Executive Council of Australian Jewry co-chief executive Alex Rychvin said the warnings reflected "a damning new reality of soaring anti-Semitism" at home and abroad.

"The fact that being identifiably Israeli or Jewish now comes with risks is a national shame," he said. "Many families have chosen to cover Jewish symbols, and have warned their children not to mention Israel or anything Jewish in public."

He said the anti-Israel movement had created an environment where it was permissible to target Jewish businesses, deny the October 7 attacks, threaten Jews online, and even call for the destruction of Israel.

NSW Education Minister and Deputy Premier Prue Car has criticised teachers for pro-Palestinian gestures at public schools, saying classrooms "are not places for political activism".

In Victoria, two AEU sub-branches, covering the inner city and Maribyrnong, supported a week of action last week by wearing pro-Palestinian scarves to school and other gestures of support. "This action is inflammatory, it's divisive, and only sows more seeds of disharmony in our community," the state's Deputy Premier and Education Minister, Ben Carroll, said.

In Melbourne this month, several hundred school students left their classes to participate in a "school strike for Palestine", a move which was condemned as divisive by the state opposition and by Jewish schools.

The principal of Mt Scopus College, Rabbi James Kennard, said Jewish schools were willing to step up to help students in non-Jewish schools at this difficult time.

"Families choose to send their children to Jewish schools for positive reasons – so that they learn more about their heritage and have greater experience of Jewish life and tradition," he said.

"But this might be a time when negative reasons also play a part, when the rising levels of anti-Semitism ... make Jewish students in non-Jewish schools uncomfortable and unsafe."

WORLD P9
EDITORIAL P10
PAUL KELLY P11

INDEX

WORLD P9
EDITORIALS P10
LETTERS P10

COMMENTARY P11
BUSINESS P13-20
HIGHER ED P21

SPORT P22, 24
PUZZLES P23
TELEVISION P23

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Labor to prioritise Pacific resilience over global climate fund

ROSIE LEWIS
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

Climate and Energy Minister Chris Bowen will hold off contributing to COP28's global loss and damage fund and instead focus on delivering practical outcomes for the Pacific, with the Albanese government preparing to announce funding for two other climate finance vehicles.

The Australian understands Labor will prioritise money for the Pacific Resilience Facility – which is of great importance to the region – and the controversial UN Green

Climate Fund over the COP fund, defying calls from climate and charity groups to make an initial pledge of \$100m.

Mr Bowen, who will fly to Dubai for the United Nations climate change conference on Wednesday amid calls from Labor and union figures to lift the ban on nuclear energy, is expected to push back against any demands that COP28 commit to a phase-out of unabated fossil fuel.

Government sources said Labor wanted to know which donors would contribute to the loss and damage fund – being established to help poor countries deal

with climate change – who would receive the money, how much would go to small island states and how it would be administered before considering a contribution.

Fiji is pushing for the fund to target the "special challenges" confronting the developing small island states most exposed to climate change.

There's also a growing push to force developing countries such as China, which is much wealthier than it was three decades ago, to help compensate the most vulnerable nations.

"We will be actively participating in the COP seeking a strong

outcome," Mr Bowen said on Tuesday.

Australian Industry Group climate change and energy director Tennant Reed, who is in Dubai for the conference, said at this point it was appropriate for the Albanese government to concentrate on instruments it understood and that had the biggest impact on the Pacific. "Ultimately, we'll have to kick into the global loss and damage fund kitty, but if it's not this year I don't think it's any real problem at all," he said.

"The loss and damage fund is very new and the commitments that have been made so far, which

are several hundred million dollars to my knowledge, are very much a down payment on getting this thing up and running. Everybody knows that, in the end, billions, and lots of billions, will be needed to truly address loss and damage in developing countries."

While former Labor defence minister Joel Fitzgibbon continues to spruik a lifting of Australia's ban on nuclear energy, writing in The Australian that it would show decision-makers at COP were serious about meaningful action on climate change, teal MPs – whose seats the Liberal Party needs to win back to help form

Future of defence funding exposed

EXCLUSIVE

BEN PACKHAM
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
DEFENCE CORRESPONDENT

The Future Fund has poured more than \$600m into foreign military and space companies but invested nothing into Australia's own defence industry.

The Australian can reveal the sovereign wealth fund's holdings in defence companies are dominated by US giants including Lockheed Martin (\$71m), General Dynamics (\$63m) Northrop Grumman (\$43m), and RTX Corporation (\$72m), which owns Raytheon, Collins Aerospace, and the engine company Pratt & Whitney.

The fund's biggest defence-related investment is a \$192m stake in New Zealand-founded space company Rocket Lab USA, which is now headquartered in California.

It also has stakes in Boeing (\$10m), Britain's BAE Systems (\$26m), Japanese aviation company Jamco (\$25m), US technology company L3Harris (\$26m), and a minor investment in Israel's Elbit Systems worth about \$488,000.

The Future Fund provided the list under freedom of information laws to Greens senator David Shoebridge.

Its release came as Treasurer Jim Chalmers hosted banks, super funds and asset managers, urging them to back Australian companies in key sectors, including defence.

The Australian Industry and Defence Network said it was extraordinary that hundreds of millions of taxpayers' funds were being sunk into foreign-owned multinationals when local firms were crying out for investment and vital government contracts.

"The logic of all of this seems impossible to understand – how the Australian government can neglect our own Australian industry whilst handing hundreds of millions of dollars to overseas companies?" AIDN chief executive Brent Clark said.

"Australian-owned companies are struggling in the current defence environment where funding has slowed to a trickle, while at the same time foreign-owned companies are being heavily funded by the Department of Defence."

Senator Shoebridge said the Rocket Lab investment was particularly hard to fathom, after the government's \$1.2bn cut to a major space industry partnership with NASA.

"One day they pull more than a billion dollars from the Australian space industry and the next they drop almost \$200m on a US rocket company," he said.

"The Future Fund needs to talk with the Albanese government and deliver at least a semblance of coherent national industry policy. The space industry has a raft of important non-military uses that are essential to the long-term prosperity of Australia, but under this government they are more interested in the long-term prosperity of the US."

He also called for ethical investment rules for the Future Fund to stop it investing in multinational weapons suppliers.

Australian Strategic Policy Institute council member James Brown said Rocket Lab had benefited from a supportive investment landscape in New Zealand and was worth billions of dollars.

"The difference couldn't be more stark. Australia's government has failed to develop a space strategy, allowed space to become a partisan debating point, and killed investment confidence in a critical national industry," he said.

GERARD BAKER P9