

Saving Shearwater

City of Melbourne Cr Nicholas Reece, ExxonMobil Australia chairman Richard Owen and Central Equity chairman Eddie Kutner teamed up last month to save Southbank's renowned Shearwater sculpture. Find out how they did it on page 5.



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From page 1

Overlooking Southbank Promenade just a short walk from Eureka Tower is an unusual mutton-bird. Weighing in at almost 5 tonnes and standing nearly 8 metres high, the steel sculpture *Shearwater* has stood looking across the city for 23 years.

Shearwater is one of a number of high profile artworks created by Melbourne sculptor Inge King. Her works include Art Centre Melbourne's *Forward Surge* and Melbourne University's *Sun Ribbon* to name a few.

The sculpture was commissioned by ExxonMobil's (formerly Esso) Melbourne head office Esso House at Southbank in 1994-95. Although in her 80s, Inge King created the distinctive blue, black and red bird, which was one of the first significant installations along Southbank.

Earlier this year, ExxonMobil sold its Southbank offices and the new buyer indicated they were not interested in purchasing the sculpture. *Shearwater* was subsequently listed for sale through a specialist auction house, which valued the sculpture at around \$350,000.

That's when a friend of Cr Nicholas Reece spotted the piece on the auction house's online register and phoned to alert him. Cr Reece immediately sprang into action.

"There were lots of phone calls encouraging ExxonMobil to donate the iconic work to the city before the auction date, as well as the matter of the auction withdrawal fees, which were around \$79,000," Cr Reece told *Southbank Local News*.

"ExxonMobil was fantastic and agreed to donate the work to the people of Melbourne. With just days to spare, *Shearwater* was withdrawn from sale."

"We had the sculpture, but we still needed to cover the auction withdrawal costs and the cost of repositioning the sculpture in Southbank."

Enter well known passionate art enthusiast, philanthropist and lover of all things Southbank in the founder and chairman of property giant Central Equity Eddie Kutner. Just like Inge King, Cr Reece knew that Eddie was too a post war immigrant from Germany.

"We're very proud to be partnering with the City of Melbourne and ExxonMobil to help keep *Shearwater* here in Southbank," he told *Southbank Local News*.

"I never envisaged I would be called upon to save a major existing public artwork, but I am delighted to help out. Inge King is one of Melbourne's greats."

Cr Reece said the team effort was a great demonstration of the power of Melbourne's networks to achieve great outcomes for our city.

"In many big cities a sculpture like *Shearwater* would simply be lost to the people as private interests snap it up and remove it from the public realm. But Melbourne swings into action at moments like this," he said.

Shearwater will be repositioned to a nearby location within Southbank Promenade in the near future. The unique arrangement that has put the sculpture in the hands of the public will be recognised with plaques acknowledging the generosity of ExxonMobil and Mr Kutner.



L-R: City of Melbourne Councillor Nicholas Reece, ExxonMobil Australia Chairman Richard Owen and Central Equity Chairman Eddie Kutner teamed up to help keep 'Shearwater' in Southbank.
