

Zoo with a view or concrete jungle?

Andrew Taylor

Plans for a \$14 million reptile exhibit at Taronga Zoo have sparked concerns that the harbour site is at risk of overdevelopment.

Taronga's proposal for a Reptile and Amphibian Conservation Centre, which is on public exhibition until August 26, includes an exhibit and animal care facility.

The project will replace the zoo's Reptile World, known as the Serpentaria, which has "reached the end of its useful life".

Taronga chief executive Cameron Kerr said the new facility would provide a "modern experience" for guests and the latest, best-practice standards for animal care and welfare.

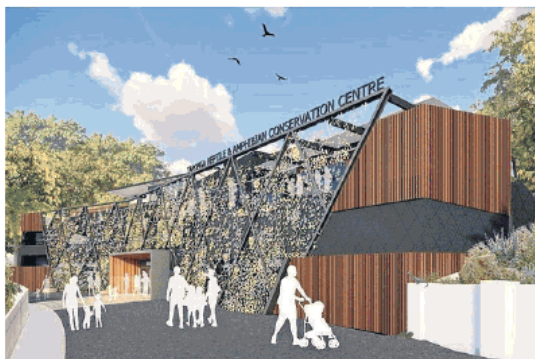
"It will provide critical breeding space to support zoo-based conservation programs to ensure important species, such as corroboree frogs, are protected for decades," he said.

Mr Kerr said the reptile centre would sit below the existing tree canopy and not affect views of the zoo from Sydney Harbour.

A state significant development, the reptile centre is the latest building project at the zoo, following the Tiger Trek and African Savannah wildlife precincts, an education centre and eco-resort, which Mr Kerr said was designed to ensure "vital income streams to fund our increasingly ambitious conservation work".

Kate Eccles, president of the Mosman Parks and Bushland Association, said there had been a "massive amount" of development at the zoo, which had become "a much less attractive venue - too many structures, too much concrete".

New buildings had also affected the view of the zoo from the harbour, Ms Eccles said. "From the Mosman ferry, the view used to be mainly one of tree cover with very few buildings. Now



there are buildings and fewer trees."

She praised the zoo for its conservation, research and indigenous program: "The education role is also taken seriously. Sometimes this is at an infotainment level, but all ages and levels of education are catered for."

But she said the zoo was under

A giraffe at Taronga; and an artist's impression of the planned Reptile and Amphibian Conservation Centre.

pressure to generate money because governments were not prepared to provide adequate funding.

"The expenses of animal care, research and education must be huge, but there must be a way of getting around this without Disneyfying it," she said. "Upgrades lean more to the human animal. Play areas for children seem to have become as important as animal habitat."

Mr Kerr said he was proud of Taronga and the modern zoo it had become, the experiences offered to guests "and the role we play as the first responders and the last line of defence to help save wildlife".

Linda Bergin, founding president of the Headland Preservation Group and advocate for Sydney's heritage parklands, said Taronga needed to ensure it does not "overdevelop its extraordinary bushland headland location to maximise tourist dollars".